



Our Immigrant Stories – Claudia Cedeño

For many, going through the U.S. immigration process is stressful, dehumanizing, and demoralizing. Having an attorney who is not only tenacious, but is themselves familiar with the immigrant experience, can make a world of difference.

At Grossman Young & Hammond, many of our attorneys, paralegals, and staff are immigrants themselves. They have experienced the immigration process as legal practitioners and as applicants for immigration benefits. Attorney [Claudia Cedeño](#) has seen the immigration process first-hand as an immigrant, as a diplomat, and as an attorney. She jokes that she has held almost every visa type, including B-1/B-2, A-1/A-2, F-1, and TN.

In this inaugural feature of GYH’s “Our Immigrant Stories” series, we meet Claudia and hear her firsthand experience as both an immigrant and immigration attorney.

Claudia is from Morelia, Michoacán, Mexico. Her interest in U.S. immigration was piqued by her own disappointing experience with a visa denial. After Claudia was an exchange student in the United States, her application to renew her visitor visa was denied. Claudia shares, “I was shocked and confused by the way [my visa] was denied.” Instead of explaining why her visa was denied or what she could do in the future to get an approval, the officer only gave her a document saying her visa was denied: “No explanation. I just got the document.” Claudia was already interested in human rights at the time, but her interview experience at the U.S. consulate opened her eyes to the immigration process and sparked an interest in helping people navigate it.

Claudia was later granted an F-1 visa so she could attend American University Washington College of Law in Washington, D.C. After she completed her L.L.M. in International Studies, Claudia started working at a law firm in D.C. that sponsored her status for Optional Practical Training (OPT). Claudia was later offered an opportunity to work at the U.S. Embassy for Mexico on a diplomatic (A) visa. “Working at the Embassy, we focused on everything that affects Mexican nationals, including immigration policy.”

Claudia also worked for the Legal Attaché Office of the Attorney General of Mexico in international cooperation in criminal matters. At the Legal Attaché Office, she worked directly with Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Interpol, the Department of Justice (DOJ), The Office of International Affairs, and Canadian authorities.

Claudia says that obtaining the tourist visa (B-1/B-2) was the most challenging because it was hard to get information on what is successful and what the immigration officers look for. “I am the first one in my whole family to graduate college,” says Claudia. “At the time, I didn’t have a background that would stand out on an application, no huge accounts or high-profile connections. Those things did not work in my favor. But these experiences helped me because they gave me more empathy for my clients.”

Claudia joined Grossman Young & Hammond in 2022 as an immigration attorney specializing in international law. Claudia is currently on a nonimmigrant visa—a TN, and she had to leave the United States to get her new immigration status. “Even though I was confident that I would get my TN visa approved, as a nonimmigrant, every time I leave the United States or have to change my visa status, I face some uncertainty because there is no 100% guarantee that I could get back. A lot depends on the officer you get,” she says. Even as an immigration attorney, Claudia is still not immune to the pressures of being an immigrant in the United States. “I understand how every decision you make can impact your immigration future. I know how difficult it is to try to always hold yourself to that high standard.”

Claudia’s experiences with the immigration process, both as an immigrant and as an attorney, give her a unique perspective. Claudia says, “I understand exactly how my clients feel when they have to go through consular processing or when they encounter immigration authorities.” She knows how nerve-racking and frustrating the consular process can be. Most importantly, she understands the importance of submitting a strong application and being well-prepared for interviews.

Claudia’s best advice to anyone going for a visa interview is to be prepared.

“Do what you can to know what to expect. Get an attorney to assist you with the visa application and interview. You have to be confident and have your documents ready. Be ready with answers to expected questions. You have to present yourself as strong,” she says.

“I think that gives me the advantage, to have that understanding of clients and to have more compassion. I know the emotional cycle my clients go through, the effort they make to pay for things; it’s scary.”

Claudia always tells her clients to be patient, but she knows how hard it is for clients to trust the process. “They may think we have not been in their shoes but, I know. I’ve been there.”

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