We Are Family – The Role of Immigrants in American Restaurants

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PROLOGUE: An Early Thanksgiving

The glass windows built halfway around the perimeter of Tarry Lodge dining room are walls of light and color. Every morning and night, the sky invites itself in. The sun floods across tables and placemats; lasers through the wine glasses and glints off the silverware. Each stage of the sun's setting dictates the mood and the flow of the evening, reminding everyone of its season. Tonight, winter whispers.

It is November, the month when days grow shorter and nights grow longer. And for restaurants in Fairfield County, Conn., it is the month when darkness begins to drape the sky as early as the five o'clock family meal.

Family meal is the nightly pre-service gathering of the entire restaurant staff. The chefs, the managers, the cooks, the servers, the hosts, and the bussers share a meal, hold a meeting discussing the upcoming evening's reservations and menu specials, address any questions or concerns about recent developments within the restaurant, and mentally prepare for the night ahead. In the restaurant industry, "family" can connote warmth and camaraderie, as well as conflict and dysfunction, all of which help to define its own warped social unit.

The men and women of the front-of-house staff, ranging from teen to middle-age, trickle out from the kitchen toward the unset tables in the back of the dining room. They exchange common restaurant pleasantries of teasing and laughter and fist bumps and backslaps, all while tucking their white, pressed, button-down shirts into the black belts strapped through their blue jeans. They count their pens. They misplace and find their wine keys.

Family members exchange stories of laughter, love, food, sex, and life. And all the while, at Table 71, the most coveted table for two against the window, in his usual spot, alone, sits Kim Addam Manuel.

Tonight, Manuel is anxious. Tonight begins his last month away from his family. The 23-year-old busboy and bar back has spent the last year and a half in America, halfway around the world from his girlfriend and son in his native Philippines, working and sending his earnings to support his loved ones through an online app. Come December, he will begin his four-month vacation with those he loves most.

Later, to his coworkers, he says of his trip, "I'm going to, you know, hang out with my son, take some nice pictures…the things that I need to do when I'm supposed to be there – but I'm here."

The chatter subsides as Chef James Piccolo, a big, bald guy in a white chef coat with an angry, wrinkled forehead covered in a red bandana, confidently kicks the kitchen door open and tromps into the dining carrying two plates of new menu items. He carefully places them onto Table 92, the table farthest back, and stands beside his food. Each member of the staff grabs a fork, a packet of menu descriptions, and a pen, and hovers around the dishes as Chef's presence silently commands their attention.

Piccolo's voice bellows of the fast approaching cold weather and the rich, fatty foods it brings. Customers, he explains, even those in Westport, Conn., will worry less about their appearance and instead rely on sweaters to mask their annual winter weight gain. He lists the ingredients of both the grilled quail with parsnip puree, Brussels sprouts and cranberry marmelatta, and the pappardelle with oxtail ragu. The staff attacks the

dishes like scavengers, using their forks as weapons, all while complimenting the flavors and textures and smells.

"This is Thanksgiving on a dish!" says hostess Brittany Meyers.

Once the plates have been cleaned, each member of the staff walks to the corner table covered with a stack of plates and two large containers, one with a penne Bolognese and one with salad. Everyone makes him or herself a dinner plate and takes a seat. John Giorno, the blond-haired, dry-humored general manager stands and opens a new bottle of Nebbiolo for the staff to taste.

Holding the wine glass by the stem and swirling it in his hand, he talks tannins. He talks tonight's reservations and birthdays and special events. He takes a bite and talks about how the salad is salty.

Once everyone has finished eating, they clear the dirty dishes and remaining food from the unset tables. Bussers and servers and managers coordinate to wipe down tables, set up place mats, wine and water glasses, bread and butter plates, cloth napkins, and polished silverware. Family meal is over and the staff is ready for service.

Family meal, and the relationships that spring from it, is a pivotal part of restaurant life. It's a tradition. It grants community, fosters respect, and nurtures relationships.

And while many restaurant employees have their own immediate families waiting for them to come home to at the end of a busy night, many don't. Restaurants across America are staffed with millions of immigrants – some documented, some undocumented - that have chosen to leave their immediate families in their native

countries. They've come to the United States to make tips and send monetary remittances home for the benefit of their families abroad.

Manuel's story is one of many in Western Connecticut, though all are varied. Also at Tarry Lodge is Gillian Manantan, a 19-year-old Filipino immigrant who supports her Grandmother that lives overseas with her checks from the restaurant. Twelve exits south of Westport on I-95 resides the opulent city of Greenwich, and Barcelona Wine Bar, the workplace of Peruvian immigrant Juan Rojas, a busboy. Also in Fairfield County resides Rosy Rivera, a Costa Rican immigrant supporting her parents abroad, who left the laborious, rowdy restaurant industry after three and a half years, choosing instead to become a nanny. And finally, BBQ's, the upscale barbeque joint in Westport, boasts Marcos Velazquez, a Mexican waiter who, after years of financially supporting his parents abroad, has recently chosen to support the dreams of his offspring here in the U.S. instead.

CHAPTER 1: Status Uncertain

The topic of immigration continues to be in the forefront of American news media. Later in November, President Barack Obama would declare an executive action proposing millions of undocumented immigrants the opportunity to remain in America temporarily, and to apply for employment authorization.

The official website of the White House lists the president's immigration initiatives: heighten border security, place high priority on deporting felons, facilitate the green card process for highly-skilled workers, and to begin requiring undocumented immigrants of five or more years to undergo background checks and pay taxes.

For highly-skilled educated workers, benefits could abound. An article written by Kenneth A. Hoogstra, published in The National Law Review, reports: “The executive actions promise expanded immigration benefits for foreign investors, researchers, inventors, and founders for start-up companies. New rules will be issued that will clarify the standard by which these individuals may be granted a national interest waiver, which allows a person to seek a green card without the need to test the labor market for available U.S. workers.”

However, for the 11 million undocumented workers whom the bill is widely believed to help, the fine print points to a different conclusion.

Doula Kutrubis, an immigration paralegal specialist of 20 years at ESPN, the sports network based in Bristol, Conn., explains the reality of the president’s proposed measure, “What President Obama is saying here is this: ‘If you tell us you are an undocumented worker, I’m not going to kick you out right away. The first people I’m going to kick out are the terrorists and the criminals. I’m going to defer your application—because by the time we go through 11 million people, it could take 10 years. So in that time, you’re able to apply for an E.A.D., which is an Employment Authorization Document. Ergo, you’re able to pay taxes, get a background check and we will—hopefully—defer your deportation until a later time. So in the meantime, I won’t get rid of you right away, but in a few years, who knows?’”

She pulls her glasses down the bridge of her nose, and reads through “President’s Immigration Executive Action Will Impact Employers,” an article released by Faefre Baker Daniels, a full-service international law firm located in the United States. “There’s

no guarantee of a green card," she deducts. "It's vague. There's no firm commitment that the immigrant would benefit in the end."

While Congress debates the details behind closed doors, and fights with the president publicly, restaurants continue to open theirs to immigrants willing to work to support their loved ones. Rojas, Manuel, Manantan, and Velasquez all live and work in the nation's wealthiest county, Fairfield, according to the Labor Department's Bureau of Economic Analysis. Fact Tank, a platform of analysis and news of Pew Research data, reports that the state of Connecticut has the 13th highest immigrant population in the nation. Furthermore, the National Restaurant Association, the world's largest food service trade association, reports that restaurants are the country's second-largest private sector employer, and that Connecticut restaurant jobs continue to rise – they currently account for 9 percent of the Constitution State's employment, and possess a projected 5.2 percent job growth rate by 2024. They prove to be a definitive financial option for blue-collar workers, especially foreign-born workers.

While most immigrants work in private households, The Brookings Institute, an American think tank, reports that foreign-born workers represent roughly 23 percent of the food service sector—15.7 percent of foreign-born food service industry employees work in the front of house as waiters, waitresses, bussers, and food runners. These employees differ from cooks, cashiers, managers, and food preparation workers in that the majority of their paychecks constitute tips from customers, and not from an hourly wage. Thus, Connecticut's hourly wage for front-of-house employees is currently $5.69 – compared to Connecticut's current minimum wage, $8.70.

The global standard of gratuity differs by country. The American standard is typically 20 percent of the total bill for excellent service, 15 percent for mediocre service, and 10-0 percent for poor service. While 58 percent of Americans continue to dine out once a week, according to Rasmussen Reports, a public opinion polling organization, the amount of money Americans have chosen to tip has been declining over the past five years. In March 2014, the Los Angeles Times conducted an online poll, finding that "…a majority of Americans tip their food servers less than 20 percent, and that 1 in 10 tip nothing at all." Additionally, the Times reported, "nearly 60 percent of those who said they tip less than 20 percent said the reason was that they 'couldn't afford to on top of the cost of a meal.' "

CHAPTER 2: The Life of the Place

These statistics don't faze 52-year-old Juan Rojas. A Peruvian-born American immigrant of 12 years, Rojas says he has complete faith in the restaurant industry, as it has continued to provide for him and for his 20-year-old son in Peru for more than a decade.

"I'm fine, I'm fine," he insists with a smile. "I thank God every day."

Rojas is 5 feet tall. He has medium-length jet-black hair and caramel skin. His face holds many wrinkles, and when he is concentrated in his work, his wrinkles are also working. But when he sees a familiar face or suddenly realizes that someone is looking at him, the wrinkles curve upwards, brightening his cheeks and his small, deep black eyes.

Rojas works Monday through Saturday, often 75-80 hour weeks. During the day, he is a full-time, behind-the-counter employee at a Wendy's in Greenwich. During the

night, he is a busboy and food runner at an upscale Mediterranean tapas restaurant, called Barcelona, in the heart of downtown Greenwich.

Barcelona Wine Bar, a dimly lit, wide-open space, with low ceilings and an open kitchen, is a chain of restaurants scattered along the East Coast. There are six in Connecticut, one in Washington, D.C., one in Brookline, Mass., and one in Atlanta.

The front door of Barcelona Greenwich opens to a hosting stand, a tall transparent mesh wall, and a hallway on the right. Diners walk down a ramp into the main dining room to a lively, bustling exchange. Young men and women in blue jeans, white button-down shirts, black shoes, and white aprons, stand over rectangular tables and engage their seated customers. Servers make an "O" with their hands by holding their fingertips together to represent the size of the tapas dishes. As the diners point to various Spanish words on the menu, the servers incessantly nod and scribble the orders on their notepads. Once the order is repeated back to the guests, the servers graciously thank their customers and quickly scurry to the Point of Sale (POS) system, a brightly lit touch-screen hidden in the far left corner of the restaurant.

A line forms as, one by one, the servers hover over the machine, furiously jabbing their index fingers onto vibrantly colored buttons that each represents a different menu item. Once completed, they hit "send" and a receipt prints. After a quick glance at the receipt for accuracy, it is handed to his or her assigned busser. The busser must be fully aware of each table's order of service, as it is his or her responsibility to clear and replace dishes and silverware before and after each course.

Most nights, Rojas busses tables and runs food from the kitchen to the dining room. Tonight, he is a bar back for Russell Jessen, the bartender.

The bar begins at the farthest point away from the front door and circles to the right, halfway around the dining room. Customers seated at the bar have full view of the open kitchen, and of Rojas, dressed in all black, standing in the kitchen polishing glasses. Once he completes an entire rack of glasses, he walks through the kitchen, into the dining room, lifts the hatch hinged into the bar, and hands Russell the glasses, one by one, to stock on the shelves. Rojas's face breaks into a smile. At 5 feet tall, he welcomes the help from Jessen, who is 6 feet.

Rojas has been an employee of Wendy's for 11 years and of Barcelona for five—an eternity in restaurant time, as the industry is infamous for its rapid turnover. The Bureau of Labor Statistics' Job Openings and Labor Turnover (JOLTS) program reports a 62.6 percent turnover rate – that is, 62.6 percent of employees of the restaurant-and-accommodations field were replaced in 2013, compared to the overall private sector's turnover rate of 42.2 percent. Naturally, Rojas has seen many of the Barcelona staff come and go.

"Everybody's new," he said. "There are new waiters, new managers, new busboys, new bartenders."

Rojas' coworkers are primarily college students or men and women in their 20s and early 30s, routinely revolving through kitchen doors. His bosses appreciate his loyalty. "The Barcelona manager ask me last time, 'Juan, you are happy here?' I say, 'Yes, I am happy.' The Wendy's owner ask me last time, 'Juan, you are okay here? Everything is good?' I say, 'Yes, thank you.' They think about me."

According to bartender Javin Bell, Rojas' fellow employee at Barcelona, Rojas is the thoughtful one. "He's the life of this place," he says as he pours a generous taste of

Albarino into a wine glass and takes a swig from behind the bar. “Juan’s always cracking jokes; he’s always trying to make sure that you’re good. And on Saturdays, before the dinner shift, he’ll bring us all sandwiches from Wendy’s – hamburgers, cheeseburgers, and a Spicy Chicken sandwich for me.”

The warmth is mutual. Rojas appreciates the Barcelona community of employees. While most all Wendy’s employees are Spanish-speaking, Barcelona’s employees speak mostly English. For this, Rojas is grateful, as his relationships among the Barcelona staff have improved his English.

“It’s a nice family in Barcelona,” says Rojas. “The guys there are very nice. They teach me English, and they give me rides home. Sometimes on Saturday night, I finish around 3 a.m., and my house is 15 minutes from Barcelona, so they drive me home. The guys there are so nice.”

But the 52-year-old is mostly driven by his love for God, his son, and his home country, Peru.

“Every day, I say, ‘Thank you, God. Thank you for my jobs, thank you for my son, thank you for my life,’ ” says Rojas.

“My goals for the future are: I want to buy a house in my country, so now I save my money,” he says, counting his goals on his fingers. “I’m waiting for my green card, so for that I save my money, because we need it for a lawyer. But my first goal? I want to buy a house in my country, Peru. My last is that I’m saving money for when I am old, and I can’t work.”

CHAPTER 3: Both Sides of the Coin

Though remittances are sent and received among all nations, more than 20 percent of all money globally sent by immigrants comes from the United States. The World Bank reports official data collection of money sent home by international immigrants living in America began in 1970. The numbers start at $650 million in 1970 and ultimately reach $51 billion in 2012 – not including money sent by unofficial channels.

The most recently completed Bilateral Remittance Chart, reported and published by the World Bank, is a comprehensive resource for analyzing the specifics of this data. A Microsoft Excel document downloadable and accessible to the public, the Bilateral Remittance Chart lists the countries of the world on both its X-axis and Y-axis – the X-axis represents countries receiving money, and the Y –axis represents countries sending money. Each Excel cell where two countries' columns intersect holds a 1 to 6-digit number, representing the amount of U.S. dollars in millions that had been exchanged in 2012. The bottom of the chart calculates the total number of remittances received, and the far right column calculates the total number sent. According to this chart, in 2012, men and women living in the United States sent $3.6 million to Costa Rica, $1.1 billion to Peru and $10.6 billion to the Philippines. Manuel, the 23-year-old Filipino busboy, has been on both sides of the coin.

"When I was in the Philippines, I just kept hanging around with my friends," he says. "I never looked for a job, because I knew that my mom would give me money."

Manuel's mother, Mary Ann Campbell, traveled to the United States when her son was a young boy. She first settled in Manhattan, where she worked kitchen jobs in

various restaurants, until she met and married an American man, William Campbell. Together, they settled in Westport, Conn., and now have three children together.

Throughout his childhood and adolescence, Manuel lived with his grandmother in the Philippines. His mother supported him financially until she decided it time for him to see the country himself.

"I wanted him to be here so he could start working and so he could see, you know, how everybody does it here in the U.S.," she says as she opens a new box of espresso pods for her Keurig machine. "A lot of Filipinos, or people back home, they think that people abroad, you know, for example us in the U.S., they think you're making a lot of money and having an easy life. They don't know what it's all about."

So, at 20, Manuel first came to America to receive an education. He wasn't a huge fan.

"I didn't finish school," he says. "I went back home because my mom was here, and she used to send me an allowance. But when I went back to the Philippines, I got my girlfriend pregnant. So, I decided to really come back here, so I could earn a lot of money. Now I know how hard it is to really make money and adjust, but I'm trying my best."

Manuel decided to leave his friends, his girlfriend, and his son to live in Westport with his grandmother, his mother, stepfather, and his three half-siblings.

"Yeah, it's nice," Manuel unenthusiastically shrugs about the quality of his American home. Nestled on a side street in an upper-class residential area, Manuel's mother's home is a large white colonial revival with a spacious backyard that bursts with activity. Babysitters and tutors let themselves into the wide, open, brightly lit white-tiled

kitchen to attend to the needs of the children. Neighbors drop by and linger around the kitchen island, chatting over new recipes for her home cooking business, Anne's Kitchen. And all the while, Manuel's spends his days secluded in the basement.

"When I'm not working, I play computer games. At the same time, I'm talking to my girlfriend on Skype, or Facebook," he explains, while sitting in front of his basement computer, his fingers jabbing the same four keys, up, down, left, right, too fast to keep track. "I go to sleep, I wake up, and I go to work. Uh, yeah."

Manuel was first hired as a bus boy at Tarry Lodge in Port Chester. Once a position opened and offered to him at a branch in Westport, he quickly accepted, shortening his commute significantly. There, he met and formed a friendship with Gillian Manantan.

CHAPTER 4: Ideas of America

Manantan, the 19-year-old bubbly little sister of the Tarry Lodge busser staff, is also a Filipino immigrant. Her mother came to the U.S. when Manantan was a baby, leaving her child under the care of her ex-husband's mother. She married, saved money, and traveled back to the Philippines to bring 11-year-old Manantan and her then-13 year old sister to Westport. Manantan, like Manuel, now sends a portion of her check to the Philippines every month. She supported her grandmother by paying for her grandfather's medical bills in his battle with cancer. He lost the battle in October.

Manantan, as the only member of her immediate family with enough funds saved to purchase the $1,000 ticket, made the 16-hour plane ride alone to arrive just in time for her grandfather's funeral. This trip was the 19-year-old's first visit home since her

departure, eight years ago. Upon revisiting her family and her culture, despite having many meaningful moments, her purpose quickly became painfully clear.

"Their idea of America? Money," says Manantan. "If you came from America, you pay for everything, because you came home for a reason, and that's to pay for everything." Throughout Manantan's visit, the 19-year-old's extended family routinely expected her to shell out payment for social activities and travel expenses.

"I don't know if it's that they don't understand how hard I work, it's just that they're proud," she explains. "Not a lot of people work, they just stay home and expect to get money from us." She sighs, elbow on the table and chin wrapped in her right palm, her fingers curled against her cheek. "At least they fed me."

Not surprisingly, a global survey conducted by the Pew Research Center called the Global Attitudes Project determining "attitudes towards the U.S.," found the Philippines had the most "favorable" view of America, out of all participating countries.

Both Manuel and Manantan both send anywhere from $250 to $400 a month. Manantan usually transfers money to her grandmother by Money Gram at her local CVS Pharmacy. Manuel, however, has created an online account with an app called xoom.com. Xoom.com provides users the opportunity to instantly electronically deposit funds into bank accounts in 32 different countries.

"You just have to download it and put in your account information for your bank. It's easy," explains Manuel. "In maybe like, five minutes, they get the money." This money relieves the cost of raising their son, Chance, and provides for his girlfriend's education.

CHAPTER 5: Up in Smoke

Despite the loneliness that inevitably comes in leaving one's significant other and child, Manuel is confident in his decision. "For now, I think it's worth it to live in the U.S. because I already have a son," he reasons. "If I'm just gonna be in the Phillippines, I don't know if I'd be able to support them." He has also found a community within Tarry Lodge, a community ever-growing in the restaurant industry – one that restaurant celebrity Anthony Bourdain shares unabashedly in a New York Times Dine and Wine article.

"Everybody smokes dope after work," he says. "People you would never imagine."

Within the walls of Tarry Lodge, an upscale wood-burning pizza-focused restaurant, "a slice" translates to a gram of weed, or $20 worth. Throughout the evening, whispers pass along the wine-stocked walls, wondering who will supply. As the end of the night nears, different staff members, both of the kitchen and of the front of house staff, take turns dashing out of the restaurant's backdoor to trips to their cars.

"It just helps me relax," says Manuel one night.

Manuel is just a piece of a much larger puzzle of partiers. An industry known for long, stressful hours and late nights inevitably has become an industry known for its alcoholism and drug usage - Alcoholrehab.com reports that 17.4 percent of employees in food preparation, serving, and bartending use illegal drugs. Moreover, restaurant owners are less likely to drug test their employees than other business owners. While many excuse their self-destructive habits for the sake of money, Rosy Rivera, the 32-year-old

immigrant from Costa Rica, would disagree. She ultimately traded the long nights of drinking for early morning cartoons.

Rivera sends money to her parents in Costa Rica, particularly her mother, who suffered from cancer, and needed financial aid for treatment. “I tell her that I don’t want her to worry about money, so I send her enough for whenever she needs it,” she says.

She explains the backwards Costa Rican economy. “The people there make a lot less money, but everything costs more, because less people are shopping,” she says. “The average salary in Costa Rica is about $650 a month, but the clothes and shoes are doubled the price that they are here. Nikes that are $100 here are $200 there.”

In order to support her family, Rivera started as a busser at a restaurant in Greenwich called Pulpo. “The money was good,” she admits. “When I was a busgirl, I used to make $700 a week working six shifts. Once I learned English and became a waitress, I made more. Some weeks I used to make $1,900.”

In addition to the hefty paycheck, the 32-year-old also speaks positively of her former coworkers.

“I remember I used to walk to the restaurant on my day off to ask somebody to let me use their car, to go shopping at the mall, because I didn’t have a car yet,” she reminisces. “Everybody was like, ‘Oh yeah, you can use my car!’ In Costa Rica, nobody would’ve let me use their car.”

Yet, as she transitioned from her 20s to her 30s, she grew tired of the long, late hours. A friend suggested she transition to nannying. She applied to an agency, one that requires background checks and recommendations. This agency connected her to a

wealthy family in New Canaan, Conn., that has become her adopted American family for the past two years.

"The family pays my Medicare, they pay my taxes, they pay two weeks of vacation," she says, smiling. "They are my family. We are so close. I've been to Florida on vacation with them. The kids tell me everything that's going on in school, who they have a crush on. They're very attached to me."

Rivera's magnetic presence attracts children everywhere she goes. Bright, young eyes match her gaze, bringing light to her face. "I used to make a lot of money in restaurants, but it's much nicer to spend time with the kids," she says.

CHAPTER 6: 'Many, Many Places'

Kids often lead to a change in perspective. Young lives inspire new lives. Marcos Velasquez, the 40-year-old bartender at BBQ's in Westport, once sent a portion of his check to his aging parents in Mexico. But upon discovering his mother's irresponsible spending, he now invests in his children's lives here in the States.

"One day, my mom said 'I need some money,' and I said, 'Well what about the money I recently sent to my father?' And she said, 'Oh, no, that money's gone! I just took it because I really needed it that day, so that money's gone,' " he explains as he pours cream into his coffee. "I never find out what she was using it for, but since then, I stopped sending money."

Velasquez first immigrated to the United States from Pueblo, Mexico, at 17 years old, in an attempt to run away from a broken relationship. "She didn't have a reason for breaking up with me," he says. "So, I wanted to get away to come here and have a new

life." He moved into a house in White Plains with a friend from his hometown in Mexico. A month later, the friend disappeared.

"I was alone," he says. "I started working at a dry cleaners pressing shirts. I'll never forget—my first check was $150 after working seven days and seven nights." After fitting the bill for rent, Velasquez barely had money for food.

"I would just go to a deli and buy a package of tortillas and a dozen eggs," he recalls. "That was my entire meals for a month. Eggs with potatoes, eggs with tortillas, eggs with bacon…something different with eggs."

He takes a sip of coffee, puts down the mug, and tilts his head.

"Now when I think about it, I got to the point when I didn't have money once, I had to steal tortillas out of the dollar store – this was before they had cameras." He shakes his head. "I only did that once, then I said to myself, 'No, this is not me.' "

The years working at a dry cleaners store passed quickly. While his parents remained in Mexico and received MoneyGram remittances from their son, more and more of Velasquez's hometown immigrated to the same ten-block radius of White Plains – including his ex-girlfriend. They eventually married. With the prospect of children on the horizon, Velasquez made the industry switch into restaurants, starting at a Roly Poly sandwich shop and ending at BBQ's.

Currently, Velasquez and his wife have two children, a 12-year-old boy and an 8-year-old girl. Five days a week, his wife presses shirts and pants at the same dry cleaners where he once worked, while Velasquez bartends and waits tables. A normal workweek for Velasquez consists of five lunch shifts and seven dinner shifts.

"Every time I see them, I always say, 'I'm sorry kids that I cannot be with you as much time as I want, but this is for you,' " he says with a sigh. " 'I'm killing myself so I can give you what I never had in my life.' "

Both Velasquez children are members of the Zeus private swimming program in Norwalk. When his son, Henry Andy, first joined the team, he was one of the slowest swimmers. Yet, with determination and practice, he quickly rose up the ranks.

"He's the captain of his team, always breaking team records," his father boasts. "He's number one in Connecticut right now for swimming a mile in the 12 and under age group!"

In addition to excelling in the swimming pool, young Velasquez also excels in the classroom. His school selected him among the entire fifth grade class to take a trip to Australia for two weeks with a program called "Exploring Australia." The trip costs $8,000.

"You can apply for a scholarship that would pay for everything, which I didn't do," says Velasquez with pride. "If I'm going to apply for that kind of help, it's because I really need it, not to just be a douche bag and steal money."

Because restaurant employees only make money when they're actually working, Velasquez took on a few extra shifts to support his son's trip.

"When he came back, he said, 'Daddy, that was the best trip ever.' He ate kangaroo, he ate crocodile, he went to the Australia zoo," he smiles. "He went to many, many places."

Though grateful to provide the money for opportunities he never had, Velasquez' is torn between wanting to work for them and wanting to play with them. He deeply values the little time he has with his children.

"The good thing about the restaurant business is that you start late," he explains. "So almost every morning, I drive them to school, ask, 'How was practice, How is your mom.' If I have a two-hour break, I'll eat and then spend the rest of the time playing X-box with them. I beat them; they beat me. Every extra minute that I have I just want to spend with them."

Yet, while he works, he isn't lonely. Velasquez speaks warmly of the BBQ's regulars – many customers specifically request him for service, mostly to chat about Henry Andy's latest record broken.

CHAPTER 7: The Rock

It is now March of 2015, and winter won't relent. Earlier this month, according to Associated Press, a coalition of 26 states, issued by U.S. District Judge Andrew Hanen of Brownsville, Texas, filed a preliminary injunction placing a temporary hold on Obama's executive action. Initiated in Texas, the states collectively argue that Obama's action was unconstitutional.

Fast forward to April 17, 2015, the day the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans held a court meeting debating whether or not the states should lift the ban. According to The Washington Post, the two and a half hour argument among three federal court judges ended without proclaiming when the court would issue its ruling. In the article "Justice Lawyers Make Appeal to Lift Stay on Obama's Immigration Actions," the Post's David Nakamura writes, "No matter what the 5th Circuit decides, the legal

fight is far from over. Hanen is still deliberating over the constitutionality of Obama's executive actions, and his decision is likely to be appealed — perhaps ultimately to the Supreme Court."

Some of the subjects of this story reside in America legally. Some do not. But all are deeply loved, admired, and needed in their workplace families. While they may not spend much time with their natural families, their selfless stories have become deeply woven into the lives of their coworkers and superiors. They are needed in Fairfield County, Conn. – and they're not going anywhere, except for Manuel.

In December 2014, Kim Addam Manuel departed from Tarry Lodge to the Philippines. While he is unsure quite how he will manage the complicated measure of traveling back to the States with his loved ones, he's not currently concerned. He spends his time in the present. He revels in the detailed reveal of his growing young son. He fills his Facebook page with photo albums, updating friends abroad on lifetime milestones – he and his wife's marriage, his son's fourth birthday. He is living. He doesn't miss it here. And yet, Tarry Lodge misses him.

"Kim was, like, the rock – the unsung hero of Tarry Lodge," says waiter Dylan Cuseo. He sighs. "This place just doesn't run the same without him."

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