

AMERICA LOOKS LIKE SCOTLAND!

Guest: Zoe Bouras
Interviewer: Joshua Dolezal

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JD: I'm curious, how do you define the Midwest?

ZB: Well I think that you know the literal definition of the Midwest is the states of Illinois, Michigan, Iowa, Missouri, and Indiana, it's the middle of the country, mostly its agricultural and it's also my home and it's the place that I love and haven't been given the option to leave its where I've come back to so.

JD: And you still think of it as home then?

ZB: I do now, yes. For a while growing up I definitely felt like living in America was something that had been done to me, you know, I wasn't an immigrant in junior high and high school, I was an ex-pat and I'm not sure if I could pinpoint the exact moment when that changed, but I do know that you know after my high school study abroad experience I had a huge appreciation for the way I was raised and what it's like to live in a safe community and a community where everybody knows you, so I think that probably when I was 17 i really had a sense of what living here had given me in a way that I hadn't before.

JD: Kinda right when you were starting to get ready to leave.

ZB: Yes.

JD: Yeah. Well, before we jump in, I would like to sort of ask this home question again, let me try to think about how complicated that is for you as an immigrant and especially when you think about your origins, but I'm curious, hold on just a minute here, yeah I lost that that question. So why don't we just, oh what I was going to ask is if you could just say your name and so, don't worry if we're making mistakes here, we will cut all of this stuff out but, if you just say your name so I could hear how you pronounce it?

ZB: Zoe Bouras.

JD: All right thanks. Yeah so, one of those loaded questions that people sometimes ask is where are you from, and I'm curious how often you get asked that question and how you answer it.

ZB: I don't get asked very often because I am white and I sound like an American. But my mother gets asked probably three times a day when she's, you know, out in the world. And it depends on how they ask. So, my mom speaks with a really strong British accent and so we either get, "Oh! Your accent is so cool! Where are you from?" or we get "Oh you're not from

around here, where are you from?" And so when people ask and it's a nicer, curious tone, you know, she'll say "Oh, I'm from the Northeast of England." But when people seem like they have their backs up about it, my mom just says, "Well I'm from Arthur." And you know we get it so often that it has become a kind of passive aggressive thing because she really can't go anywhere, she can't even order things at a drive-through without someone saying something about it, so.

JD: And so, Arthur is Arthur, Illinois, and is that how you answer when someone asks where you're from?

ZB: Typically, unless it's a conversation in which people know that I'm an immigrant, if it seems relevant I'll say, well, you know, "I'm from England, but I'm half Greek." Generally though I just say that I'm from Arthur or that I live in Arthur.

JD: Mmhmm. Well thinking of your immigration story, which is something I'm sure you're still discovering with all your travels, new insights into that. Where do you see your immigration story beginning in time? With your own, do you think of that as starting with your own personal journey or farther back in earlier generations of your family?

ZB: So it's actually really funny, my grandfather used to be a welder for Caterpillar in the Northeast of England and when my mom was a little girl he had the opportunity to come and work at the Caterpillar in Peoria and he turned it down because my grandmother didn't want to leave my great-grandmother. And now, you know, all these years later, we moved to America like an hour and a half, two hours away from Peoria. Which I think is really funny and an interesting coincidence. I think that as a child with dual-nationality I was always pretty international, you know in England it's real close to other places where you can go on vacation, European holiday laws you know, are quite generous compared to what most people get for vacation time here, so I was traveling a lot as a child. We would go to Spain, we would go to France, we would go to Greece, we would go to Holland to see my godmother and so I never really thought about being in the same place for a long time because I never really was until we moved here. So I guess I would say that my immigration story started then, but I think more realistically it started the first, I had a conversation on the phone with the man who is now my step-father. I would've been six, just turning seven, and my mom put me on the phone with him, and he said he was from America and at this time, I didn't really know what that meant, you know the idea of going to America to me was like the idea of driving to Scotland, which is maybe an hour north of where I lived and then, I don't even remember what we talked about, but I remember him saying, Oh, like, you guys are going to come and visit, and I was like "ah, road trip." And then when it actually came to coming to America to visit, I was so unprepared for how big and much more everything would be here. More time in the car, more food at the grocery store, you know, more house, more people, more space, there is so much space here, and I just remember sitting, you know in our living room having that conversation with my step-dad on the phone and thinking "oh this is, this is fun! You know, I want to go to Scotland! I love Scotland! America looks like Scotland!" And at the time the only real conception I had of America was

what I saw on tv shows like Recess and Liz Miguire, and the Gilmore Girls. I really thought that moving to America would be the Gilmore Girls despite the fact that we were coming from here, like, for my mom to get married, and I would inherit a brother and sister. So.

JD: Yeah.

ZB: I would, that's when it started, but I also don't know that I realized we were going to move here when I was that young. We were in a process of visiting for three years, we crossed the Atlantic Ocean nine times before we moved here. And my brother and sister came to England once, and I remember when I told people for the first time, oh I'm going to move to America, we're moving before Christmas, it was at my Girl Scout troop and I'd just moved into the older section so it was junior high kids and the end grade school, and so I was basically the youngest and I told one of the girls, like oh I'm moving to America. And she goes are you sure you don't mean you're going on vacation?' And I was like no no, this time I know. We're moving.

JD: It's for real this time.

ZB: Yeah, and so then we moved here, two days before Christmas in 2005 and Arthur, Illinois became my home.

JD: Well I wanna come back to Arthur a little bit later, but so as you're describing it, that phone conversation was really the beginning of that immigration which was permanent and really changed the rest of your life. But you were born and raised in Sunderland and if I'm mistaken, that's a coastal city in Northeast England? I'm curious what the culture is like there compared with say other regions of the UK?

ZB: Yeah! The north is very distinct, some people mid-landers specifically would probably refer to that part of the country as like the armpit of England. It used to be really industrial, a heavy, heavily mining community the place that I lived actually was old mining cottages, it was a terraced row of what used to be mining cottages and when my mom was a little girl almost everybody's dad worked in the pits. And there is a lot of northern pride I would say because there is such a stigma against the north of England as being not great. But, I don't know, it was nice, it's traditional compared to, you know, a lot of, of other areas of England. It has a lot of countryside, it has South Shields and the beach, and it was a really nice place to grow up. You know, I, my life was pretty regimented as a child. I would go to school, my grandad would pick me up, and I would ride on the crossbar of his bike and he would, you know, take me home, and we would ride through this country park every single day. On weekends I would do dance classes for a while I was doing, I think 13 classes a week including drama and voice. And then on Sundays we'd go to my great aunt and uncle's house for tea but I always called them just, Auntie Pat and Uncle Henry. And then we'd have Sunday dinner which is basically like Thanksgiving dinner, just a little bit smaller and every week. So when we moved here, everybody loves Thanksgiving and my mom was just like "eh". Regular Sunday.

JD: It isn't a big deal. Yeah.

ZB: Not a big deal, yeah. Because the roast dinner in England is a central part of what it is to grow up in England. Everybody has a, everybody I suppose that dietitian restrictions, has Sunday roast every single Sunday. And it's just a tradition, it's part of the way of life and my great-grandma did it, and my grandma did it, and then my grandad did it for us, and then when my grandad died my mom did it. Because it's just the way things are. But, yeah it was a, it's an, it was a nice place to live. I was very, we were very close with our neighbors, there are some real differences though between growing up in the Northeast of England and growing up in the particular part of Illinois that I grew up in because where I lived in England was, you know, closer to a city, it was more dangerous and I think that in general England is a bit dirtier and a bit rougher than the Midwest. You know, I was never really allowed to play outside of my front yard which had six foot high fences. And here, you know, we moved here and my dad was like "okay, have fun! You can ride your bike on your own a mile to the pool and back at eight years old, that's fine." And nothing bad ever happened, he knew that nothing bad ever would. And you know, here in my neighborhood even, I am sitting in my living room and I can see across the street people have porch furniture out. In England that would have been stolen so fast. You know, one time we were visiting here and someone stole a bike out of our front yard when we were gone. Despite the six foot high fences. So--

JD: Yeah. Well, I'm curious, you said your grandfather was a welder and did you grow up thinking of yourself as working-class then?

ZB: So I didn't really have any conception of money as a child and I think that's largely because at school, everybody wore uniforms so I didn't know what everyone else had. You know, we weren't talking about shoes and clothes and whatever as much as I did when I got here. Now that I'm older, I would say that, yeah we were working class. My mom worked at a university and, but she was, she was college educated, you know, most of the people I went to school with, their parents were college educated because of the way the school system works in England and education was free for a really long time so lots of people went. Now it's I think 9,000 dollars, 9,000 pounds a year. So maybe, 13, 15,000 dollars per year? And I know people in England that complain about that, which I think is really funny. But, yeah, we had a pretty working class background. More recently I was in England and my great aunt that I told you about earlier showed me a bag of pasta and he goes, "Zoe, do you know what this is and how to cook it?" And said "yes I do. It's pasta, like let's have, let's have pasta." And I was telling that story to a friend's mother who lives in Southern England and she was explaining it to her son and she was like "well, in the North they're kind of meat and two vegg people." So, the entire, you know, the entire region is pretty working class. Yeah.

JD: So there's a bit of a stigma in the rest of England of the, of the North.

ZB: Yes, I think a lot of people think it's quite rough and ready and in a lot of ways it is. But, you know, there is a lot of nature, it's really close to the lake district which is the equivalent to a national park. And then there's some really really nice things about living there. So.

JD: Yeah. Well tell me a little bit more about your parents. You said your mother was college educated and worked at the university. Tell a little more about her and then, maybe a little about your father?

ZB: Great. My mom went to the University of Edinburgh and studied textile design and she worked as a college administrator in England when I was a child and her name is Eileen. She, her favorite color is yellow, she has blue eyes, she was very into Abba as a kid we had tons of records. And my father lives in Greece, he is Greek, he grew up in the village of Regini which is maybe forty five minutes outside of Lamia on the mainland. Now he owns restaurants in Rhodes, which is the tourist island and famous for the Colossus of Rhodes. And my stepfather is an environmental health and safety engineer. He went to the University of Illinois, as did most all of his family. We're U of I people and he works in manufacturing as a, as a manager.

JD: Great. Well what was your relationship like with your biological father when you were growing up?

ZB: So I was raised by my mom and my grand, my grandad. In the Northeast of England, multi-generational families are a lot more common than they are here. So a lot of people that I knew lived with grandparents. Or, well, their grandparents lived with them. My dad prioritized other things, so I only saw him maybe, maybe 15 times in my first, like 10 years of life. As I got older, though, I kind of got back in touch with him and since then I've been to Greece four or five times since 2014 to reconnect with my YiaYia, which is my grandmother, and with him. And that's been a good experience, but as a child, basically my dad was the person that sent me age-inappropriate birthday gifts.

JD: What would one of those have been?

ZB: One year he sent make-up, and I, I wanted the make-up so bad and my mom was trying to hide it, but I saw it so I knew it was there. And she was like "absolutely not, you're eight." Another time he got me, like a baby doll, but I was nine so I was too old for it then. One time he got me a shirt with a picture of my own face on it. And most famously a Gameboy Advance with no batteries and no games. Yeah.

JD: That's great.

ZB: But, yeah I mean he's a, a good person. I now have a half-sister in Finland, yeah. He goes about--

JD: Well so, you were estranged from your father for many years, how did you renew your relationship? Was that you reaching out of him reaching out or, or both?

ZB: He reached out, I, well he told my mom that my Papu, my grandpa had, had passed away. And I took that surprisingly hard. I have memories of my YiaYia and Papu from when I was a child, you know, we'd go to Greece, we'd go to Cyprus. And for a while, my YiaYia came to stay with us for like six weeks when I was a kid. So I was really upset when I heard that my Papu had died. And so I reached out to him and then I went to visit for three weeks in 2014, then like a week over new years and then another three weeks, and then another time at Christmas so, yeah.

JD: Well and, and now you visit your father's family in Greece, quite, quite a bit. So what are those visits like, you know, what do you do with your cousins, and I know you've told me that you don't speak a lot of Greek so how do you communicate across language barriers?

ZB: So my dad speaks Greek, I don't know, or Greek and English, I don't know that he writes English particularly well but he does speak it. And the nature of the trip really just depends on where we're going. So if I'm visiting Rhodes, it's like a fun vacation. You know, I got a hotel room and there's a beach, and I eat breakfast every morning with my aunt and my grandma at my aunt's restaurant. And then I fill my time during the day and then I have dinner with my dad, pretty late after he closes his restaurant. If we're in the village though, on the mainland, it's completely different so basically the first time I went to the village all we did was, like a tour of introducing me to everybody we knew. And I have never gained so much weight so fast because everybody is like, here's some cake, here's some cake, here's some cake. And after like the 34th house visit of the day and their like "ah more cake" so. But, yeah the village, it's really really really small, I could walk to the whole thing in maybe 15 minutes. And we would, I would stay in the hotel and come out of Vuorela, which is outside Regini and its on the coast, a lot of Greek tourists go there and it's about 10 minutes downhill from Greggini and so my dad would come and get me and we would have breakfast and come out of Vuorela and then we would go to the village to my grandmother's house, we would spend some time with her, then go visit friends, then in the afternoon, after lunch everybody naps. Kind of like in Spain. And, so they would sleep and I would read mostly because I wasn't used to the time. And then we would have dinner with my YiaYia, and then my dad would go to the village to get the news, but that isn't really what that means, it's just like all of these middle-aged and elderly men sit in a coffee shop and gossip. And-

JD: He's not bringing a newspaper home.

ZB: No, no they just sit around and talk. And I would go out with my cousins and, some of them aren't really my cousins, but they call them cousins. So, you know, I have my cousin Nico and Thenasus, and Alexandros, and they I don't think they're related to us at all but one of them is my godmother's son. So I would hang out with them and they all speak English because in most of, I mean in most of the world now, English is taught as a second language in schools so.

That's not such a problem, but YiaYia doesn't speak a lick of English, and so I've never, my dad or my aunt would translate or we would just kind of look at each other and she would cry, so that was hard. But

JD: So how do you communicate then?

ZB: We'd like draw pictures or hand signs. And a lot of what I would have to say I think that there isn't really a reference point for her. You know the world is so very different than it was when she was growing up. And I don't think she has any conception of what life would be like here. So mostly we just like look at old pictures and draw pictures and hand signs or my dad would translate for us.

JD: Well you probably have spent some time thinking about if you were her, you know, just how much the world has changed for women as well in terms of opportunity and, it seems like you're opposites, your grandmother and you in terms of how much you've seen and how many experiences you've been exposed to compared to what sounds like a fairly sheltered life for her?

ZB: Absolutely. I am very very lucky in that I have been able to do I think an awful lot for someone my age. You know, I went to college, I have a masters degree, I've seen 31 countries and you know, I've climbed a mountain, I've swam with sharks, you know, I've done a lot of really really interesting unique things, and you know for my YiaYia, I think, some of those things are unimaginable. I did tell her I was gonna go rock climbing in Morocco and climb a mountain and she was like absolutely not. You cannot go to Morocco and you cannot climb a mountain there. And so did and just didn't tell her because I was worried about her heart. But I don't know if you've ever seen Mama Mia, but there's a scene in it where all of the men are dancing on a dock in like flippers and snorkels, and one of, there's an old woman with like a bundle of sticks on her shoulder. And the first time my mom watched that she was like, oh my god that's just like the village. The boys doing whatever they want, and the girls are carrying the sticks, even the old ladies. And I didn't really understand what she meant then and then I went to the village and I've seen like Greek boys and I'm like oh, yeah. You know, as far as I can tell Greek boys are definitely, you know, mama's boys. And I, I know some other Greek Americans that would 100 percent agree with that as an assessment. And so, that was really funny to see in real life based on what my mom had said. You know, years ago.

JD: Well tell me about your Greek christening, this is a vivid memory for you, I think it was a new year's celebration? What do you remember best about that day?

ZB: So, my Greek christening was when I was a child. And I, so I've been christened twice, I've been christened Orthodox and I've been christened Anglican. And my mom tells the story of it, and basically they just kept killing animals to feed her, you know they killed all these chickens, everyday, what kind of meat do you want? I don't know. Well, we'll have chicken and they'd go and slaughter a chicken. And by like, day 15 she couldn't handle it anymore, but she knew that

you know my family didn't have any cows so she said okay, I would like some cows, I want, I want steak. And instead of being like, oh sorry we don't have any steak, I we can't kill an animal today, they went to the other side of the mountain and got a cow from our cousin. And at the christening party, you know, they, the whole town roasts lambs on spits, basically all big holidays. Easter is big for this as well. You know, you'll have entire communities around roasted meat and then I went to Greece for New Years and we went to the village and my dad takes me to a butcher and I've never seen a butcher like this before in real life. You know, it looks like something from a black and white movie because there are just animals hanging from the ceiling and he buys an entire lamb and we take home, and then he puts it on the spit in the backyard and that is what he does for like nine hours that day. He roasts the lamb and it was so funny to see the story that my mom used to tell come to life. And the lamb was great, but also the lamb head stressed me out, so.

JD: That's stuck with you all these years.

ZB: Oh yes.

JD: Well, you told a little bit of this story earlier, when you're put on a phone with the man who'd become your step-father in America. But I'm curious, if we could just back up a little bit and could you tell me how your mother met, met him, I think you'd said it was an online book forum? How did that happen?

ZB: Yeah. So a lot of people when they think about immigrants they think about you know assylum seekers, people coming here to make their lives better alot and, and a big part because that's the most visible I think face of immigration in America, but my mom was looking for a book on the internet and my dad was in the same forum for the same book and they started talking about the book and three years later they're married. And so it's always really interesting to share that with people just because I think it challenges their notions of what it means to be an immigrant, you know we moved, you know my mom wasn't looking for a husband. My mom was looking for a book. But, that's also been really I think good because it's something that they both are very interested in. You know we have a library in my house, we have an office with floor to ceiling bookshelves. And it's something they both really value so, that's really neat I think to be able to have that story.

JD: Well I'm thinking, you know marriage is a big commitment under any circumstances but it must have been especially hard for your mother, given that she'd been a single mother to you and then becoming a mother to other children in your, in your step family. How did she know that she was ready for that big of a move?

ZB: You know, I'm not 100 percent sure, I think it was kind of a long slow burn though. You know, we visited the first time and, oh, my step dad hugged my mom immediately off the plane and I was like who are you? I was so mad at like seven years old, I was like who is this man?

JD: She hadn't told you they were romantically involved?

ZB: Yeah, I think, I think I was told we were going to visit a friend. I'm like not, I don't really remember, but I remember being like what do you think you're doing? And so we came, you know the first time in 2003, it must have been and it was like the coolest vacation I've had, you know my American childhood when we were visiting here was very idyllic, my step-sister and I would catch fireflies in the neighborhood and we used to have a lot of kids in the neighborhood at that time and so we would all like, well, my older brother and his friends would play, like hide and seek and stuff and we would get to tag along because my dad made him take us and, so that was really fun and like, we would go to the pool and we went on road trip, you know we'd go to the zoo and we'd go to the house on a rock in Wisconsin and we went to a Renaissance Festival, so it was all of this, really fun all the time kind of thing because Morgan and Paul were never in school. Because we would come in the summers. And then we would start coming more often and I was so bored when Morgan and Paul were in school. I'd just follow my mom around the house all day. Because I didn't have anything to do, you know. Oh, this is fine. But, I think that because we visited so many times in such a short period of time it was a natural progression. And I don't think that it was, you know, a hard decision. We got along pretty well, I mean well as siblings can. The first time anybody ever hit me it was Morgan you know, I think it was a very normal sibling relationship pretty quickly and because of the safety issues where I used to live, you know, I was really excited to have friends my age that I could play with all the time because I was an only child and I didn't really play with the other kids in the neighborhood in England. And basically we applied for the VISA, I think it took like a year and a half to get approved, so there was a lot of time for you know, minds to be changed before we eventually moved here.

JD: Well, I'd like to hear about that, that day when you left England for good. Did you have to leave your grandfather behind?

ZB: My grandfather passed away when I was seven.

JD: So right around that time.

ZB: We moved when I was ten, we started visiting when I was just turning seven and my grandpa died a few months later basically.

JD: Okay.

ZB: I actually remember the first night we visited here we were having, my mom had told my dad that I just really meats, anything would be fine. And my stepdad was like, oh okay. I'll make Polish sausage and sauerkraut for three children. I didn't touch the stuff, I was like I don't even know what this is. I liked fish fingers, what are we, what even is this where is Poland, is that cabbage, I don't like it. And then I like wasn't allowed any ice cream, you know and my mom, I remember her saying to my, I remember my mom saying to my stepdad, oh you and my dad are

not going to get along because he would have given her the ice cream. And it was a shame that they never actually got to meet each other but I also don't know if my grandpa was alive if we would have come. So.

JD: Yeah.

ZB: That's, you know a consideration that you could, what would have been, but.

JD: Right. Well tell me about the day when you left England for the US. What do

ZB: Yeah.

JD: What do you remember best about that day and that journey?

ZB: So we went to my aunt Karen's house, who isn't really my aunt, she's my mom's best friend and we hugged her goodbye and there was crying and then we went to my great aunt and uncle's and there was crying and they were way more skeptical than everybody else. My great aunt and uncle were like what are you doing? This is crazy. And they hugged us and they cried and I remember her saying to my mom you can come back. You don't have to stay. And I am pretty sure I was so exhausted by the time we got on the plane that I slept the whole way, like the whole eight hours. And my brother and sister did not come to the airport to pick us up, just my dad. And I remember we got here and my brother and sister they, they got a Christmas tree and they were waiting until we got there to decorate it so it was like the entire holiday season in four days. Because they just hadn't done any of the Christmas preparations without us basically. So my brother and sister were like sitting around the tree waiting to decorate when I got in. And I remember just standing in the door and staring at this Christmas tree. And they were like, okay now you're here, lets go. It was very you know, you're here, we're family, let's get to it. So.

JD: Well and you were prepared because of all those other trips that you'd taken so it wasn't quite as sudden, or did it still feel really sudden to you?

ZB: I don't think I realized that it meant that we were like not coming back. You know I think that the academic concept was fine but the reality of it hadn't really set in. You know, we'd spent like months selling our stuff, and I was still like nah, this is, this isn't real, this is fine. But, it was a, it was a smooth transition for me family wise I guess. You know I already had a bedroom. It was already set up, you know, the biggest sadness I think for me as a child was that we couldn't bring all of our stuff. And we were living in a house that wasn't ours. And, you know, for a long time none of the furniture got moved because my step-sister would be like, that's not where we keep the broom. But, you know, I had my own space and it was fine.

JD: Well so you moved just before Christmas so you had a little time over the holidays to get settled in. But then after that you had to go back to school in a new country, so, what was that like? What were some of the biggest adjustments you had to make then?

ZB: American school was a nightmare. I cannot stress enough how hard the transition to American school was. For the first time in my life I didn't have to wear a uniform, so we had to go and buy me a bunch more clothes just because I didn't have enough clothes to do, you know, seven days a week of street clothes. I didn't really understand the concept of a dress code. I'd, I'd never been in trouble for wearing, like a halter top before so I didn't know that I couldn't do that. The homework was insane, so at the, I was still in primary school in England and I was in the last year of primary school. Which is like 6th grade. And at that point still, you don't get homework every single day and you don't even take the classes, same classes every single day. It's on a block schedule so the only thing you do consistently is English and Math. And everything else is spread out throughout the week, so. This idea that we had to wear tennis shoes to school because we were going to do P.E. everyday blew my mind because in England, people don't just wear tennis shoes everywhere. You know, I was used to wearing school shoes and tights, and skirts and all of a sudden there were all these rules about what I could wear and all of this freedom of choice about what I could wear. And it really made me stick out. I remember, I had this little like sweater with a fake fur hood, and people, like the kids really thought that I'd killed a Dalmation because 101 Dalmations is set in England. You know, there was a lot of ignorance I think about what it meant to be English, a lot, one of the girls asked me if I'd ever been to a nude beach because she'd heard all of the beaches in England were nude beaches and I was like ten, like I don't even know what you're talking about? And, so the social part was difficult and the physical coming through the schoolwork part was difficult just because I had never had so much work in my life. The first day of school, I used an entire pencil! I came home with this little stub and my mom was like what is that? I was like this is how much I wrote today mom! And I couldn't believe it. And that night we were up doing homework until three in the morning. And my mom was like, oh my god, this is going to kill her. Because I'd just never had the volume of work and in ENgland for primary school they don't really do continuous assessment. So you know you take tests to know how you're doing. Well for your teachers to know how you're doing, I feel like as a kid I had no concept of where I stood in comparison to my peers. And the classes were so streamed, but there wasn't any emphasis on it, whereas grade school in England, or sorry grade school here I felt like there were very clear streams and very clear differences in expectations and pace that wasn't anything I'd had to deal with before.

JD: You know, its curious because I mean, I, I would assume, I don't know this for a fact, but students in the UK are better prepared for college than students in the US so I'm curious from your perspective why, why that is if they're not, if students in the US are working so much harder, why aren't they getting further along.

ZB: I think it's a pedagogy difference and I think that the forced repetition of doing things over and over again doesn't necessarily mean you're learning it. And the way things are thought is very different. So, and what is taught is also very different. So in the English system, you have nursery, which is for it's like preschool, then you have reception which is like kindergarten and then you have primary school, which is years five to ten. The ten, eleven year. And then you go into secondary school which is year seven to year twelve and in secondary school you get to

start specializing. So you get to decide pretty early on that you are not interested in math and then you don't take math ever again. And you can take things that you're interested in and things that are compelling and then when you go to University you're applying into a program based on the courses you took in high school. So if I went to do, so when I, when I did my year at Oxford, I was in the P.P.E. program and so to get in to a P.P.E. program which is politics, philosophy and economics, typically a kid'll have taken you know a math, English lit, politics, and maybe philosophy at the, at the A levels. And then depending on what grades you got on those final exams, it's, what you're working with to get into college. And instead of GPA where every single thing you've ever done for four years is put into an equation and then you get the number of how good you are. So if I was doing, you know, high school in England, I would not have been taking Pre-Calculus I wouldn't have been doing math probably because I would have picked something else. I have a cousin type thing in England, she's not really my cousin, but our families are really close, she is in her A levels now and she is doing, I believe, photography, philosophy, politics, and English lit and that's it. She's taking four classes for her last two years of secondary school before she goes on to university. And when she applies to university, she'll be looking at programs that are related to those subjects. But even as, like even in primary school, it's very different. I have volunteered in a preschool classroom in, in America and preschool here is a lot more like educational childcare than I think Kindergarten is, than reception is in England. And when I moved here, I was doing what a lot of people now call Common Core math and the teachers didn't know what I was doing, you know, I, my very first American math test I got an F, despite having mostly right answers. Because the teacher wasn't sure how I'd gotten the work with number lines and grids for multiplication. And so that was a huge adjustment and I think that the lack of continual assessment in schools for primary school aged children takes the pressure off a little.

JD: Yeah.

ZB: So it's just

JD: So you can just sort of learn like you move through the world otherwise, you, you follow your passions and you know maybe you have some point of need and instruction, but its not, its less standardized it sounds like, less rigid in England?

ZB: Yes. I would say. But also, you know the downside of that is that if you make the wrong decision, at age 14 or 15, you're stuck.

JD: Right.

ZB: You know, there's also a lot of freedom with comes with the American system in that you don't have to make any serious decisions until you're what, a sophomore in college? You know you can kind of put off this is what I'm going to be choices until 19 or 20. As opposed to 14 or 15 where you take the wrong GCSE or maybe you decide that actually you're interested in microbiology, but you never took the foundational courses for that.

JD: Right. Hmm so there's some pros and some cons. Well, I want to go back to your transition to school and you know this kind of culture shock that you were experiencing with the dress code and no uniforms and so on. I'm curious how long it took you to lose your accent and you said you were bullied because of that?

ZB: Yeah. So I think one of the things about being different is that it's a really cheap shot, right, it's easy to pick on someone for that. And so I think I was probably 14 before the accent went away all together, but I worked at it so hard. And I can, I can turn the British accent on now. If I, If I want to and if I'm speaking with my mom it comes out very strong. And if I'm speaking to anyone from England or any family, it's very heavy then. But, for the most part, I prefer to speak in an English, in an American accent just because it's an equalizer but yeah I used to get a lot of go back where you came from! Oh, Zoe, the British are coming! Like trying to.

JD: Revolutionary war stuff huh?

ZB: Yes, which I had never learned about before so the first time someone said it to me it didn't even mean anything. I was like, I don't, I don't know. For a long time I had the opinion that yeah England lost the revolutionary war, but like they were kind of focused on other stuff at the same time. So, yeah I worked really hard to get rid of the accent. The words that were most difficult were banana, grandma, because I, trying to say it in an American accent. I really wanted to put an R on the end of that. So for a long time it came out as grandmar. And can't, I got in a lot of trouble at school trying to say can't with an American accent.

JD: I can imagine.

ZB: Yes. And when, one of my early-- so one of my like earliest American school memories is we were reading a book called Number the Stars which is about the Holocaust and in England for, at least in my primary school, they didn't teach about the Holocaust in World War II until you were a little bit older. They taught about like the Blitz and that makes sense because we have lived memories of World War II in England on our, you know, on our land. My grandma was bombed in World War II and I grew up hearing that, so in classrooms, you learn about the Blitz in primary school and then you learn about the Holocaust in secondary school. And so we started reading this book and I asked what the Holocaust was and I got sent in the hallway because the teacher thought I was trying to be funny. And so, still nobody explained it to me and then I went home and I was like, what was the Holocaust? And then I got told. And after we read the book, we watched sections of the movie called The Pianist and everybody thought I was saying peinusdiowgn because of how it came out in my accent. I was like trying, and I was like the pianist was so sad, and they are like, what?

JD: Well so, all of this is happening in Arthur, Illinois and that was your first home in the Midwest it sounds like the place you still think of as home. So how, how do you describe Arthur, Illinois to people who are unfamiliar with it?

ZB: Depending on how much time I have, I typically just say that it is just a really small town south of Champagne, with an Amish community in it. Because that's the thing people are likely to have heard. Arthur is quite famous for the Amish community and our celebrations. We have a Cheese Festival and a Barbeque Festival and a Strawberry Jam Festival and an outdoor hunting expo festival and like a Christmas Parade, we have these huge fireworks, they are some of biggest fireworks in the state and we'll get like thirty, forty thousand people into our tiny town of two thousand people to watch fireworks display that gets put on by the Rotary. So, people kind of associate that with Amish towns so I tell people that because it's what they'll remember. But, I think it's a lot more than that. It's a really close-knit community. It's very safe, everybody knows everyone. One time I got in trouble at school and my dad knew before I got home. First thing I said, he said when I walked in the door was, what'd you get in trouble for at school today? And I was like, well how did you know that? And it's because somebody called their dad at work and told their dad and their dad told my dad. Like at lunchtime. Yeah, so, it's very tight-knit but it's very safe and people look out for each other. There is like a little grocery store, a florist, pumpkin patch, a hairdresser uptown, it's basically one street of like commercial area and then houses, we have a high school on the highway and it's like a kind of picturesque place, you know. But it is surrounded by cornfields. My backyard is a corn field and my side yard is a corn field.

JD: That's where you're, that's where you're speaking to me from right now?

ZB: Yes. And it was very very very different coming here, than it, from where I lived in England. You know, in England my entire life was in a ten mile radius, every single thing that I did. For the first 10 years of my life was within 10 miles. And now, it's like a 45 minute drive to a grocery store that would be considered a supermarket.

JD: Well, so I'm curious, you, you spoke about this a little earlier, you know the ways that you were picked on or you know, marked as different because of your accent and people knowing you're from England. But I'm how you've, how you've reflected on how your experiences as a white immigrant to the rural Midwest is different than it would be for immigrants of color, who often come to those same rural communities.

ZB: Yeah. So, it's definitely different being an American passing immigrant. YOU know, being white and speaking with an American accent. Kind of for three reasons. Firstly, I don't get the extra attention that you know immigrants of color get. People don't necessarily think about white immigrants in the same way, at least that's my understanding. And when people hear about you know illegal immigration and undocumented immigrants and DACA recipients, they are not thinking about people that look like me. So I generally don't get the criticisms and I kind of get to live apart from that. But at the same time, I do have similar burdens that those immigrants have. Not all of them, obviously, but some of it is, is very similar and when people talk about legislation, the legislation will affect me too. And that's difficult to navigate and it's kind of the second thing is that you are always expected to have an opinion but in the same breath, people

say that your opinion doesn't matter because your opinion doesn't count because it's not about people like me. And so that's really difficult to navigate and I think it's kind of an identity crisis for probably a lot of white immigrants. And you know the third thing is that because people forget, I can kind of catch them off guard when they say things I think that a lot of people say things in front of me that they wouldn't necessarily say in front of an immigrant of color or someone that was more obviously an immigrant and then I'll be like oh well, you know, I'm one of those people. And they're like oh well that's, you know, that's not what I meant. I--

JD: Well what are, what are some of those things that you've, you've heard said about immigrants by people who didn't realize that you were an immigrant yourself.

ZB: I have a family friend and I was hanging out with her and her dad came in and was like all these immigrants are coming here to rape and pillage and I was like hello! I am an immigrant. And he was like well, I don't mean, I don't mean people like you. It's like well, but it is people like me you know, people like me are immigrants and I have obviously not come here rape and pillage, I came here to like eat pumpkin pie and I don't know, be an American right? And so that's always kind of difficult. Also, I don't if you remember the Coca Cola, was it, the Coca Cola commercial from the Super Bowl a few years ago, it had people singing America the Beautiful in different languages?

JD: I don't remember that, but go ahead.

ZB: Okay well, I thought it was a very very beautiful commercial but a lot of people on my Facebook feed were like this is ridiculous, some people were like they shouldn't have the national anthem song by other people, by other countries and other languages, which was funny because it wasn't an actual anthem. But this commercial was getting a lot of flack and it was during the Super Bowl so tons of people saw it and so I said something, and it was like, you know, I think this commercial is really nice and as an immigrant you know who believes in the contributions of immigrants and the idea of the melting pot, I think it's really, you know, really beautiful and a very positive message. And tons of people commented on that and it was like I completely forgot you weren't even from here. Or well, okay Zoe, but if you were going to sing, you would've sung it in English so it's different. And so it's kind of weird, but also you know I can use that to kind of challenge people's opinions sometimes too. You know, sometimes it's like oh well you know as an immigrant, I feel like, or my experience has been, and then if they're willing to listen to that, I think that it can do some good that way and, and in some ways I think it lends unfairly, I think it lends validity to complaints of immigrants of color in the same that a lot of times people are more willing to, you know, to listen to the majority instead of the oppressed minority. I think that it's, it's not right, but I think that a lot of people when I say something they're oh like, if she's had that problem, maybe it is a problem. You know when I,

JD: Did you know any, did you know any other immigrants in, in Arthur or nearby who were people of color?

ZB: So, there's a town about nine miles away from us with a high Hispanic population, but I, I mean I knew that place existed and I knew some people there, but the people that I knew were children of immigrants. I don't think I knew any actual immigrants growing up and I didn't meet a European immigrant until college. The, the book we had to read going into school was called *The Madonnas of Echo Park* by Brando SkyHorse and I thought that we were going to get graded on whether or not we read the book and like answered the questions so I was like really into it. And its, it's about a the Mexican-American experience in Los Angeles and its told through multiple viewpoints and there were some lines in there that, despite the differences between my experience here and the experience of someone living in L.A. as a Mexican-American immigrant, there were, you know these lines really struck me. As poignant to the immigrant experience more broadly. And so, I went to the discussion with my answers typed out and I was ready to talk about this and I remember vividly saying, are there any other immigrants in here because as an immigrant I felt like and then these two kids raised their hands and you could've knocked me over with a feather because I'd like never spoken to an immigrant before and I definitely had never spoken to a European immigrant before. And their feelings about these sentences were also, you know really similar. One of the students was from Poland and the other one was from the Czech Republic. And all of sudden I was like oh I have been seen, it's not just me, you know, you know, we can appreciate living here and also miss what we've left. And so that was really, impactful for me and actually, you know, as I went through my freshman year, the two girls that became my best friends were both European immigrants. One was a Swiss-Italian and one was from Armenia and a lot of our conversations would be about like the differences between living here and living there and what it's like to be white English speaking immigrants in a place where you both have privilege in many many ways but also get discriminated against in other so, I definitely learned a lot that year from those people.

JD: Well it sounds, as you're talking, a little bit similar to my own experience coming to the Midwest from Montana, your experience as an immigrant is quite different of course, but you know if, if you haven't been born and raised in Iowa to some extent you yourself will never be from Iowa. My kids might have that claim, but I will never belong in Iowa in the way that someone whose native born would, and it sounds like that's a similar struggle only magnified for you that no matter how long you've lived in Arthur, Illinois, all of your formative years you've been shaped by that place that for some people in that community you'll never be from there. Is that accurate?

ZB: Oh yeah. A lot of people in town I think look at me kind of like I'm a martian and other people in town kind of humor me, you know. They're like ah, Zoe's kind of weird but she's funny if you keep her around. Stuff like that. Actually I in preparation for this I was looking for something that I've written and so I Googled myself and I found in the newspaper that someone, it might have been the University submitted like, Illinois Wesleyan University graduates area student and it was about me and I was like Oh my goodness! It says I'm from Aruther, you know someone, somewhere cared about that. But also, you know, I did a lot of different kinds of stuff as a kid to repre-, as a young adult to represent this community, I learned a lot about it and so while some people really are oh well you're not really from here, you'll never be from here, I

think more people kind of see me as a product of you know the Arthur school system and the Arthur community.

JD: We're nearing the halfway point, so I do need to ask if you need to take a break for a bit before we plow ahead?

ZB: I'm okay! Is it going okay? Am I saying the right stuff?

JD: Yeah! Yeah, it's good. I asked in the chat if the voice memo was going, it's kind of two late to ask about that now, but.

ZB: Yes it's going.

JD: Alright, that's great. Well, we'll forge ahead then! You know, it's funny, everybody that I've asked that to this season has wanted to keep going so there's something about resilience and immigration I guess you, just, you know, are-- last, last season everybody needed to take a break after an hour so. You guys, you guys are all tougher it seems like.

ZB: No, I'm good.

JD: Well, let's, let's talk a little bit about the Amish community in Arthur since that's a big part of how you introduce the place to other people. What did you learn about Amish culture as you were growing up? And did you make friends within that community?

ZB: So, the Amish community is both very integrated and at the same time, very separate. So all of our tourism in Arthur comes from the pull of the Amish, we have a lot Amish businesses in town you know, we have the Country Cheese and More which recently just got bought by someone else and it's called something else now but it's an Amish owned Bakery and they do sandwiches and they sell like jams, and like honey sticks and crafts and quilts and stuff. We have the Stitch and Ships, ooh, Stitch and Sew which is you know a quilting store, a fabric store. And we have the Amish buffet which is hugely popular, people come from all over to eat at the Yoder's kitchen, which is the Amish buffet restaurant. But, as far as you know, knowing people in town I think that a lot of that comes when you're a little older. In, the school system, most of the Amish children do, like public school with the English children. Either you're English or you're Amish. And they do that through the sixth grade in the classes and the same system, but then from seventh and eighth grade Amish students move into self contained because of a lot of them stop formal education at age 13. So, then your only seeing the Amish for lunch and P.E. I think. Yeah, I'm, I'm pretty sure that that's, that's right and so the curriculum then are very very different because you know Amish students are learning more life skill stuff that normally comes at a high school home economics, financial planning class. So I really only had, like a year and a half to really to get to know Amish students in my class, or in my grade level. But, the other kids in town obviously knew them since they were children. But then when Rumspringa comes, around age 16, a lot of Amish students reintegrate in that time. And so you'll see them around

town, you'll see them doing stuff and then a lot of the adults that I know are on very good terms with Amish people or people who used to be Amish. One of my best friend's older sister is dating a guy who used to be Amish, it's very common. And you know my best friend her father grew up Amish and then left. And so she has all these aunts and uncles that are Amish or used to be Amish, you know, she had the dress and the bonnet growing up she used to go to the church, so you learn a lot about the lifestyle but the chances, like opportunities to chat are quite limited.

JD: Yeah.

ZB: For most of your life, or most of your formative time anyway.

JD: Did you ever make jokes about Amish people calling everybody else English when you were yourself English?

ZB: I was not sharp enough for that at the time. Despite the fact that I should have. But I was quite focused on self-preservation.

JD: Yeah, of course.

ZB: You know, I think that at the time that I came most of the kids in the class were ten and eleven, and I think that's an age where people are least able to handle not having all of the attention. And as a person with a funny accent, I got so much unwanted attention the first six months to a year. I remember vividly that the grade school science teacher said Zoe, I could listen to you talk all day. And I could feel the eye rolls from everybody else in the class because all of the teachers had said it. And no one else wanted to hear me talk ever again. You know.

JD: Right.

ZB: So, I should have picked up on that as I, as I joke but I didn't.

JD: Well, so by the time you were in high school, it sounds like you'd lost your accent and you'd integrated more thoroughly into the community began to think of that as, as your home. Am I right that in high school, your history teacher was also a local pastor.

ZB: Oh, yes. Mr. Davis. He is a powerhouse of a man. At the time that I was in high school, he was the high school history teacher, he ran the drama club, he coached the girls track team, he did, he, he live recorded and commentated on the Arthur school sports and he was a pastor at the Southern Baptist church. So hugely involved in, in the community and in the lives of students.

JD: Well I'm curious how much of the religious attitudes in the community, like kind of carried into the culture of the school and if you felt any conflict there given your Orthodox and Anglican background.

ZB: Religion in America is something that continually perplexes me. So Arthur, the last time I had to know, it had eleven churches in like one square mile. The youth group that's run by the Methodist church on Wednesday evenings was hugely popular, tons and tons of kids went. It was actually one of the first social activities I was invited to when we moved here and I didn't know what it was. And I went home and I was like, hey dad, what's youth group? And I'd gone to Sunday school as a kid in England and I did like the equivalent activities we just weren't calling it youth group. But it was weird to me because in England it's, or in the Northeast of England, it's almost more embarrassing to say that you are religious than to say that you're not. And in the same breath, at that time in England, people were praying in schools. Every single morning in primary school. WEe would have an assembly and every single morning the headmaster would tell a Bible story although we didn't necessarily know they were the Bible stories, sometimes they were like, changed to just be about morals. And then we would say the Lord's Prayer. Every single day for eight years or something we would do that in school. And then here, everybody is hugely religious, you know, everybody goes to church, lots of people you know wear shirts about Jesus. For a while there was a group at the school where they would pray around the flagpole, but they don't pray in school. And so that was really strange to me as a shift. In junior high, I did get a lot of like negative attention because my understanding of religious was different than a lot of the kids in school. And my ideas about Christianity were different. But, I think that that's not necessarily uncommon for kids at that age.

JD: Did you feel that that was something you had to go along with or was that something you could respectfully maintain your difference?

ZB: I maintained my difference, I don't know that it was necessarily respectful. I was super vocal in high school and in junior high about my opinions on basically everything. And you know there were a few other kids that would really, we would really get into it pretty regularly. And I was at a point where I really couldn't see the, the affinity for the Republican party and Christianity based on social policies right. I, I remember very clearly thinking in history, like why do you guys hate poor people? YOu know, in high school. And so, I think that it maybe was not super respectful and with the little bit of wisdom I have now I think I would about it in a different way. I think I maybe contributed to a target on my back in that respect. But.

JD: But you, you sort of embraced your difference in that way. And it seems like you also embrace your difference by becoming an exchange student so you were a Rotary foreign exchange student to Arequipa, Peru during your junior year and I'm curious what that transition was like from rural Illinois to a Spanish speaking city of about a million?

ZB: It was crazy. Basically I had, I had been to Peru the summer before through the Girl Scouts, my, both my parents were Girl Scout leaders and we were very very active and so one of the girls I met there was like oh I'm going to study abroad in Spain this year. And I came home and I

was like mom that sounds really cool! How do I, how do I do that? And I went to the school and asked for the papers and by the time school got me the paperwork, I had forgotten that I had even asked. It was like way too late to apply but people pulled some strings and I got placed in Peru again and when I finally got there I could not believe how different it was and how I had changed living in America that last few years. In a way that was really clear to me. Now that I was living in a city again with things like public transportation. You know in, in England we used to ride buses. In Arthur there are no buses. And then in Peru when I was faced with the opportunity to ride a bus again I was like, oh actually I'm scared of this. You know, I don't know what I'm doing with this bus. But Peru was so, so great for me. I lived with two families while I was there. The first family I had a little brother and the second family I had a little sister. Nobody in either family spoke English so that was rough. I took cold showers for like three months before I realized that they had been trying to tell me to turn on the water heater before I got in the shower.

JD: How much Spanish did you study by then? Was that, you'd, you'd describe yourself now as fluent, so I don't know if that was what came out of this, this year in Peru or did you bring in some language skills?

ZB: So I'd taken Spanish for three years beforehand and you know as part of application process you have to get a note from your teacher saying, you know, indicating your level and I think she said I was competent or something but on the first night when I was sitting there with my host family, the only word I could think of was carrot. You know, I could read words and I knew vocabulary but I couldn't, was not confident speaking, so I learned a bunch of Spanish while I was there. The problem now is that I speak Peruvian Spanish, which is not necessarily the same as you know, Spanish Mexicans speak or Spanish that Mexican Americans speak and it's definitely not the same as Spanish spoken in Spain so there is some differences there but I learned Spanish in Peru for the most part. I went to a private school, I met a bunch of like rich kids basically there, in Artica there are four or five good schools, good private schools and I went to one of those so all of the kids knew each other in other schools, it was very very fun. Being a young person in Peru is very different than being a young person in America because they have like clubs and stuff that teenagers go to and teenagers are welcome in. So that was completely different, you know every weekend we were going to like party, whereas every weekend in Arthur we'd like drive our car nine miles one way and then turn around and drive eighteen miles the other way and then nine miles to town and we'd be done. I, yeah went to school, went to prom, I spent New Years on a beach, and it was super fun, spent February on a beach because it's the Southern Hemisphere so their summers and winters are different from ours. And when I came I just had this whole new appreciation for how big the world is, who I am, how I was raised, how, where I live, you know I remember I'd come back from Peru, I'd been back for maybe three days and I was walking home from my friends house and I didn't have to stop to look to cross the road because obviously there was not going to be a car there. Which is so different than in Peru where like, even if you looked across the road you still might get hit by a car. You know, I'd written a newspaper column while I was gone and people had read it and people asked me about my trip and all of this you know interesting stuff that I'd done and it was

nice to be part of a community where even as just one voice that's like a, it matters in a way that, in a city of like a million people you get drowned out right?

JD: Well how did the class structure in Peru compare to what you knew from rural Illinois? Because it sounds like you were in a fairly privileged kind of situation there in Peru?

ZB: I was. Yeah my first family the dad was a cop and the wife was a OB and then my second family, the dad was like a manager at an Alpaca wool processing factory and the mom didn't even work right, so. We had, you know we lived in a gated community and it was very comfortable. Yeah my second family had a self, or not my second family, I'm sorry. One of my friend's families had a self parking Audi from 2013 in 2012. And that's just so different than, you know, the average middle class American's life. Yeah so school.

JD: How did-- go ahead.

ZB: Sorry school was very different. I started school at like 6 am everyday. Which almost killed me. I could not get out of bed to save my life. A little bus would come and pick us up, me and my little brother, it wasn't really a bus though, it was like a van. And it would pick up all the kids and the, the district of the city and then it would take us to the school. And then school went until 5 o'clock in the evening but there wasn't any homework and we would eat the main meal of the day would be eaten at school so in Peru lunch is the big meal. And dinner is like you know maybe a sandwich and a cup of tea before bed. And so, I, because I was spending so much time with the kids at school, I got to become really good friends with them. But, the physical school day was grueling. The schedule there, though, was a lot more like in England where it was blocked, so everyday we would do lit, math, and reading, or lit, math, and English sorry, every single day but then the afternoons were always different. And so one day we would be doing computers, one day we would be doing, you know, design tec, another day we would be doing P.E. or science. What was really interesting about school in Peru, that really didn't dawn on me until I was in South Africa in 2018 was that despite the fact that this was a fee-paying school, you know, well respected, lots of money, they didn't have any science equipment. And so, they were learning chemistry without ever doing chemistry experiments. You know, they didn't have Smart boards in the classroom, it was all dry erase boards. And then I was in South Africa in 2018 and we were in Pretoria and we were you know, visiting a school and one of the, the people there said wow I can't imagine how hard it must be to teach chemistry without any, you know, chemistry equipment, without flasks and Bunsen burners and all of a sudden it dawned on me that everyone I knew in Peru learned science without any, ever doing a science experiment and that really hadn't sunk in for me at all until I was hearing it again years later. And then all of these, you know, other differences about school really became clear. You know about the way the classrooms were and about the resources available despite the fact that you know the students going to these schools had way more family money than I've ever had here, but we had you know a lab in Arthur high school where we could do experiments. We set things on fire and you know, mixed solutions and stuff.

JD: Well, I'm, I'm curious. It sounds like this was really a transformative year for you if you emerged from it bilingual or close to that. How did this year abroad revive maybe your sense of yourself as an immigrant?

ZB: Yeah. So I think that it was definitely, it definitely cleared a space for me to fully fall into being an American immigrant just because I came back so appreciative, or with a new, not so appreciative because Peru is great and I don't want it to sound like I went there and was like oh this is terrible because that's not the case. I loved my time there, I love the people there. But I did come back with a new perspective, I'll take perspective on what it is to be here and what life is like and the reality of being raised in a community where people care about me and being raised in a community where you know I was terrible at track in high school. So, so, so profoundly at it, but everybody's mom still cheered for me when I was the one that was running. You know, things like that. And I think that it was maybe the final part of what I said earlier where I stopped viewing myself as an expat that was temporarily displaced and started viewing, you know I finally decided that this is who I am and this is where I belong.

JD: It's just, and well I was going to ask also when you were in Peru, how you were seen there as an American, I assume that you were, you were seen as an American and not as, as English.

ZB: Yeah. I mean mostly I was viewed as white.

JD: Yeah.

ZB: I was a gringa and then I was American. Some of the kids had really, you know, crazy ideas about what that meant. One person asked me like if we had a six car household they asked me how many houses we had, they asked like how much money the average American makes because they just, there was the assumption that we were all really rich, we all had tons of cars you know, huge houses which was just really interesting coming from a place of relative poverty right. You know, where I live it's not a super wealthy community, there's tons of kids on free or reduced lunches when you look at the demographics of the census you know because a pretty high poverty rate is you know the county has a pretty high poverty rate and then you know, you go to Peru and they're like oh you guys must be super rich. So that was really interesting and also in some countries with the way the Rotary program works, is that if you want your kid to go, you have to take one into your house. And that isn't the case in our district 6490 in Illinois but both of my host families had sons in America, one in Michigan and one in Ottawa, Illinois. And you know they'd talk to their parents and their parents would come downstairs and be like Pierre said that you can just open the fridge and eat whatever you want. And I was like, yeah that's pretty, pretty common. And then they were like and Pierre said that you know his friends will come over and open their fridge. And I was like oh yeah, that got my mom too you know when, when we first moved here my mom came down in the middle of the night once to see my brother's best friend's head in the fridge because he was like hungry. And my mom was like what is going on? But that's you know, what it is like to live here you know our house was always open for everybody and that was such a big difference in Peru and it was really kind of

hard explaining that to my Peruvian parents because they were like, well, why doesn't he eat at meal times? What do you mean he can just eat anytime during the day and why, why does he even have friends over during meal times and stuff like that. Because people I think in America do spend a lot more time socially than with family whereas in Peru it's very much the other way around.

JD: Well I'm going to fast forward a little bit through some of your, your college years we don't have time for the whole college experience but it seems like what you did in Peru was, was pretty closely connected with your interests you know in international studies as a major for instance, and so at Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington, where there other classes that you took or maybe other aspects of campus life that helped just build on that sense of yourself as a global citizen?

ZB: Absolutely, so I Peru was hugely formative for me academically. I don't know that I didn't know what I wanted to do before I went, but once I got there I couldn't remember ever wanting to do anything else right. Seriously, you know as a kid I wanted to be an archaeologist but I can't remember when in high school I thought I would go to college for. Because when I got back it was so obvious that I would do political science, international studies. And I got to learn so much about the the world at Illinois Wesleyan. I took a class called Third Women Speak, it was an English class, basically where we studied writing from women in the Middle East, obviously that title is problematic for some, a few reasons but that's what the class was called and that's what we learned about. And you know all of a sudden I was learning about Abu Ghraib and you know, the realities of the first and second Gulf War. I took intorudcitoin to international studies where I got to meet Anita Lobel, she is an author of a book called No Pretty Pictures and is also a Holocaust survivor, I got to have dinner with her. I got to intern in South Korea for two months, fully funded through the MIDasia Foundation. And I lived in Seoul and researched refugee flows from Hungnam to South Korea and that was a really interesting time for me because lots of times people think about North Korea as having defectors, it doesn't produce refugees it produces defectors, and you know talking to people about that and how they see the two Koreas or if they see themselves as one Korea and you know it was the first time I ever went to Asia and I, I had a blast. It was super super interesting, I learned a bunch of history, went to the Korean war museum, cried in the Korean war museum, I also got to go to South Africa with a South African professor for a month. It yeah, my time at Wesleyan hugely expanded my world view.

JD: So, let me connect some of these dots so going to Seoul during the summer of 2016 was after you'd already been there for, for a different class? Or?

ZB: No.

JD: Or you went there because of what you were studying?

ZB: Basically Wesleyan has a bunch money to send kids to get experience living and working in ASia and so you apply for it in the fall of your sophomore or junior year and then the summer of your sophomore or junior year you get to go fully funded for two months and you work an internship and you know experience what it's like to live there alot of kids go to like the Rice Institute in the Philippines some kids went to intern with Mezuno in Japan, the shoe manufacturer and I was just at the institute of east and west studies and to get college credit for this experience i had to write a paper and I had to research something so I researched refugees.

JD: And that was, that was what you did for your internship?

ZB: Yep.

JD: And so you were speaking about that a little bit earlier but what were some other things that came out of that research that brought up in your results?

ZB: Well I learned so much about the ways different countries view the idea of a refugee and you know it's interesting because when you think about refugees now typically I think people think about Syria and the refugee crisis. You know a refugee is a a brown woman with children. But when the idea of a refugee first came around, it was to describe professional men escaping communism in Russia. You know they were coming to Western Europe to flee, you, know, the terror of communism. And so it was really interesting to me how that conceptualization changed but most of what I was writing about in the research at that time was about you know the refugee policies for integration and how to put people from such a different system come to live here and integrate and do they integrate successfully? And what kind of resources are available for them. But, when I came back, from South Korea, I went to Oxford for a year to do a study abroad and then I came to Wesleyan for my senior year and had to do two research projects I did one on the rise of right wing Populism in Europe and then I did another about international standards for, like refugee policy, and how women friendly they are, and this interest was completely spurred by finding this history of the word refugee and what it used to mean and I did like comparative research between Canada, America, and the UK about how they conceptualize refugees, how they care for refugees, how they integrate refugees and what that means for women.

JD: And that summer of 2014 just sticking with South Korea for a bit, that was the summer of the Brexit vote?

ZB: Yeah.

JD: What was, what was it like to hear that news while living in South Korea?

ZB: That was crazy. I was there with another girl and because of the time difference, you know I woke up to the news that England had voted Brexit and the first thing was walk across the hall

and I was like Molly, does your phone say that they did vote for Brexit or they didn't because mine says they did but I think it must be like a joke? And she was like oh no, they totally did. And that was just so bizarre to me because you know I still keep in touch with people in England and for the most part the people that I went to school with and the people that I know were very much to vote remain as opposed to leave. And then I called my mom and we were both really upset about it. Just because, you know if, if England's not part of the European Union, are we really European and I think that it is important to the identity of a lot English people that they are European. And you know, I think it brought back a lot of the same kind of feelings of everybody moving to the euro except us. You know, growing up. And then I, I went to Oxford and I got to see my family again and I learned that my great aunt and uncle both voted to leave and when I asked them why they said that they wanted to like buy their vegetables in pounds instead of kilos or something and that's just such a non-reason. And so that was just really bizarre for me to, to hear, that they were like oh no this is a great idea, it's going to bring around independence and blah, blah, blah. And then

JD: Well how ironic that you know the Brexit vote came just before you went back as a visiting student to Oxford. So I was

ZB: Yeah.

JD: I was curious how that affected your transition to Oxford that fall? Other than conversations with your family, did it sort of complicate things with your studies or not so much?

ZB: Oh, no it didn't because the passports were still e-passports and I'm a British passport holder. So, it didn't make anything more difficult, but coming up if I go back I think it will make things more difficult before it's, you know, the European UNion passport is kind of a work around. You can travel to 16 countries in Europe and only get one passport stamp, you only have to wait in the line the one time. But no, it was more of a social difference, you know, it was, it was things people were talking about in conversations and then of course the, the Donald Trump election happened while I was there with very similar themes and so that was interesting and gave people I think a lot of fodder to talk about that year. And then

JD: Yeah, what a, what a year 2016, so what, how did you process the news of Trump's presidential election when, while, while living in, in England?

ZB: So I was, I was one of the people who was surprised at his election but also I knew a lot of people that were definitely going to vote for him, so also not very surprised. You know, I, because I come from rural America, rural small town America, I do know a lot of people that are, you know, card carrying conservatives. And they are Trump supporters and unapologetically so. And I have the privilege of knowing these people both as their political opinions but also who they are as individuals and so, it was a weird time because I, you know, if I had been able to vote I don't know it's the way that I would have voted but also people are like oh well, Donald

Trump supporters are this and this and this, and I was like, well I know some of them and that's necessarily the case and so that was a really difficult and uncomfortable time for me.

JD: Well it sounds like in that context, you were again being seen as the American even though you are English by birth. Was that

ZB: Oh, absolutely

JD: Was that strange to you?

ZB: Yeah. So there's a book called In the Name of Identity by a man called Allen Maloof and in it they say that the aspect of your identity that will be the most salient is the one that's under attack. And the first time I read it I didn't really get it until I went to England and all of a sudden I felt very American. Whereas here, I feel quite English in my day to day life. And you know everybody's like oh well, what's your opinion on this? And I was like, well my opinion is but, you know, I didn't get to vote and in a lot of ways people do see me as American. One of my, my, one of my first friends at college I actually didn't speak to for three and a half years of our time there because he said, well you're basically an American anyway. And I was like, I am not American in any of the ways that count right? You know, I don't have the passport, I don't have the, the memories or the imagined community, I've actually spent most of my life being told that I don't belong. And so, I you know, I don't have the same rights as Americans, so I was like really upset with this, this boy and I literally didn't talk to him again. Ever.

JD: Well say a little

ZB: And then

JD: Say a little bit more about how imagined communities connects with that struggle to belong as, as an immigrant.

ZB: So, I think that there it's, it's two fold. You have who the people that live here think about America and then you have how you think about America and reconciling the two. And obviously people's opinions can only be formed by their lived experiences and like things that they've read and things that they've exposed to, but you know, the average American school day, pretty patriotic. You say the Pledge of Allegiance and you have the flag in the classroom and we do veteran's day at school and the fourth of July is huge, you know Old Navy has those shirts, like the, the seminal American experience I think is being a child with a shirt from Old Navy with an American flag on it. And there's you know, all of this kind of folklore about what America is and what it means to be an American and a lot of the patriotic songs tell a story here, you know, the I'm proud to be AMERICAN song, the first time I heard that it was at a veteran's day assembly, with you know, a boy and girl who were older than me in school singing the, the parts at the beginning about giving up your children and your wife and you know it's all very evocative and it paints a picture of who America is and you know, the mystique of the melting pot and

people really really believe it. And then the contrast to that is my experience coming here where you know no one spoke to my mother in a grocery store you know, none of the other parents spoke to my mother in public for five years and there weren't really a lot of other opportunities to see the immigrant impact you know, what it means to be a contemporary immigrant in the melting pot and you know it was place that really tried to I think homogenize me into the group and then kind of balked at the fact that they couldn't so. It was really difficult to bring both of those like imagined ideas together and then, and then the other side of that is people thinking they know what England is. And you know, you are simultaneously not just representing yourself, you're all of a sudden in charge of representing an entire country and that's crazy, that's impossible so.

JD: And little did they know which part you from and how that was perceived back home?

ZB: Oh absolutely. One time and we were in, we were in high school at this point so it's really bad but one girl was like so are you from like Maine? And I was like what? And she's like you're from like New England. And so there's a lot of you know misunderstanding that comes with that and I mean I don't know, when I was fifteen my global geography not great so I don't know that I necessarily blame that girl for thinking that but you know there was a lot to try and combat and like I said you know in sixth grade those kids thought I was Cruella DeVill and literally skinned a Dalmation.

JD: Yeah. Well let's go back to Oxford for a bit. So you returned to Oxford just two years ago to complete a masters in Latin American studies and so I'm curious how you experienced Oxford differently as a graduate student and if you brought some of these same dissonances to that, that period.

ZB: I did. Yeah, so I, I did the undergrad year and I really really loved it and I was like, okay well I'm coming back here. I didn't even apply anywhere else for masters, you know, for for graduate school. It was like I'm going to Oxford or I'm going to get a new plan and the undergraduate experience there is very very insular. You live on in basically Oxford University is a bunch of little castles in in a town and so all of the first year students live in the castle type building, I mean the newer ones aren't castles, they're just big buildings but the older ones look like castles. And so it was like a dorm experience but everybody has their own room with a sink in it and everything so you can really spend your entire day not speaking to anybody and the expectation is kind of that you will. You know I had a girl across the hall and I was like hey floorie let's do homework together and she goes Zoe you're studying politics and I'm studying German, how could we do homework together. Because there was no expectation that you would do work in shared spaces. And undergraduate degree there is really a grind, you do two classes a, per term for three terms a year for three years and every week you're expected to produce a two thousand five hundred word essay for each class based on a reading list of like 30 books. You know my mom printed one of the reading lists for one of the classes for me before I went and it was like 56 pages long. And you go to the library, you get the books, you read the books, you condense information into an essay, turn it in and then you talk about the

essay and then you do it all over again with exams at the end of the year. The master's degree was different in that you are also expected to write a dissertation at the same time and that it's only one year long. So you take two classes at a time, you write the essays for the tutorials but you're doing the dissertation and you're going to you know faculty colloquia every week or the Latin American seminar every week and so you get more contact hours with your peers than you do in like the regular Oxford undergraduate experience but even then, you know, I was maybe with other kids in my class six hours a week total.

JD: So it sounds like in, in isolation a lot of those cultural differences just don't matter so much, you're, you're studying at Oxford but you're not in constant contact with people rubbing up against difference, having to you know, adjust yourself or decide not to in those contexts you're, you're mostly on your own?

ZB: In the classroom absolutely. But Oxford is you know, it's the city and so I was at St. Anthony's college which is all the way up the Woodstock road, it's super far away from you know the town center but if you want to go to a gym you have to go to the town center or if you want to go to eat, you have to go to the town center. So also everyday me and my best friend at graduate school was a international education student named Megan and we would walk, we would probably walked I don't know, 4 miles a day everyday for nine months because we wanted to go into the town because that's where the people were and there it was really funny because she would get made fun of by the Barista at Starbucks and this is something that had never even occurred to me, now I got made fun of for the word puma all the time but I never got made fun of for the word Hibiscus. And I guess Americans say Hi-biscus which I didn't know until I went to Starbucks with her and she asked for a Hi-biscus tea and the guy would not give her one until she said Hibiscus. And I was like oh weird like it's happening the other way around.

JD: Yeah. Pretty low, pretty low stakes conflict though.

ZB: Yeah. Oh yeah there was never anything super aggressive but Europeans kind of think Americans are dumb you know when I travel in other parts of Europe I speak with an English accent so people don't think I'm an American because it makes you a target for a lot of things.

JD: Like what?

ZB: Like, getting pickpocketed getting like hit up for money, and also people just think you're dumb like the stereotype of Americans in Europe is that you're loud and you're obnoxious and you're kind of dumb and I'm not sure where that comes from and why that is the way people think about it but it, it absolutely is. And then, the flip side of that is that in Spain, Spanish people think English are loud and obnoxious and rude and dumb, so I think everywhere probably has their own, their own perception but Europe is not super friendly for Americans especially France. And so you know when I'm traveling to other places I do, I am cognizant of that and I think that being an American student abroad that's your responsibility you know part of what you're doing is trying to change that narrative and you do get warned right, like the Illinois Wesleyan study

abroad prep says you might encounter really anti-American attitudes. How are you gonna handle that? And I think that, you know, people do but probably more so from people passing on the street than anybody that they encounter normally in their day to day lives.

JD: Well we might shift gears back to the, back to the Midwest and and your work now with the immigrant project. Before we talk about your work now, I'm curious, how has, how has the Midwest shaped you so you think and you know, you're, you're preparing for law school now and what you do you'll carry from the Midwest with you if you settle somewhere else?

ZB: A lot. I think that you know, I, as much as I'm English the Midwest made me. I learned about American government for the first time here, which is a huge interest of mine. I learned about the reconciliation between science and religion here. I learned about how to get things done with people that maybe don't want to agree with you here. And I learned to value community and reliability of having good neighbors and you know the, the joke about the Midwest is that they always say hi to everybody. And they totally do! No where else in the world are people so friendly to people on the street. And I think that's just really nice! And so in a lot of ways I am very Midwestern and I do say ope, you know when I hit someone I'm like ope! Ope.

JD: Well you've really learned to pass then.

ZB: Yeah I'm absolutely integrated. I have a John Deere ball cap I have a family friend a few years ago they invited me to shuck corn with them. You know I have done the full, full range of the Midwest experience. I have lived it. a lot of it

JD: Well I'm sure

ZB: I have internalized so.

JD: Yeah. Well I'm sure some of that's useful also in the kind of work you do which is you know building bridges between immigrant families and communities and also the legal system or, or other resources so can you tell us a little bit about your work now, you're an AmeriCorps Vista with the immigration project which is based in Carbondale Illinois so what do you do there and how did you find the immigration project?

ZB: The immigration project has two offices, one in Champaign Illinois and one Bloomington and it is a nonprofit legal service for low income immigrants in down state Illinois. So the state of Illinois has interstate 80 that basically runs across the top and we serve everyone under that so its 86 counties with over a hundred thousand immigrants living there and we work to ensure access to justice for you know immigrants in need basically. And what that looks like in real life is we have lawyers and department of justice representatives who travel around the state to different communities to provide citizenship workshops, and legal clinics to immigrants who have you know immigration, family immigration issues so we do regular naturalization which is what they've helped me with we do adjustment of status we do work permits, we process DACA,

some deportation proceedings and we do a significant amount of defense for survivors of trauma. There are a few different paths for immigration in the United States and you know the asylum system is one of them, we work with people trying to navigate that and we work with people who have been victims of crime and certain abuses at the hands of Americans while living here. Which is also a you know a, a big problem in a lot of cases.

JD: Well can I just ask, I know that so I initially reached out to the immigration project you know for our, our season on immigration and had in mind speaking to someone who was currently using your services at the immigration project, and I know that for a lot of people in that transition are in this this vulnerable state, you know speaking publicly is dangerous and so that's partly why we're, why we're talking. But are there stories that you can tell without putting someone at risk about maybe a success story, either reuniting families, or or helping someone who suffered crimes by Americans?

ZB: So I don't have a U-VISA story which what you apply for if you've suffered at the hands of Americans that's specific, but I do I can give you some like pretty good examples. One, in one case a woman called our office and she was an immigrant and her husband had basically been beating her and abusing and she you know felt like there weren't any options in a lot of these situations people are told if you go to the cops you'll get deported if you go to the cops ICE will come for you. So they feel like there's no way out. And so we have taken on cases like that before sometimes to qualify for a U-Visa if you get, the, the qualification for it is basically that you have to be able to help, help the police or help an investigative body. So help in the investigation of the case somehow so essentially people that have been abused and then are willing to help testify or give identifying information or something like that are good candidates for it so in those cases it's a little less dangerous but not completely free of risk. The, some of the most dangerous cases are issues of like undocumented immigrants looking for change of status or something like that. Or asylum seekers, you know we, one of the the things that is being talked about right now at the national level for policy is what are the grounds for asylum and some of the discussion is circling around whether or not the threat of death if you go back should count. And so a lot of a lot of people are at risk if they go back you know there was a report issued about El Salvador a few months ago and people, you know the report was saying that of the El Salvadoran population that was sent back, that was deported, something like 138 of them have been murdered. And having come from America does put a target on your back in a lot of cases. Independently of anything else you might have done. And so, that's really difficult to navigate and

JD: So seeking asylum and not getting it would actually just intensify the danger because of the association with America?

ZB: Absolutely. And and in some cases it really is a serious risk and you know the policy around that right now is under consideration. Similarly some of the most dangerous cases that we do are you know victims of domestic abuse. We, which we have to handle very carefully, you know we always ask is this a safe phone number to call you from? Because if people know you're

trying to get help, if your abuser finds out you're trying to get help, that's really difficult. And can cause problems and can be directly threatening. One of the things we write if that you know we are changing lives, but in a lot of cases, we're also saving lives because we are getting people out of some really terrible situations. One of the cases that we've had involved the defense of a two year old little girl from Guatemala who was brought here basically to escape incestuous sexual abuse in a community that would not protect her. And that's something that we're you know that we've, we've taken on that case and it's incredibly difficult to know what to do and how to handle that kind of case and it is something that can be difficult especially if people talk about their story publicly because then you know everything is traceable. If it's on the internet, it's there. So it can be difficult to get people to share their testimonies but also we do such happy work in a lot of instances. Just a few months ago we received a thank you card, one of our DOJ representatives got a thank you card from a client who thanks to the positive result of his case was able to return to see his family for the first time in 20 years. And we host a Valentine's day clinic every Valentine's day to help people that are you know that just need a consultation or that need representation for their Marriage Visas. And you know that's a really happy exciting event. You know to celebrate love. A few years ago we helped a military veteran get his citizenship and at his oath ceremony he received a medal of honor for his service as a colonel. And you know it's just really happy, it's really positive and it is such a great way to see the positive contribution of the American immigrant in Illinois so

JD: Those, those stories keep everyone going at the Immigration Project?

ZB: Absolutely. We are I think my the team is very mission driven. Everyone's really passionate about the work that we do and providing the best service for the clients. Our executive director got immigration law because when she was navigating the immigration process, with her now husband she was appalled at the quality of the immigration lawyer. And in a place like Illinois it's very difficult to get any kind of legal representation honestly. I was reading an article a few days ago about the dearth of rural lawyers in the Midwest and then when you want something specific like immigration law, it's super hard and restrictive to find adequate representation. A Lot of people if we didn't exist would have to go to Chicago or Saint Louis and in cases of disability or domestic violence that's almost impossible. And for a lot of people that are working class, it's also just not super feasible for them. To make that kind of travel as often as is necessary so we are filling a serious gap in service provision. You know there are 100,000 immigrants that live here. I never even met one until I was in college but that doesn't mean they're not here. And they're also great, a lot of immigrants are greatly in need. Which I think has been highlighted during the pandemic.

JD: Well I going to ask how you would describe the impact of covid 19 on immigration families in Illinois and maybe how that's complicated your work with the project.

ZB: So we did a complete pivot. We had to close our in person office, we stopped doing in person clinics which is such a huge deviation from our rural regional service approach. And everything went remote so we have our legal staff in their home offices trying to do all these

consultations by telecommunication and we normally utilize telecommunication just not to this extent. So that was a huge change. But also we started a covid 19 response and we partnered with some other organizations like the United Way of McLean county to get this going but we have done food distribution with local restaurants to immigrant families in need and we have received funds from grant awards to do direct cash assistance and basically what we saw with the first round of stimulus checks is that if you don't pay taxes with a social security number, you didn't get one. And a lot of immigrants and foreign nationals pay their taxes with an individualized identification number and so that entire swath of the you know, economic contributors didn't get any economic support despite the fact that a lot of immigrants with tens are working the front lines, you know. A lot of the people are working two you know feed you and cloth you and help in the hospitals.

JD: How many people would you estimate are, are doing that in Illinois.

ZB: In Illinois it's something like 100,000 immigrants work in the medical industry and I think 230,000 work in other essential industries so you know they're really doing a lot of work. One in seven people in Illinois is an immigrant which I, it blew my mind when I learned that. And it's such a valuable part of the economy and you hear about you know the immigrant impact on the economy but you hear about it in terms of California. You know, these are our farmer workers. But also immigrants are custodians and working in service industries, working in malls, working in hospitals, being in schools, and people don't feel see that I think so often.

JD: What are some other things about the immigration project that you would just like people to know?

ZB: Well this is our 25th anniversary. We've been providing you know these legal services for 25 years this year which is a huge, a huge cause for celebration but also there's still so much work to do. And we are available for consultations if anyone in Illinois is interested in receiving immigration family based legal aid. We also can provide consultation and referral a lot of times we'll get calls from Indiana and they're like hello please help. And we'll be like okay this is the person in Indiana that you can call. But also I think that you know it would be great if people could just reflect on the immigrants they think they know. And you know reconceptualize what they think it means to be an American and what how how immigration can contribute and especially with the election coming up you know think about what this country looks like and what the contributions are, I think that would be really great.

JD: Well if someone wanted to contact you to use your services, how would they do that? Do you have a phone number, website?

ZB: We do. Our phone is immigration project, sorry, our website is immigrationproject.org. We also have a Facebook where we post live weekly immigration lessons that cover a whole range of different topics with immigration experts and volunteers that can you know provide some valuable information for people that need you know need to know about how the stimulus check

works and need to know how covid impacts immigrants. Or need to know about how to get you know their tax records. And our phone number 309-829-8703 an individual could call and leave their information with that number and one of our intake specialists would get back to them also you can send an email to info@immigrationproject.org

JD: And you have, you have voice instructions in both English and Spanish, is that right?

ZB: Yes we do. We, our entire staff is multilingual in Spanish and we you know hire translators and interpreters as necessary for things like French, XXX, XXX.

JD: Great. Well I understand that you're now studying for the LSAT and I'm curious what you hope to do with a law degree eventually

ZB: So actually I'm interested in immigration law. I am studying for the LSAT, I'm going to take it here soon. I'm hoping to start law school in the Fall of 2021. I've always been kind of interested in the legal profession, it was something that's always been in the back of my mind but since starting at the Immigration Project and getting to work so closely with the Iwaters and since seeing how much need there is I am very motivated to you know find a way to do some good so I am hoping to go to law school that offers an immigration clinic for pre-graduation practical training and then you know maybe join the immigration project or a similar organization to you know help those in need and contribute to America's rich immigration history.

JD: Well as I'm listening to your story it seems like so many of these moves that you've made in your life to Arthur Illinois, to Peru, now to the job that you have currently, these are things that seem to have really crystalized your future. Now Peru defined your college major and then your work now seems to be defining your career path.

ZB: Yeah I think so. I think it's an accurate assessment. I don't know that, I mean before this I was interested you know non-profit work and international aid. So I was always you know had a plan to do something that was quite civic minded but yeah I've just been really inspired by the you know the attorneys and advocates that I work with and you know we see so many people so many deserving people in such difficult situations that I'm really excited about the opportunity to help and also you know on the other hand we just see people that are you know they've lived here for the seven years and they're ready to make the step because they want to become full fledged members of the American community and I think that's really great. you know, that's that's where I'm at in my immigration journey I'm currently in the process of becoming an American imm-, an American citizen and you know it's something that I'm really, really looking forward to.

JD: Well maybe we can end on that. So 15 years after you came to Arthur Illinois, you're working with the immigration project and your own citizenship. Tell us about that.

ZB: Yeah so actually I am being like represented in my citizenship by the Immigration Project, They are you know they helped me fill out my paperwork they turned it in if I need help in my citizenship interview, you know if I need defense at that, they will accompany me and we submitted my paperwork in November so hopefully here soon I will get a call from USCIS to begin you know studying for the citizenship test. Then I will go to Chicago, probably the Chicago office. I'll sit the test, and I'll sit my interview and then hopefully after that I will be you know getting an oath ceremony. And it's just a really exciting time you know even, even as a teenager that was of two minds you know I went to Illinois Girls state I've always been really interested in politics, I you know want to be a part of it and I've always kind of wanted to be a part of it and so I;m really really excited about you know belonging.

JD: Yeah. Well all the best in that journey and thanks so much for, for talking to me today.

ZB: You're welcome! Thank you for having me!

JD: I'm going to, just let the room tone record here for a bit if we can so it looks like the counter is almost at when it gets to two minutes, or two hours six minutes we'll just let it go to two hours seven minutes and if we can make as little noise as possible, that would help our engineer.