

Immigrants

Immigrant—the word has a negative sound, doesn't it? As the much-publicized caravan of migrants reached the U.S. border last weekend, I couldn't help thinking about how hot the topic of immigration has become. It's so hot that we don't want to touch it—it's *political*. We figure that if we are to have any chance of getting along with each other we can't talk about it. But, I propose that the only chance we have of truly getting along is to risk talking about the things that divide us.

I believe that our opinions about immigration are rooted in personal experiences—our story. For some of us, our story is obtained by first-hand encounters. For others like myself, it comes from someone else's encounter. I'm going to share my experiences with you—two chapters in my story that have helped me understand—although incompletely—both sides. Then, I'll tell you where I have ended up.

First chapter: He was about my age—a young man with his thumb out, on the side of the freeway in Fort Worth. As I swerved onto the shoulder and waited for him to catch up, I thought there was something familiar about him. It had been about a year since I returned from my hitch in the Marines, and he recognized me first—a high school classmate. After chatting for a while about what we'd been doing, I asked why he didn't get a car (after all, everyone in Texas was supposed to have a car—preferably a truck). He told me that several months earlier his wife and infant son had died when their car ran into a car that was driving the wrong way on a freeway exit ramp. He didn't want a car again—not yet anyway. I asked about the driver of the other car. He told me it was driven by a [undocumented migrant] who couldn't read the highway signs and didn't have a license. For many years after that—decades in fact—I was set hard against anyone coming into the U.S. without following the rules.

Second Chapter: It was Christmas—one of the few times that our family would get to see my brother Kerry. He'd been a missionary for 9 years in Mexico. Big news—Kerry and his family (wife and 3 granddaughters) were moving back to the states. It was getting too perilous for him to raise his three girls in Mexico.

Things had started to get bad for Kerry about a year earlier. A Gang (the Gulf Cartel) had moved into the remote area where his church was. They bombed the village police station. The injured were taken to the nearest hospital, and the Army was moved in for protection. The cartel told the Army that if it did not withdraw, they would burn the hospital down. The Army left town.

Then extortion began. Their village mayor—owner of the only hotel in town—refused to pay. Several men walked into the lobby of the hotel, shot the mayor dead, and walked out. All the small businesses closed because they could not afford the payments to the cartel.

The last straw was when the wife of Kerry's good friend and ministry associate was killed in an ambush while driving to the border for a visit to Texas. The gang wanted his pickup.

Kerry decided that he couldn't risk the lives of his family any longer. If the cartel ever came down their rugged driveway it was clear that Kerry and his wife Jane would be dead. The fate of their three young granddaughters would be worse than death. And so, Kerry *migrated* back to Texas. His is a story, much like those immigrants, of leaving loved ones behind in a land he loved as his own, to save his family from unimaginable violence.

Where I've ended up: From the first chapter of my experience, I acknowledge that *for us* there is some danger in having open borders—danger to life and property. From my second chapter, I see that *for them* there is certain danger remaining where they are—danger to life and property.

For them, the risk of coming to the U.S. is worth it. *For us*, is the risk of accepting them worth it? I guess that is the question we all must come to terms with. I suggest searching your Bible for clues about what might be the right thing for us to do.

That is my story, and I'm stickin' to it. What is your story? Do we know why we feel so strongly about some issues? What are our own encounters—our story?

See you at church –pastor tony