

Interview with Dylan Quiroga

Q. Could you tell me your background? Where are you from? How did you come to be in a position where you were undocumented?

A. I was born in South Africa and raised there until I was 17. My father came over on a work visa to the United States and I decided to join him in order to study here and pursue my education in this country. I was on an H4 dependency visa, which meant that while my dad was working in this country and I was under 21, I could be a dependent of his and stay in the country. But once I turned 21, my visa expired and so I just decided to stay and try to work things out and go to community college, and try to figure out a pathway to citizenship or a greencard. It never worked out. I was traveling on a greyhound bus in upstate New York in August, 2011, and immigration came on the bus and asked everyone for identification and that's how I got detained and put in deportation proceedings.

Q. When you were detained were you in a detention center?

A. Yes, it was Buffalo Federal Detention Center, which is like a federal prison. I was there for a week until I was able to bond myself out.

Q. How much was bond?

A. It was \$5000 dollars. I will receive that once I get back to South Africa and I can prove that I'm no longer in the U.S illegally.

Q. Who helped pay the bond?

A. It was actually my savings for my school. I paid it.

Q. What was the detention center like?

A. I was in a unit where everyone else was in the same situation, they hadn't done any crimes – they were just there because they were undocumented and they were facing deportation hearings. There were a lot of Latin Americans, Africans, some Eastern Europeans.

Q. Had all these people been caught the same way – being on a bus and immigration coming on?

A. A lot of them had been caught on the bus. Some had been caught trying to get over the border or had a driving violation.

Q. Where were you going, why were you on a bus upstate?

A. I was just trying to travel across the U.S. I was on my way to Detroit and then I was going to go to Minnesota and Seattle and Portland. I had bought this thing on Greyhound where you pay a certain amount and you get months unlimited travel. So I was just going city to city seeing the country. Because I am undocumented in this country, I'm not able to leave so I decided to travel in the U.S and see what I could. I was going to Detroit to see Motown and all the old Motown museums and some of the music in Detroit.

Q. When immigration came on the bus, were you scared, were you surprised? What were your feelings?



Interviewed by: Thanu Y.

Date: 5/21/12

Published on Dutty Artz

A. I was really shocked, I knew that immigration was strict across the U.S-Mexican border but I had no idea they searched people near the U.S –Canadian border. I know they check people if you want to cross the border, but I didn't think that they would do random searches and checks in upstate NY. I was shocked so I just gave them my passport- I was hoping they would just let me slide or ask me questions and let me go because I wasn't breaking any laws. The next thing I know they were confiscating all my stuff and I'm in the back of this van and getting fingerprinted. All my stuff was taken into inventory. It was disorientating and you don't know what's happening and before you know it, you are in a detention center.

Q. Did they ask you questions on the bus?

A. They asked, "Are you a U.S citizen" and I said no. They asked if they could see my identification. Once they saw my identification and they had phoned it in, the people on the other end said this person's visa is expired. Then they started asking me all these questions like why are you here? Why did you come here? Why is your visa expired? At that point I asked, "Am I under arrest" and they said no but that they had to detain me So then I said, "I don't want to answer anymore questions without a lawyer." And that's when they take you to the detention center.

Q. You said you were traveling to Detroit to see music and museums. From what I know of you, you are really into music and that's why you come to New York. Can you talk about that? What's your connection to music? Why do you come to parties like iBomba and Que Bajo? Have you been doing this a long time?

A. I've always been into a wide variety of music. Only recently I've been getting into dance music. When I discovered the iBomba parties it was just a perfect fusion of world music and dance music that a lot of people can relate to. Coming from South Africa where that music shares a similar rhythm and beat, it just feels really universal, a lot of people can connect to it, they hear that rhythm that was taken from Africa, transported to Latin America and the Caribbean.... Tropical bass has a broad spectrum. You're able to connect to a wide audience of people and that's what attracted me to it. I've only been going up to iBomba since 3 or 4 months ago.

Q. What happened after you were released from detention?

A. They scheduled a court case for me in November so I went to buffalo and asked the judge if he would move it to Baltimore since I live in the D.C area. And then I had another court case January 30th in Baltimore and that's when they granted me voluntary departure, which basically means I'm given 120 days to leave the country on my own accord and that way I don't have a deportation order against my name, so I don't need to check in with a parole officer.

Q. Did you request voluntary departure? Did you sign something?

A. I did request voluntary departure. All the lawyers I had spoken to before my court date said that that was the best I could ask for. Since then, I've learnt differently... I should have asked for "prosecutorial discretion" (PD), meaning that since I'm not a threat, and I don't have a criminal record that they shouldn't be deporting me and separating me from my family. That they should be focusing on other cases.

Q. Do you think your lawyers misinformed you? It seems like you could have gone a different route.

A. Yeah we should have gone a different route but the thing is that the prosecutorial discretion thing is very new. And a lot of lawyers aren't familiar with it or didn't know how to go about fighting for it. So I was



Interviewed by: Thanu Y.

Date: 5/21/12

Published on Dutty Artz

given bad information but at the same time I don't hold it against them, it's a very grey area. Even if they give you prosecutorial discretion, that basically means you are back to square one of being undocumented, that doesn't give you permission to work or permission to study, that just means they won't deport you, you can stay here. But it doesn't give you a pathway to citizenship, so it's very much a loophole in the law. Since immigration law is so messed up, they don't know what to do.

Q. Who from your family is here? What does your family think of this?

A. My dad is here, my step mom and my little sister, who is 15. They all have greencards. My father got his greencard when I was 23, so I didn't qualify for it. I missed it by two years.

Q. Has your family been supportive of you trying to stay?

A. Yes, they want me to stay but at the same time there's not much they can do. They live in the suburbs of Maryland, right outside of D.C. I see them about 2 or 3 times a month.

Q. You started working with DREAM youth on your case? Why are you fighting to stay and who has been pushing your case?

A. I got involved with DREAM youth [undocumented students who would be eligible for the [DREAM Act](#)] through [National Immigration Youth Alliance](#) (NIYA). They've been really amazing. A friend of mine told them about my case and they contacted me. I've had one person who has been dedicated to my case and working on it with me and another couple of people helping out. They've provided me with a lot of resources. There's so many cases that they are working on. They contacted me in early to mid-April. The thing is – we couldn't really start pushing my case until May because ICE doesn't pay attention to cases if there's too much time so it has to be a last minute urgent thing. So we started my online petition and the fight for me to stay in early May. Since then we've just been getting signatures and getting letters of support and reaching out to congressman and senators, making phonecalls to ICE and pressuring them and letting them know about my case.

Q. Is there any complication because you signed a voluntary departure form?

A. It definitely makes it more difficult. It might have been easier if I did this before my court case. But a lot of people aren't aware of prosecutorial discretion so I think they are understanding of that. It's a bit of an outside shot. I don't think it's a sure thing at all. I'd count myself very lucky if they allow me to stay but having said that NIYA has had a lot of success with cases similar to mine and clearer than mine. Right now they are also working on a case of a mother who has three U.S citizen children- these cases are more clear cut than mine.

Q. Because you came here at the age of 17, technically you don't qualify for the DREAM Act, right?

A. I don't qualify for the DREAM Act. That's also one of the reasons why some of the lawyers thought I wouldn't be eligible for prosecutorial discretion. In order to qualify for the DREAM Act you have to have come here before age 16 and have done three years of highschool. I came here at 17 and only did 1 and a half years of highschool. I know NIYA was first doing only DREAM eligible cases and now they've branched out as much as possible. Next month, I think they are doing a campaign where they are doing hundreds of cases at the same time. Working with individual cases, a lot of them are being denied. So they think if they do hundreds of cases they can show that ICE's memo on de-prioritizing cases of people who



Interviewed by: Thanu Y.

Date: 5/21/12

Published on Dutty Artz

aren't a threat are not being implemented at all. They want to push ICE to implement prosecutorial discretion across the board, not just here and there.

Q. Are you in school right now?

A. No, not right now. I completed 2 years community college and did 70 credits, which was above the credit requirement. I couldn't complete my 4-year degree because of my status. So I started working and saving up money. Because I am undocumented, I couldn't get into a nursing program because you need a social security number for that. And I couldn't get into some state schools because you need documentation... like University of Maryland, you needed documentation to go there. Community college only requires a high school diploma, so they will accept you. I would have been willing to do another degree in public health or a field related to nursing..., but that was my number one choice.

Q. What did you do to save money?

A. I would work while studying at community college- part time waiting tables or as a food runner. And then I started working as a line cook in d.c. Some semesters I'd be studying part time and working full time and other semesters I'd be studying full time and working part time.

Q. Did you pay for your studies by yourself?

A. I had to pay my own way. My family helped out every now and then with textbooks but really I was paying for most of it. My family was still trying to get on their feet here. Community college is not as expensive.

Q. What are your feelings about going home, if you in fact have to?

A. I have mixed feelings because I still have a family back home and South Africa is my home in a lot of ways. At the same time I want to stay and finish my studies. If I have to leave, I will be banned for 10 years from this country and I'd be leaving behind my family and a lot of friends and people I care a lot about.

Q. Immigration is often pitted as a Latino issue. I'm sure you know a lot of undocumented youth who are from all over the world. What do you think about the struggle for immigrant rights in this country?

A. The immigrant rights movement often gets typecast as a Latino issue and it's really not. I think the Latino community has done great to organize but there are a lot of other ethnic groups that are dealing with the same thing, they just haven't organized as efficiently yet. This country attracts people from all over the world. And that's one of the reasons I love going to cities like New York – you go to neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Queens and it's like you are traveling the world. When I was in the detention center, there were so many Africans, people from Asia like Afghanistan and Pakistan- a lot of people trying to escape terrible conditions back home. It's pretty universal to try to work and make your life better.

Q. One of the things that attracts me to the U.S. is being around community from all around the world. For me a lot of these dance spaces are political and who it is we meet and how it is we help each other once we meet each other is all connected.

A. I definitely agree with that, just the nature of the music, it's so diverse and it brings together people who are looking to learn from other people. It opens them up so when you tell them about your story they are



Interviewed by: Thanu Y.

Date: 5/21/12

Published on Dutty Artz

more open and sympathetic to it. And the music is just a way to connect people from different backgrounds, so it connects our stories. It helps people identify with each other, so they can identify with each others stories.

Q. All of this intense stuff happened to you in August of last year, and you continued to live your life, to go see music, to go out. Why did you do that?

A. I really wanted to appreciate and enjoy the people in this country before I left. That was one of the biggest things. With this ten-year ban in mind, I just knew that these parties and these communities are so special and you don't find it in a lot of places. To get all these different cultures in one place was special. I wanted to take it in as much as possible. That's why whenever I had a chance to come up to New York and experience these parties I would because I didn't know when I'd get the chance to enjoy it again.