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When I was 7 years old, my mom, my 5 year-old brother and I managed to escape an immigration raid at a supermarket on Long Island.

It happened at a Pathmark in the town of Glen Cove NY where we had arrived as undocumented immigrants from Chile. We had just started shopping when a man alerted my mom that immigration officials were in the store asking for papers from whomever spoke Spanish, or looked Latino. I remember my mom grabbing me and my brother, and telling us that we were not allowed to speak to each other, or to anyone, for any reason until we left. I remember she took the few groceries we had in our cart, walked us to the checkout, paid, and we left the store. Luckily we were just white enough to not be questioned. To this day, I remember the fear in my mom's eyes and the confusion I felt as a kid not knowing what was happening.

My parents came to the U.S. on tourist visas to escape a dictatorship. They weren't murderers or rapists, they simply wanted a better life for me and for my brother--a life they couldn't provide for us in the country they had left behind. Through hard work and a lot of sacrifices (my mom cleaned houses and my dad worked construction) they succeeded, bought a house, send two kids to college, and eventually became U.S. citizens. They created a better life for themselves and for their children--children who are educated, productive, law-abiding U.S. citizens who love this country more than the country of their parents.

The raids currently happening in cities around the country are heartbreaking. I think back to that day in the grocery store and how different my life would be if immigration officials had heard us speaking Spanish and had asked my mom for her papers. All I ask is that you have compassion for immigrants, and understand that these raids affect real people and destroy real families. Families like mine who are simply not being given a chance to succeed.

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