

Justin Bullock:

Hi, this is your host of Bush School Uncorked, Justin Bullock. As we've mentioned before, we're doing a series of episodes on migration and asylum seeking in the US, particularly at the Texas-Mexico border.

Justin Bullock:

As you've probably heard by now, Faith and I have already done a little bit of debriefing about what some of my experiences were, and how this kind of fits in the big picture of policy and what policy actors are doing right now, both at the federal and state level.

Justin Bullock:

What also nonprofits are doing on the ground to help, and what that looks like and how we experienced that. We're lucky enough tonight to have with us the team of folks we went with, as we may have mentioned. Mary Lu Hare is a former Bush School student, and had been down to Matamoros before.

Justin Bullock:

That's how we learned about this opportunity to kind of go down to the border and see what was going on with asylum seekers. Her father is with us, and friend is with us. I'm going to let them introduce themselves in just a moment, to give their full background on them. We had a lot of fun with this group, in the ways in which you can have fun in these environments.

Justin Bullock:

It was nice to bond with you all. It made the whole experience kind of easier to bear, being able to do it with a group of people that you had gotten to know. To kind of hear your stories and hear how you all come to this issue, and how you ended up kind of in Matamoros and in Brownsville serving refugees.

Justin Bullock:

I want to thank you all for taking the time and hanging out with Faith and I and debriefing. I know there will be parts of this that will not be easy for everyone, so thank you so much. With that, what I'd told the team I'll do, is give them each a moment to introduce themselves so you know who you're hearing from. Again, I'm Justin Bullock, next to me.

Faith:

Hi everybody, my name is Faith. I'm Dr. Bullock's graduate assistant, and also that makes me his favorite student by default.

Justin Bullock:

My goodness.

Faith:

Yeah, that's me.

Justin Bullock:

You are related to the podcast...?

Faith:

I am the podcast producer.

Justin Bullock:

She takes all of our audio and our conversations, and makes sure they're put out to you all. Scott, maybe you could go next from the top left of my screen there. Maybe tell us a little bit about you and how you ended up on this trip with us.

Scott Spreier:

Yeah, I am Scott Spreier. I am first and foremost, I guess Mary Lu's dad. She had talked a lot about this trip. I'm a former journalist, and semi-retired consultant and writer.

Scott Spreier:

The other reason that I got involved, because I'm on the missions committee at our church, which in a way helped sponsor this. I had been interested in it from both perspectives and personally, but Mary Lu talked about it and I decided I should come and see it.

Justin Bullock:

Our trip together was your first trip, as in-?

Scott Spreier:

My first trip, exactly.

Justin Bullock:

All right, thanks Scott. Angela?

Angela Sayre:

I'm Angela Sayre. I'm on the same committee as Scott at our church, and that's how I came to this specific trip. More of a loaded question as why I joined this trip, is that I, in the past, went to one of the first family detention centers in El Paso, when they were starting to separate children from their families.

Angela Sayre:

It's always been something that's been very close to my heart, been very close to what I feel like has been my extended familial experience, which we can get into later. That's pretty much the gist.

Angela Sayre:

I'm also an opinionated type of protester. I wanted to kind of see facts for myself and be on the ground, and know where I could actually help and fit into the situation. That's kind of where I've started to really get my footing.

Justin Bullock:

Thanks for sharing all that. That was also part of our motivation, just to see it on the ground and see what it actually looks like. I think it's easy for it all to get lost in the headlines and words, to kind of quit having their human meaning. Seeing it on the ground is kind of helpful to put it into perspective I think.

Angela Sayre:

Truly.

Justin Bullock:

Mary Lu.

Mary Lu:

Howdy. I am a Bush School alum, whoop.

Justin Bullock:

Whoop.

Mary Lu:

Had Professor Bullock for Quantitative Analysis. Actually the first time I went down to the border was about 15-ish months ago with my church. Angela and my father, Scott and I all go to Wilshire in Dallas. Went down originally just to see what was happening.

Mary Lu:

The space kind of became home really quickly for me. It's become a place I have come back to multiple, multiple times. I'm really passionate about this immigration/refugee/asylum issue, especially in my state and in my community, and how that impacts who we are as a country and who we are as a state, and how we show love and respect to these other humans.

Mary Lu:

I have not been silent about my passion for this. I would classify it as my rage, about the way we've been treating people overall. Have gotten to have some really awesome conversations with all the individuals that went on this trip, in really different ways.

Mary Lu:

Was really that this group of people kind of came together to experience it in another way, and with people we haven't experienced it with before, so yeah.

Justin Bullock:

How many total trips have you made in the last 15 months?

Mary Lu:

This was my fifth trip.

Justin Bullock:

One thing... if it's okay with everyone, I noticed a theme across the three of you's responses. What ties you is your church and your Christian faith. Before we move on from that, I'm curious if someone would be happy to explain, or be willing to explain the connection there in your minds.

Justin Bullock:

As to why your faith... or how your faith has informed your desire to just speak out about these things, to go serve refugees. I was wondering... someone just tell me a little bit more about the connection between asylum seekers, and refugees and your Christian faith.

Mary Lu:

Well, I'll start, but I'm going to throw it to Scott and Angela here in a second. Jesus was a refugee and was seeking asylum most of His life. I think that would be the first way it ties into our faith. Angela and Scott, I'll throw it back to you.

Scott Spreier:

Go ahead, Angela.

Angela Sayre:

I mean, well, that's hard to beat, to say that Jesus was a refugee, which is true. I will say, speaking with many different Christians that are my best friends across different demographics and church denominations, sometimes it feels like being in a church is like being in a high castle.

Angela Sayre:

To where we're supposed to strive to be this level of... to this level of righteousness. That's a personal journey. As long as it's a safe journey, then we're living our Christian life.

Angela Sayre:

That is very far removed from our communities, and I feel like that's a reason why people have kind of left the church. I feel like being a Christian is being out in the world, and doing these things that are not easy, that are not comfortable and that are not full of judgment.

Angela Sayre:

Our purpose is to be in these places where people are in need. To show them that we can help each other and we can grow, and that there is a lot of love to go around. Then there is abundance if we create it, right?

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, that's very helpful. Thank you. Scott.

Scott Spreier:

Let me say that I was asked this question Sunday, and I kind of classify myself as a born again agnostic, masquerading as a Baptist. I think Angela and Mary Lu said it very well. I did not go because of my religion.

Scott Spreier:

I went, because I believe that looking at what Christ did as a human, sets a very good example for how the rest of us should act and how we should do things. As I look back, that was part of it.

Scott Spreier:

I think it was equally a political reason for going. I did not only want to help these people, but I wanted to see for myself and take action in a political sense, to move the issue forward.

Mary Lu:

Justin, can I add one other thing? This is Mary Lu jumping in here.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah.

Mary Lu:

I think that statement that... well actually, I think both Scott and Angela said it, is that sometimes coming on these trips, I leave feeling less romanticized about my faith than I feel when I start the trip, if that makes sense. It feels harder to come home and be a Christian, and to try to embody that love and goodness, when you've seen the things we saw.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah.

Angela Sayre:

I agree with that.

Scott Spreier:

Yes, working with us, was a group of people from Lutheran Synod, I believe it was, in the South, a group of people. Again, Christians. As I talked to them, and watched them and watched our group, and I'm a old boomer and I was on this trip with four millennials.

Scott Spreier:

The two things I observed for one, the older folks including me and the folks from the Southern Synod, acted very much and talked very much like old hippies, who continue to maintain the values that they're going to save the world. I was very happy to see that I thought the millennials that were on the trip share those same values, so all was good.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, it was nice how it felt like we were bonding across generations. We've highlighted the Christian element, but across faiths as well. One of the nights when I served food, I was working next to a Muslim woman. Another night I was working with a Jewish man. It was people representing all kinds-

Scott Spreier:

Right.

Justin Bullock:

... of different faiths, that kind of come to this place to serve the refugees and help feed them. What I'd like to shift to, is talking a little bit about what we actually did to give people some reference point for kind of what's going on and what we're talking about.

Justin Bullock:

I think we've gotten some background on this, but kind of what the actual experience was like volunteering with World Central Kitchen and with Team Brownsville, and what that kind of looked like and what we kind of saw and experienced. Listeners would have already heard me talk about this, so I'm just going to add a little bit at the end.

Justin Bullock:

Mary Lu, if it's okay, since you are the most experienced, I think maybe it would be useful to kind of tap you to describe to the best you can, what it was like this time when you were down there. Take a few minutes and then the rest of us can add as well. Would that be okay to ask of you?

Mary Lu:

Yeah, absolutely.

Justin Bullock:

Okay, [crosstalk 00:13:23].

Mary Lu:

Yeah, so let me give some reference I think to the other times I've been down there. One of the things that's really hard about the MPP expectations, that's Migrant Protection Protocol or the Remain in Mexico Policy, is that it started and grew really fast in Matamoros.

Mary Lu:

The first time I was down there, we were talking to maybe 12 people waiting on the border. The second time, which was just a few months later, we were talking to about 600 people on the border. When I was down there in September, we fed about... I believe it was about 800 individuals who were seeking asylum, waiting in Matamoros.

Mary Lu:

What we were doing at that point, Team Brownsville was arranging... volunteers were arranging all of the food that was brought over. You volunteered for a couple of nights. You not only volunteered to serve food, but you volunteered to fund the food, to cook the food.

Mary Lu:

To figure out where the food was coming from, all of the details around the meal. I thought I was really good at cooking for about 20 people. Cooking for 800 is a whole nother ballgame.

Justin Bullock:

Oh, yeah.

Mary Lu:

It takes a skill level that just... you know. That's my previous experience, but this time was really wonderful. There is a group called World Central Kitchen, who has agreed to stay in Matamoros for the foreseeable future. To serve a meal every night to those waiting. They have it down to such a beautiful system.

Mary Lu:

They are sourcing produce and food locally, as best that they can. They're creating meals that are unique to the individuals waiting, that are really specific to their heritage and their communities and their home. Really taking into account that these are real people, eating real meals.

Mary Lu:

The value that a nutritious and warm, and friendly-served meal really brings to somebody is just overwhelming. The dignity that provides is huge. We got to be part of both the preparing the food with World Central Kitchen, and then walking across and serving it with Team Brownsville.

Justin Bullock:

Anyone else want to jump in? Just to kind of describe the general of what you were doing, and some of the things you experienced while you were actually on the ground working with World Central Kitchen, crossing over into Matamoros. Just some of the experiences of being there on the ground that anyone would like to point to?

Angela Sayre:

I think one of the biggest things that is surprising when you go into volunteer work like this, is how hardy the work is. You're physically exhausted at the end of the day because you're doing so many things, and that helps with dealing with the emotional toil or toll of it during that timeframe.

Angela Sayre:

I mean, the work is constant, so you have to prepare for that before you go kind of, if you've already done it. To prepare that, you're going to be going all day long. That there are lots of people that need you and that want you. It's important to give as much of yourself as possible, and especially if you're passionate about it.

Angela Sayre:

World Central Kitchen, having them there, because like Mary Lu, I've been there once before and it's a totally different ballgame. It's more organized, it's less chaotic. It's more humane. It feels like a loving experience, but it's still hard work. You still have to cook in Brownsville and carry it across the border.

Angela Sayre:

Then people in the camp come and help you take it down into the camp, and people in that camp are helping you serve. It's very much a communal activity. It feels like something that you would do. I keep going back to saying this, whenever I explain it to other people, it feels kind of like a land run.

Angela Sayre:

It feels like people are setting up their homes for the first time who... they don't know if they're staying or they're going. You're kind of participating in this kind of experience. It's a lot of work. It takes more of a physical toll I think, than people initially think. Does that make sense?

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, I mean, the prep time was... as you all know, we started around 1:00. The actual prep of the food is for 1,000 people. Even given the volunteers that are there, it's a lot of work. Then it's loading all the food up into the back of a couple of vehicles. Then pulling it across the international bridge in wagons.

Justin Bullock:

Then standing and serving food until about 8:30. It's seven, seven and a half hours on your feet. Man, the World Central Kitchen people, they do it seven days a week. They're just a couple of them-

Angela Sayre:

Right.

Justin Bullock:

They're working 12 hours a day, doing what we did for a couple of days for 8 hours or so.

Angela Sayre:

Yeah.

Justin Bullock:

Man, it just must be so exhausting.

Mary Lu:

What's really beautiful about what they're doing is that, we worked the 1:00 to 4:30 shifts each day. Then went immediately and served, but the group of women that Scott was talking about earlier, they worked the 10:00 AM to 12:30 shifts.

Mary Lu:

They were there in the morning making somewhere between 200 and 400 sandwiches, to make sure that kids had breakfast for the next morning. Not only were we preparing food for that night, but there was a group there in the morning, helping them get ready for other meals that might be needed.

Mary Lu:

I know the group that's down there this weekend, was helping them cut up handmade soap, to make sure that each asylum seeker had soap so they could actually shower this week, which is really beautiful. I mean, they're doing really cool stuff in such short amounts of time.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, Scott, do you have anything you want to add about kind of, on the ground work that you were doing while you were there?

Scott Spreier:

I just think to Angela's point, it is a lot of physical work. I found the hardest part, crossing the border, because we were hauling these wagons with... it felt like 75 pounds of food on each one of them.

Scott Spreier:

As you go across, of course, to go over into Mexico, you have to pull the wagons up a hill. Then go across the border, and then have to carry the wagons up this flight of stairs to get to the camp. As I was thinking about it, I thought, "It's the physical."

Scott Spreier:

There was something... given the situation, and we were treated very well by the border officials on both sides. Just the nature of what we were doing, there added for me very much an emotional labor in crossing the border, as the physical labor.

Justin Bullock:

The emotional labor is maybe something we could talk a little bit about. One of the things for people who might decide to volunteer, is to think through both the physical and the emotional labor as part of serving. I know we talked about this when we were there.

Justin Bullock:

I've said to Mary Lu a few different times, because she really prepped me about how it would impact you emotionally. Which made the process feel normal, in terms of what a response often is to being out of your normal environment and serving in that way.

Justin Bullock:

One of the things that Mary Lu told me is... so we started serving on Friday. We served Friday and Saturday with World Central Kitchen, and did the Escuelita on Sunday and then returned back to our homes.

Justin Bullock:

As you're serving on Friday, you really don't know what to expect. You'd notice fairly quickly that it's going to be physically taxing. You're getting to know people, just kind of getting to know your surroundings. You get the job done. We actually had about an hour break that day in between serving food and walking the food across.

Justin Bullock:

As you walk across the border with the food, cross over the street, go to the camp, as you're doing it all, you don't have a lot of feeling. At least I didn't, you're just trying to kind of figure out what's going on around you, and how can you help and how can you be useful? Kind of taking in all the new surroundings at once.

Justin Bullock:

Then you're in there in the tent, serving about 1,000 people coming through the food line that you're serving. Then it's kind of over. Then each time we went back, and we would help pack up, take stuff back across. The five of us would kind of have dinner.

Justin Bullock:

I noticed Mary Lu had said, "On Friday, you're just going to be tired. You're not going to be able to process, and that's okay." That's exactly how I felt Friday night, as we were all together. I was just exhausted and I didn't feel anything. I was kind of just numb.

Justin Bullock:

Then, as I said to you all, Mary Lu had said to me was, "On the next morning as you're starting your day and kind of reflecting on what happened, you had a night of sleep, that it'll kind of hit you, the emotional response to kind of the human suffering that you're seeing on the ground. That's exactly how it played out, the second day I was kind of emotionally taxed.

Justin Bullock:

I had a hard time talking about what we were doing, and that was kind of on top of the physical labor, so that by Sunday morning, I was just beat. I mean, I was sort of in a daze as we were doing the Escuelita, Sunday morning. I helped, but it was kind of come at you from all angles.

Justin Bullock:

Anyways, not to keep throwing it back to you, Mary Lu, but maybe you could talk about that process and describe it kind of in the way that you described to me. I don't think I did it justice.

Justin Bullock:

Just about how people that do go and serve, some of the emotional labor that you've observed over your trips. Then I'd like to hear from everyone else about how emotionally, it struck them as well.

Mary Lu:

Sure, so you did a great job explaining it. I do feel like the first night is just going in and seeing. You're absorbing, you're learning. For me, each time I go, even though I'm seeing faces I've seen for... some of them, I've been seeing them for a year now.

Mary Lu:

Every time I walk back into that space, it takes me a minute to remember that what we're doing is bringing human dignity into a space where they have really been denied it. When you're serving someone a meal that is smiling at you, or kids who are laughing about, "No, I don't want salad."

Mary Lu:

Sometimes it's hard to remember in that exact moment, where you are and the situation that you're in. It isn't until you have slept and have kind of dealt with that physical exhaustion that you experience, that you start to process the emotions. For me, this trip was really interesting, because I was seeing faces that I saw in September.

Mary Lu:

People were recognizing me and remembering me, and kids knew who I was. That's a really beautiful and really horrific thing in this situation. There's a sense of beauty and that it's a face they recognize, and they're so happy to see that you're back. They're still willing to talk to you and tell you more and to laugh with you.

Mary Lu:

It's horrific because I can't believe you've been sitting here for this long waiting for somebody to tell you that your fear is valid, and that your life is worthy of being protected. I really cycled through the emotions.

Mary Lu:

When we got there Friday night, when we first served... and we were serving in a tent with tables where people could sit down in a community, to talk to each other. They knew there was enough food.

Mary Lu:

Parents were death gripping their children's wrists, to make sure that they got something. I actually left Friday evening feeling relieved like, "There's something good happening here. There's something really good happening."

Justin Bullock:

Yeah.

Mary Lu:

Saturday morning I woke back up and was like... but we were in a refugee camp. We were in a space that people who have been in war zones, say is more horrific than war zones they've seen. Then you start thinking about all of the unique faces, and the stories and the smiles.

Mary Lu:

Each day for me, is another layer of wanting to absorb their pain, sit with them in that hurt. Also, remind them that they're loved and valuable. That I really want them to be awarded the safety and the security that I have, because I know they're worth it.

Mary Lu:

I have told everybody who went with us... and I was very open about this, that one of the deals I made with some of my friends was, I would keep going to the border as long as I started seeing a grief therapist.

Mary Lu:

To work through some of the grief that I experience and bring home with me, and some of the stories that I carry with me from these people. There's beauty in loving other humans, and there's pain and loving other humans and that's not diminished in this space in any way. It might be exacerbated on both ends, so--

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, that's all really helpful, thanks. Rest of the team, would you like to share kind of some of your own emotional responses, how you processed it. Any of the kind of emotional labor pieces that you would like to share, I think would be great to hear.

Angela Sayre:

I feel like for me, because I had been before when it was very traumatic, where we had a very short amount of time with people before they were split up, or sent somewhere else and everyone was so terrified of me.

Angela Sayre:

For this experience, for people to be really happy to see us and knowing that they were going to continue to be there, that was a surreal element that I still can't wrap my head around to be honest. To Mary Lu's point, I see faces from my first trip that I can't get out of my head, because I don't know what happened to them.

Angela Sayre:

It would have been nice to see them this trip, just to know that they were safe. Also, I can understand going back and seeing a face, and knowing that they're stuck there. Knowing that the smile that they give us is essentially their hope and their strength, mostly for their families. Not that they're in the happiest place they've ever been.

Angela Sayre:

It's truly a sign of strength. I mean, I might get emotional on this. I'll try not to, but there is something of... moral injury is the only term that I can come to when I try to explain it to other people, whenever you see people in situations like this. Then you get to go even to like a nice hotel room and have a shower at the end of the day, that's hard.

Angela Sayre:

It's harder every time you do it, because we can say that we stand for equality and lots of things. We can say we stand for being good Christians, or being however we feel politically or how we feel as feminist, or whatever label down the line. At the end of the day, we're not doing that in the world.

Angela Sayre:

You also feel from people who don't see what's going on, and they get a limited access of whatever news that they choose to intake, how they feel about it on either side. I have had friends on either side think that it's something that's made up, to kind of feel a political game.

Angela Sayre:

You feel that, you feel all of these opinions of people. You're there with people and you see it affecting their livelihoods. The fact that if this doesn't happen for them, if they don't actually get asylum, if they go back to where they came from, we know that that is essentially the end for them, that's genocide truly.

Angela Sayre:

That's a hard thing to come to terms with, when you see these people and you know that we don't get to go back until maybe July, and will they be there? We don't know. It's hard to go sometimes, or it's not hard to go. It's easy to go.

Angela Sayre:

You want to go back as much as you can. It's hard to come back, and go back to your jobs and go back to your work, and go back to loving your people who... I mean, we live a really good life of privilege. That's hard, you know?

Justin Bullock:

Yeah. No, I think that's all right. Scott.

Scott Spreier:

I think Angela and Mary Lu have captured it quite well. I would just add, this was my first trip. I'm still processing it. Having this conversation tonight has pulled up emotions that I had... I think successfully tamped down. The more I think about it, the more angry I am. I will go back, I will help.

Scott Spreier:

I also want to know more about what's going on in the camp? The lives of these people. What's going on as they try to make the journey? Are continued to... rebuffed and pushed back how the process is playing out.

Scott Spreier:

All of that, I want to know more about and be able from a humanitarian standpoint, keep working with these people, because the one thing that keeps coming back is, they are fellow humans and there's such an effort to oftentimes diminish what they're doing and diminish their value.

Scott Spreier:

It's an ongoing process, but I also realize that we have to actively work on the political front, to make our voices heard and to push for changes in policy, that are clearly much needed at this point.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, and the policy pieces is something that Faith and I talked to a little bit about, and that I want to circle back to as well. This is a little bit of... one, it becomes a little bit challenging to talk with people, because it's become such a partisan issue.

Justin Bullock:

It's been loaded as I mentioned earlier, with a lot of baggage around words that mean human and they've been turned to mean something else. There's such bad parallels throughout all of history, and to modern day across other places in the world.

Justin Bullock:

Also, here at home, dehumanization efforts often are what come before what we call in our literature, administrative evil. That comes before acts that are truly horrific. Dehumanization is one of the precursors that legitimizes extensive harm against humans.

Justin Bullock:

It's become a hard thing to talk about from a policy standpoint, because of the way in which the tools used to talk about it are often dehumanization tools, which appeal to really long-standing things in the brain that make it hard for people to overcome.

Justin Bullock:

It's just a trickery tool that politicians have always used. It's frightening, the degree to which it's been kind of effective in covering this conversation. Just the rhetoric around it, and so much so that I was... as we've mentioned, just being on the ground to get a clear head about, what are the consequences of our policies towards refugees and asylum seekers?

Justin Bullock:

It's even hard to have a clear head about it, because it's such a barrage of dehumanization and madness. That's something we should [crosstalk 00:35:37].

Mary Lu:

Justin, I was-

Justin Bullock:

[crosstalk 00:35:41].

Mary Lu:

This is Mary Lu. I was just going to jump in and say, "We do such a good job of perpetuating fear in our culture. Even people who totally support what I've tried to do down there, and the people I know who are going down there and our group who just went, one of the things people always come back to is, "Well, it's really not safe there."

Mary Lu:

I think what's so interesting about that is, I keep going back and it feels like home. I don't know if the rest of our group knows that there was actually an attack the Thursday night before we got there, really close to the camp. It is an area of Mexico that is not safe, and that gang violence is prevalent.

Mary Lu:

That kidnapping is big, and that's one of the reasons this is so unsafe for asylum seekers. The fear that we perpetuate with those conversations and those stereotypes, is so unfair and undeserving from any political standpoint.

Mary Lu:

That we're using this little tiny piece of fear, to perpetuate something so much bigger than this tiny thing that we're potentially afraid of. Does that make sense?

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, it does. I wanted to bring Faith in. She stayed in Brownsville, and was not able to cross over with us, mostly because she doesn't have a passport, as listeners of the podcast will know. Greg and I had been giving her a thorough hard time for not having a passport.

Faith:

Sorry.

Justin Bullock:

I have to give you a hard time once again. I was wondering, we were able to have some conversations about it. You were able to help us prepare the meals, help load up. Then you saw us kind of leaving you and then coming back in the evenings.

Justin Bullock:

I know you've had some response to it as well. Maybe talk a little bit about what you are able to do, and then any kind of responses that you would like to share as well.

Faith:

Yeah, so I don't have a passport. I'm very sorry for not having a passport, but just seeing the reaction from all of you guys whenever y'all came back, it is definitely enough for me to get to point that things aren't what they should be down there.

Faith:

Yeah, just kind of going back to what Scott was saying about just, these are people. It did feel really good being able to help out, and just being part of the solution and not so much the problem and definitely inspired me to write a paper, so yeah.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, and you wrote it in your ethics course, yeah?

Faith:

Yeah.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, very nice. Do you want to share some of your argument?

Faith:

I'll just say that some of the politicization has definitely led to ethical wrong doing. There is a lot that we can do to be better, but yeah.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, some of that with the way that... just the rhetoric and language, we haven't even gotten into the details of the actual laws and what the actual legal framework is for handling asylum seekers. Then the actual policies put in place, to try to find creative ways to discourage asylum seekers from showing up at our borders.

Justin Bullock:

Even all that aside, it's amazing the way in which language gets captured. In conversations I have with people about this, that they've just replaced person with illegal. They've given a status to people, one that's opposite of what they're doing. They're legally seeking asylum in the US by US code and US precedent.

Justin Bullock:

It's as dehumanizing as about any kind of label they could come up with in the space. The rhetoric around it is really challenging. What's on your mind? I have other questions, but I don't want to completely steer the conversation. What are the things that as the conversation's been unfolding, that any of you would like to share?

Scott Spreier:

This is Scott. To the point you just made, I think a lot of people... a lot of that fear and rhetoric might shift. I've said this to friends who sort of look at me as [inaudible 00:40:12], when I said I went to the border. I think your view might shift a bit. Certainly come into... my dog thinks that too.

Scott Spreier:

Certainly come into question, if you spent a couple of nights serving meals to parents with small children. Parents just like I am, with small children like I've had. Parents who want nothing more than a better life for those children.

Scott Spreier:

As a former journalist, I realized that what we see on the news and what we read, it's a very narrow perspective just because of limitations. It doesn't capture... I think often times, that humanity, that when you understand that, it shifts that polarization a lot.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, you hit on something there that's kind of stuck with me too. It's just kind of a... basic I think, philosophical or biological thing. It's horrible to see the parents... it's horrible to see people my age just through sheer poor luck, in the circumstance that they're in.

Justin Bullock:

Then something like that kind of gnaws at you a little bit more, when you see the children suffering. Then you see kind of the parents, just trying to do the best they can to kind of keep them safe. We did the Escuelita on Sunday morning. There's essentially I think four tents.

Justin Bullock:

There was some people there helping with some drawing and some English learning skills. One group is doing yoga and one was carrying some basic physical activities. One was working through some worksheets for the kids, where they would get homework. This kind of makeshift school... that they've pulled together with a few volunteers, that is on Sunday mornings.

Justin Bullock:

I mean, what I do for a living is teach. It's not any way for a child to have to be kind of learning at that age. It's just not helpful for their learning. It was great they were doing something which we got to be a part of. It's great that other organizations are going to start coming in to prepare more, but these are people that have fled their homes.

Justin Bullock:

It just doesn't seem that hard to provide them a basic education. Serving the meals is so physically exhausting. It's just a normal thing to kind of be like having a meal with someone and you see the kids with their parents. It feels much more normal, but then being in my work setting, which is teaching and trying to help educate.

Justin Bullock:

Then seeing kind of what they were having to pull together with such minimal resources for... I don't know, we didn't count, but we were talking about it, I think it was 150 plus children. Yeah, seeing the ways in which it is impacting children.

Justin Bullock:

In a way that is kind of done deliberately to try to keep their parents from coming here for safety purposes, is really... the child aspect of it is something that you have a hard time processing. It's the kind of thing that I have flashbacks to.

Justin Bullock:

Particularly the following few days, as you can just see these images of these children that were smiling and... some children were smiling, some that weren't, some that were crying, all kinds of things. They're just burned into your brain I think, yeah.

Angela Sayre:

I feel like I have three different soundbites to throw at you. I mean, they all fit into the conversation, but it's just my thought process right now. Number one is, seeing the kids there is one of the hardest things. That is for sure one of the hardest things. I have a background in domestic violence and sexual assault as well.

Angela Sayre:

Working for a nonprofit where that was our mission, of helping. When you see the parents there, I felt like serving sometimes, you can see where people hold trauma in their faces and in their bodies. When you pay really good, close attention to someone... because one of the main things that they told us was, when you serve someone, you're not just serving them.

Angela Sayre:

You're looking them in the eyes, you're trying to speak with them. You're letting them know that this is a dignified exchange. "I see you." You can see them carrying a lot. That's why I'm saying like, we saw a lot of smiles there. That was strength, that was hope and strength and that was impressive.

Angela Sayre:

That's more than you see in a lot of people on a daily basis, I feel like. I also feel like there are a lot of adults in that camp, men and women. This goes back to something Scott... to something that you said in Sunday school. Actually, how you said you felt irrelevant, because of your age, with a bunch of millennials. Which I hope that's okay that I just mentioned that.

Scott Spreier:

Yeah.

Angela Sayre:

I have an older husband and he has felt that way before too. The thing about it is, I don't feel like we talk enough across generations, to let people know what's going on to a degree. That we're allowed to talk, and that we're allowed to figure things out together.

Angela Sayre:

That one person up at the top... which right now being kind of a very loud, ugly president, gets to dictate how everybody feels and how the pendulum is swinging in terms of rhetoric, and in terms of everything. I feel that way about like a church too. I don't believe you just take a preacher's word for... like the, be all end all.

Angela Sayre:

We see these things happening. I do feel like it's our purpose to go back and make sure people understand these policies, and how they're affecting people. Even seeing how things that sound like they don't relate to this like, climate change and these people's homes. That being an exodus factor.

Angela Sayre:

I mean, there are tons of different ways that our world is shutting off. Just like you said, with rhetoric, things that are important. That they're making sure that we don't learn, so that it's very easy for us to be scared of people that are actually just scared and fending for their lives in desperation, and are the sweetest.

Angela Sayre:

When you meet them, they're the sweetest people you've ever met. We're having to see that, and then come back and talk to people who don't see that and only hear this rhetoric. That's a weird thing to try to navigate.

Justin Bullock:

It feels really like kind of, bizarro-land. I mean, it's like part of the way that people... studies in social media and echo chamber stuff say, it's like people live in alternate realities, when we don't have agreed upon kind of basic facts about the world and-

Angela Sayre:

Yeah.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, that's a big piece of this one, coming back to kind of try to describe it or talk about it. That the language around it sometimes, that it just doesn't match at all with the reality that you experienced with these people, and know from the basic immigration policies and what the US code... all of the things that seem without the rhetoric pretty clear.

Justin Bullock:

When you're trying to have these conversations, because of the way the conversation's been hijacked, it feels really bizarre. It's like you're talking about two different actual realities.

Angela Sayre:

Right. I mean, this is kind of off topic, but this is where the generational stuff should come into play. Like when you see those kids in the camp, I mean, they're from El Salvador, Guatemala. They're from all over. They have different dialects, they have different languages that they can communicate with.

Angela Sayre:

You see them interacting with each other, and kind of living out this almost normal-looking child experience to them. They can do it, so it feels like we should be able to do it and we're not doing it. I don't know how to do it. I mean, we're all trying to figure out how to do it.

Angela Sayre:

I mean, I felt like I was looking at those kids, trying to figure out how to communicate the way they could communicate and thrive the way that they could thrive. I mean, they were thriving the best that they could there and they were laughing. I mean, they were resilient.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah. I mean, I think it's also in some ways a touching picture of the human spirit. Despite being stateless and homeless, and living in a tent while waiting for their day in court essentially. The fact that they're able to push through, and it is kind of a beautiful side of the children too.

Justin Bullock:

I mean, it becomes their normal pretty quick and then they're just doing normal children things sometimes. Which again, just kind of strikes you as bizarre, is the only way I really know how to describe it.

Mary Lu:

Well, and most perfect example, how bizarre it is when you watch somebody have their quinceañera in a refugee camp. [inaudible 00:50:23]...to have her dance with her mother next to port-o-potties.

Justin Bullock:

Right.

Angela Sayre:

Like holding on to the [inaudible 00:50:31]. The life that happens in childhood, in a space where it doesn't seem like it could flourish, I mean, there is something powerful and hopeful about that.

Angela Sayre:

Right.

Mary Lu:

It's awful.

Angela Sayre:

Right.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah. All right, yeah.

Scott Spreier:

One of... go ahead.

Angela Sayre:

Well, I was just going to say another example that we talked about in the car on the way home, that I don't think we got to talk about with you, Justin and Faith was, there was a young trans-person in the camp. They came through my line every night.

Angela Sayre:

I could tell by the mannerisms and dressing, everything. On the way home, I was looking up different articles, just reading about the relationship between Brownsville and Matamoros. About how in downtown, in Brownsville and in Matamoros, they had had so many beatings and killings of people who are LGBTQ.

Angela Sayre:

That goes back to the rhetoric, but that person found a better community in that camp than they did in their own communities.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah.

Angela Sayre:

That's a trip. That's a community failing to support their people. I mean, we're afraid of these people. If anyone met these people, you would not be afraid of these people. I mean, that's what's the craziest thing, when you come home that you can't explain to someone. Children, you can say, "You can love these children."

Angela Sayre:

I mean, you're just an asshole if you don't love children. When it comes to adults or anyone else that you can't identify with their label, then all of a sudden, I mean, that goes to like, "What kind of shame do you hold on? What kind of label do you feel?"

Angela Sayre:

Why are you judging this person? Is it the color of their skin? Is it because you feel like you don't have enough, and they're going to come and take something from you? I mean, where does that come from? That's confusing. That's confusing to me. I don't understand that, you know?

Justin Bullock:

Yeah. No. Scott, you were going to say something as well.

Scott Spreier:

It's much less profound and deep, than what Angela just said. I found one of the most connecting moments I had, as one human being to another. I served the salad. I discovered very quickly that refugee children, like all children probably across the world, do not like green, leafy vegetables.

Scott Spreier:

I started teasing the children in my horrible Spanish. The children got it, from the look on their faces and so did the parents. It was sort of a moment that everybody laughed. Again, to the point of going, I think it is important for them to see us. It's also very important for us to see them, and for both of us to see people as just other people.

Mary Lu:

I think something really beautiful too about that story, is that I was in the same line with dad when he was serving the salads. Some of the little kids would come by, and I speak enough Spanish to get by and dad would be trying to get them to take these vegetables.

Mary Lu:

These kids would be like, "Oh, you sound like my dad," and told one little girl, I was like, "That is my dad." She goes, "Oh, parents." I was like, "It doesn't matter who you are, your parents try to get you to eat vegetables."

Mary Lu:

It is annoying, and every human in the world can relate to that." I mean, like that is such a basic life experience. "My adult figure wants me to eat something that they think is green and good for me."

Justin Bullock:

I want to ask each of you the following question. The question is, what was the most troubling thing to you? Which we've talked a little bit about, maybe you could just say what was the most troubling to you about the experience you had. What was the most kind of positive thing that you saw?

Justin Bullock:

What things that you saw were most troubling to you? Then what thing to you was the most positive given the circumstances? I'll go first, to kind of give you a moment to think since I'm putting you on the spot with questions, which I try not to do too much as the host.

Justin Bullock:

I mentioned earlier, the most troubling thing for me is to see the limited resources to educate children, and kind of the situation their parents find themselves in. In that particular situation, I think it's because I'm an educator really, it was hard to watch and be a part of it.

Justin Bullock:

It also could have been that it was Sunday and I was pretty exhausted by then. Children who need education and not get it, I think is just challenging. Particularly given the situation in which these people are in.

Justin Bullock:

On the flip side, the most kind of positive thing is, the nonprofits on the ground are providing immense amounts of relief, with a relatively small group of volunteers, all things considered. There's roughly 2,500 people... was the best guess we got, of individuals in that camp.

Justin Bullock:

There was roughly 1,000 hot meals served a night. There's the sandwiches, Team Brownsville has kind of taken the lead on some of these coordinations. Now World Central Kitchen is helping with the food. Team Brownsville is still taking the lead in coordination, taking the lead in getting resources brought, additional resources over and above the food.

Justin Bullock:

They're working with some organizations to bring in regular... an organization called Yes We Can, to have daily teaching, daily school instead of once a week. On the positive side, even if they're being mistreated by governments, it's really nice to see the role that nonprofits have come in, in this space.

Justin Bullock:

They're just providing basic humanitarian relief to people who aren't getting it from anyone else. That's my most kind of troubling and my most positive things that I observed. Would anyone like to volunteer to go next?

Angela Sayre:

I'll go-

Justin Bullock:

[crosstalk 00:57:34].

Angela Sayre:

... if no one else is ready.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah.

Angela Sayre:

Mine are kind of threefold. I'll try to make them short, but I mean, they're pretty equally in my mind. Like the troubling things are some of the things we didn't actually see a lot of on this trip, except for that the numbers have grown and that they're stuck there longer. I mean, that's obviously the biggest thing.

Angela Sayre:

They're in limbo, and they're in limbo because of the mess that we keep throwing around up here. I mean, that just proves that we need more help. There are people that show up and we're helping in that way, but we need policy makers who will give us help. We need people that won't deny certain policies that we've put in effect on other countries.

Angela Sayre:

I mean, this is a domino effect from a lot of things. I mean, it just truly is. I guess that's the most troubling. That's the most troubling, with some of the reactions I get at home. Then the most kind of uplifting thing that I saw, is the kids that are so resilient and I know that... I mean, I have real faith that they're going to be okay.

Angela Sayre:

That they're going to take from this experience... I mean, and I have to feel this way. I have to know that they're going to be okay. This is maybe my way of making the situation okay in my mind, because it's hard to find something that's good in this sometimes. I mean, kids have been through revolutions.

Angela Sayre:

Those are the people that I see that will come back, and hopefully do make sure that things like this don't happen again. I mean, when you see these kids there, you know that we have failed them in some way. That's how I feel. That's how I feel no matter what is going on.

Angela Sayre:

I just have to add this, because it feels like once you start talking about this, it's emotional and it's like word vomit. When I see those men in line... because it's not just the kids, it's the women and the men too. I see my mother and my father, and things that they had to carry through their life.

Angela Sayre:

That no one else could give them some support and space to survive. Then I think about my nephews who are native American and Mexican. I see people that only look at these people and just see color, and that's what this is. I mean, that's undeniable. If it were different, there just would be in a different outcome.

Angela Sayre:

You can't change my mind on that, because I've heard too many comments. I mean, I take it personally, whenever I see people not wanting to help them and wanting to say, "I'd rather let them stay in a field by a river, and I don't care how they sleep. I don't care how they bathe.

Angela Sayre:

I don't care that there to be cartels outside of where they are, that are fueled by a drug problem that we perpetuate." Nobody is taking responsibility for anything, and they're just acting like, "These are irresponsible humans that are showing up to take things from us." That will forever just burn me.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, it's tough to hear the language around it, particularly once you've seen the people. It's hard to imagine that race doesn't play a piece of it. A significant other crowd mentality, makes the dehumanization attempts easier. Yeah, it brings out some of the kind of, not so great in people.

Justin Bullock:

A combination of fear and not understanding. It can be a really toxic mixture when guided in a way to dehumanize. Again, this is not a new phenomenon. This has played out over history, over and over and

over again. We use fear and misinformation to de-humanize, and fear and misinformation dehumanization lead to bad outcomes for humans.

Angela Sayre:

I will just add real quickly, my other uplifting thing is obviously you guys. We never met each other before this trip, and we met so many people on that trip that just showed up. There are people that are coming to do the right thing. You just have to have faith that we'll all continue to do it and work.

Angela Sayre:

I mean, we support each other. Mary Lu's one of my heroes, for having done this just on her own. I mean, you see people that are continuously doing things and that does give you an extra fire. You know that something's going to get better. I mean, it just does.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, it makes me one proud former professor, Mary Lu helped pulled all this together. I was aware of things, but didn't know what a core opportunity was to help. It was kind of through her service and her voice, that I was aware of the situation and was able to kind of look into it.

Justin Bullock:

Kind of further on the ground and have this experience. I am one proud former professor. Scott or Mary Lu or Faith, would anyone like to jump in with some of the maybe more troubling moment or a more kind of positive moment?

Faith:

I'll kind of jump in, just echoing what Angela said about her negative. One troubling thing was some of the reactions that we got, after posting about some of this stuff. One comment that was made to me was basically just implying that these parents are irresponsible.

Faith:

That kind of made me pretty mad, just because as we've talked about in other podcast episodes, no one wants to make this trip. I think it takes a lot of mental and physical strength for parents to put their families through this. Just that kind of reaction, I did not like at all.

Faith:

Also, echoing Angela's point about, there are good people who want to do good things and it was really nice seeing just kind of everybody, again, going across generations, just coming together to help these people.

Justin Bullock:

Thank you. Father or daughter, anyone want to take a stab?

Scott Spreier:

I'll jump in and let Mary Lu wrap it all up. I think the most troubling thing that haunts me and causes me to lose sleep... and you hinted at it. This is a story that's been going on for thousands of years some

place, many places in the world. Most of us, I think if we look back, we'll find that some of our ancestors were indeed refugees in one shape or the other.

Scott Spreier:

I know certainly, there were in my family. What we saw was three days of one unwritten chapter of the story. With... I don't know who mentioned it, but the whole issue of environmental change, there's a good possibility that a lot more of us will find ourselves refugees in a few years.

Scott Spreier:

I think it's very, very important that we continue not only to help folks at the border, but meet this challenge in places where we can have an impact. Whether it be with corporations, whether it be with the government, whatever. All that said, the one thing I saw more than anything that made me feel good was hope.

Scott Spreier:

I saw it in the work and the actions of the volunteers. The not-for-profits that were involved. I also saw it on the faces of those families. I think one of the highest moments for me, was when we were... they have a very large tent there, that they now serve everyone dinner.

Scott Spreier:

There was a sense of community and a sense of hope among those people, and among both the refugees and those who were trying to help, that came together in that tent every day. A sense of hope, a sense of a future. I think we have to channel our anger and fight as much as we can to change the situation, but at the same time continue to give folks hope.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, that's nicely put, Scott, there is a lot... as we've talked about from a policy standpoint, that sometimes makes it hard to hold onto that hope with them. As we've talked about of course, lowering the number of refugees that we're allowing in as a country. The governor of Texas has announced that for 2020, we're going to accept zero refugees.

Justin Bullock:

Apparently because we've done enough. The numbers of people who apply for asylum that the US government believes, or that then are given actual asylum to the US as a percentage, is also not encouraging. It's something we'll talk more about.

Justin Bullock:

As we do more episodes in the series, we're also going to talk with some immigration lawyers, some immigration experts to kind of put that stuff more in a general context. The basic takeaway is that we're not engaging in policy that is encouraging for hope for these people. That is kind of hard to kind of square.

Justin Bullock:

I think that's part of the trauma of this, for all of us. For me, is to see that hope and to know on the ground in the US what the attitudes are towards them as humans, and what our current leaders... the decisions they're making, that are going to impact their lives.

Justin Bullock:

It seems like just a gross miscarriage of basic human rights and due process, and following our own legal code in a way that's celebrated. That is really kind of troubling. Mary Lu, would you like to kind of share about some of the more troubling things from this visit, and some of the more positive things?

Mary Lu:

I mean, would I like to? No, but will I? Absolutely. I have this friend, and we have this running joke that she's the sage to my profit. She is the person that can help me find the ground when my anger and my voice, and my need for people to understand the injustices happening get too big for people to really listen to.

Mary Lu:

She and I talked the other day. I was just listing off all of the things that I was angry about, and all of the things that just felt unfair and horrific about... not just this trip, but every time I go down. I said to her, "I think if I really was honest about how I felt, I would not get out of bed. I don't know that I could go back down."

Mary Lu:

I don't know if I sat in the pain that we witnessed, that I could do it. I don't know that you can sit amongst people who are telling you stories of family members being shot in front of their eyes. Being scared to go home at night, being scared that their children are going to get abducted and sold into sex trafficking."

Mary Lu:

I don't know how you wake up the next day and say, "Okay, I'm going to keep talking about this. I'm going to keep showing up. I'm going to keep working towards something better." We have a rule in our house, we don't watch the news in the evenings, because it makes me angry-

Justin Bullock:

Yeah.

Mary Lu:

... because it's hard. I think everything everybody said, was a hard moment and was horrific. The fact that this is a conversation we're having to have, is horrific to me. Yet I keep showing up, because we can't not for those people. I hope and believe without a doubt that each human has dignity.

Mary Lu:

If they had enough faith and hope to believe that they could get this far on this journey, I mean, if they risked as much as we know they risked, with cartels and gang violence, sexual assault, trafficking, death, for them to get this far and then to still be here and still waiting.

Mary Lu:

If they have that kind of hope, then I have to have that kind of hope and I have to keep showing up for them. I think to me the most beautiful moments are kids sneezing in your face. The markers and the snot you have running down your pants, after hanging out with them.

Mary Lu:

There's something beautiful to me in the exhaustion of getting to spend your time with these humans. I am so grateful that y'all came with me. It's been really hard and really discouraging, for over a year now to try to get people to see why I want them to see this. See why I keep showing up for these people. Keep hugging them, keep practicing my Spanish.

Mary Lu:

I've been listening to a lot of podcasts in Spanish. That's frustrating sometimes, when you don't know what's being said. I can't imagine how those families feel when they get to the border, and are handed a piece of paper saying, "Oh, your key to getting in here is to read this document in English," that you've never seen in your life.

Mary Lu:

That most people who are fluent in English don't understand, full legal jargon. If they have hope and they have the strength and they can continue to show up, then we will continue to show up. There is goodness in the fight, as painful and as sleepless. As hard as it is, for me, the really awful and the really good just kind of coincide in every aspect of this.

Mary Lu:

I just keep thinking, "God, how have we gotten this far, that this is what we're doing to other humans?" Also, "Man, I am so glad that there are other humans showing up for these people every day."

Mary Lu:

I think my really awful and my really good, just kind of all gets melted together in this weird space of, these are humans who want good things for their families and want to be safe.

Mary Lu:

Want to live successful lives and want to live in community. I want us to be part of giving that to them. I want us to be part of helping everybody understand that they deserve that, because we each deserve that too.

Justin Bullock:

Yeah, thank you. Anybody have any kind of parting things, that they'd like to say about this experience, about how it's affected you? To the audience that might have listened to this, along with us in this conversation. Anything that you would like to leave on the table for anyone, I think now is maybe a good time to give you that opportunity.

Mary Lu:

Well, I think the first and foremost is, it is not that hard for you to be involved and for you to bring justice into this space. There are 900,000 ways you can do that. If the very first thing you do, is start

following groups on Instagram, and on Twitter and on Facebook that are doing good work, that is the first step.

Mary Lu:

Being part of these conversations is a first step. Calling out harmful rhetoric is a first step. It is a way to be involved without investing in a weekend, or investing any money. You can be part of changing what is happening in our world. Just by learning and just by being aware, and just by the way you speak and talk about this issue.

Mary Lu:

That is powerful and very important. If you want to engage, and you want to go see more or you want to get involved in some way, reach out, let's get you there. Come love on people and come bring dignity to people. Come be part of seeking justice.

Justin Bullock:

Thank you. We'll also provide in the links, with the podcasts links to Team Brownsville and World Central Kitchen for sure. How to get in touch with them, how to donate, how to be connected with them on social media.

Justin Bullock:

If you're listening to this, be sure to find that in the description of this episode of the series. I think it'll be a nice way to maybe help connect some people. Anyone else have anything that they would like to leave listeners with?

Scott Spreier:

I'll just add to Mary Lu's comment. As you get involved, get involved across borders, across boundaries, across cultures, across languages, get involved across generations. I think we've all discovered something there. To Mary Lu's point, contributing is good, but acting and your voice is what is really needed.

Justin Bullock:

Thanks, Scott. Anyone else have anything they'd like to add as we close down?

Angela Sayre:

I mean, I'm just going to echo what they said. Educate yourself on what's going on, because it's confusing and I know it's hard to stay up on it. The links that you're going to put up here, the people that Mary Lu talked about, people who go into this with integrity and wanting to show you the dignity that can be had in this situation.

Angela Sayre:

They want to tell you the truth, and you can listen to facts without trying to bring in politics and opinion. You can, and you can form your own opinion of what's going on and it will very quickly turn into that. You just want to help these people. If you have a heart, that's what you will find.

Angela Sayre:

Yeah, you can cook, you can show up, you can send money to them. I mean, there are lots of ways that you can get involved if you're taking care of your family. Yeah, you can shut the rhetoric down whenever it comes to your table.

Angela Sayre:

That's the number one thing, because that's what we're dealing with at home. I hate to be the one to say it, but I mean, we are voting right now, so that's important. That would be a big help too.

Justin Bullock:

Voting is something that [crosstalk 01:19:23].

Mary Lu:

It's hard, because-

Justin Bullock:

Go ahead Mary Lu. Sorry.

Mary Lu:

I was just saying, it's hard because we keep talking about how we don't want this to be partisan, but it becomes political. I don't think that's wrong-

Angela Sayre:

Yeah.

Mary Lu:

... but I think it's something we have to be aware of, and we have to work through. My experience is, this is not a partisan issue when you start talking about the people in the stories.

Angela Sayre:

Right.

Mary Lu:

That's why the stories and the experiences, and all that matters so much.

Angela Sayre:

100%.

Justin Bullock:

If it is, it shouldn't be partisan that refugees lives are important to us, particularly when they show up at our border and declare asylum. The legal way that we've set up for them. It's become a partisan issue, but it doesn't necessarily need to be.

Justin Bullock:

I think irrespective of your political orientation or your political party, having kind of kindness in your heart for fellow humans and honoring our own basic precedent for how we treat these people, these fellow humans, doesn't need to be a partisan issue. It can just be kind of supporting basic human rights, and supporting our fellow humans.

Justin Bullock:

It doesn't have to be a partisan issue. I hope if you followed with us this long, you've been able to take away some understanding of what it's like on the ground. Just across the US border from Brownsville and Matamoros, as direct consequences of a number of kind of global factors.

Justin Bullock:

In part, they're currently there, trying to seek asylum in the US and being held there through what is commonly known as Remain in Mexico Program, while they await their opportunity to make their case. As we mentioned throughout, it's not a short process. This is a process that's long and drawn out.

Justin Bullock:

Sometimes it's hard for the asylum seekers to get the accurate information they need. This is all coming from people who are showing up and declaring that they want to be asylum seekers in the US.

Justin Bullock:

I think keeping that in mind, and keeping in mind that the horrible historical precedents that come along with systematic dehumanization efforts, is something that I hope you'll take away from this conversation. We may talk with this wonderful crowd again. I just want to say thanks again to Mary Lu, for helping organize this trip.

Justin Bullock:

We all were able to have an easy way to kind of have this experience, in part thanks to her. Thanks to the Bush School of Government and Public Service for connecting me with such wonderful students, in Faith Dingas and Mary Lu Hare. Scott and Angela, it's been such a pleasure to get to know the two of you and hear your stories.

Justin Bullock:

It was nice to have a community to experience this with. We'll be having a number of episodes from the podcast, around this theme of asylum seeking in the US and what's the precedent there? Some more details on some of the numbers, some more details on some of the policies.

Justin Bullock:

Speak with at least a couple more experts in this area, to kind of get a sense of what the experts have to say. Given this particular situation, I thought it was useful just to hear from other people about their responses to what this is like on the ground, and just kind of hear the stories.

Justin Bullock:

I think it shows an important part of the picture, when so much of this dialogue has been hijacked by the way it's presented to most Americans. Thanks again everyone. It's been a real pleasure chatting with you tonight. Thanks for sharing.

Mary Lu:  
Thank you.