

# COMING TO AMERICA

IT'S THEIR HOME, TOO

STORY AND PHOTO BY CHRISTY PIÑA

The country they were brought to against their will as children housed them, but now some want to kick them out.

In 2012, President Barack Obama introduced DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), a measure that would keep children who were brought here before the age of 16 from being deported; a policy that is renewable two years at a time. It allows those children who didn't have a choice in leaving the only home they had ever known a chance to remain in the country legally, receive work permits and pursue higher education.

DACA recipients are often referred to as Dreamers, named after a similar law called the DREAM Act, which was introduced in 2001 but never passed. The law would've given its recipients a path to citizenship had it been passed, which DACA does not offer.

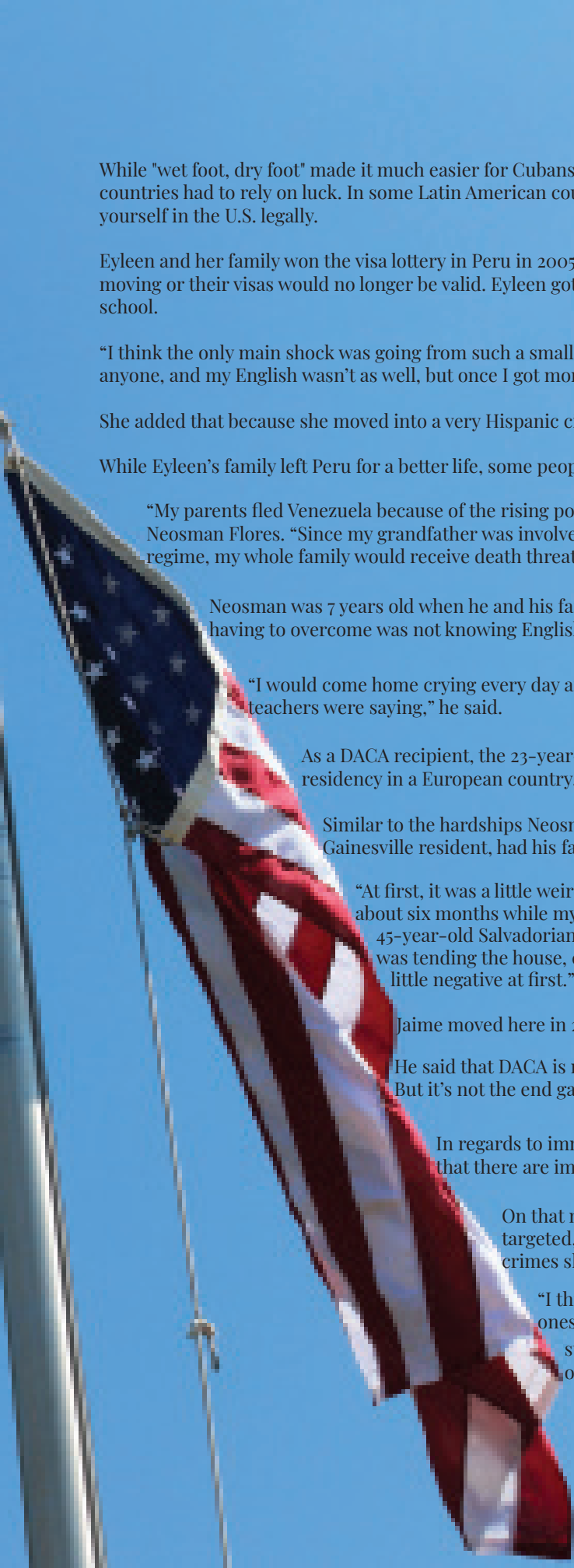
In September, the Trump administration announced that it would be revoking DACA altogether. The president called on Congress to come up with a replacement — which they're still working on—so the Dreamers aren't in danger of deportation just yet, but it is in the works.

Unlike the question, "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" it is clear that DACA came to be as a result of parents who immigrated into the country, whether it be legally or illegally, with their children.

"I feel like people who want to better themselves should be given the opportunity to do so if they are bettering the community, if they're giving back," said University of Florida senior Eyleen Izaguirre. "To me that's something that's important. If someone wants to go to school, wants to better themselves, wants to become a professional, they should be allowed to do so."

In 1966, the Cuban Adjustment Act was passed. It allowed anyone who fled Cuba and made it to the United States to pursue residency a year later. Come 1995, the policy was updated and became known as "wet foot, dry foot," which said if people who were trying to flee Cuba were intercepted in U.S. waters, they would have to be sent back. However, if they stepped foot on U.S. soil, they would be allowed to remain in the country and receive expedited legal permanent residency. But in January 2017, the Obama administration ended the policy.

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While "wet foot, dry foot" made it much easier for Cubans to immigrate into the U.S. than anybody else. Citizens of other countries had to rely on luck. In some Latin American countries, you had to win a lottery to be able to leave and establish yourself in the U.S. legally.

Eyleen and her family won the visa lottery in Peru in 2005 and were told they had about five months to be completely done moving or their visas would no longer be valid. Eyleen got to Miami when she was almost 11 years old and jumped right into school.

"I think the only main shock was going from such a small school to a bigger school. I was kind of shy because I didn't know anyone, and my English wasn't as well, but once I got more comfortable, it was okay," the 23-year-old said.

She added that because she moved into a very Hispanic city, it didn't take long for her to adjust to her new world.

While Eyleen's family left Peru for a better life, some people had to leave their countries for more grave matters.

"My parents fled Venezuela because of the rising political uncertainty at the time," said University of Florida student Neosman Flores. "Since my grandfather was involved in local government and did not agree with the rising Chavista regime, my whole family would receive death threats. Without thinking twice, we migrated to the U.S."

Neosman was 7 years old when he and his family had to get up and leave. The hardest thing he remembers having to overcome was not knowing English the way his classmates did.

"I would come home crying every day after school because I didn't understand anything my peers or teachers were saying," he said.

As a DACA recipient, the 23-year-old said that his backup plan if the policy is revoked is to find residency in a European country.

Similar to the hardships Neosman dealt with when he came to the United States, Jaime Zelaya, a Gainesville resident, had his fair share of adjusting to do, as well.

"At first, it was a little weird. I came from doing a lot of things at once to doing nothing for about six months while my work permit came in, and I tried to normalize my new life," the 45-year-old Salvadorian immigrant said. "In that time, while I wasn't doing anything, I was tending the house, cleaning, making food. Those things can make your experience a little negative at first."

Jaime moved here in 2006 with his wife, who was an American citizen.

He said that DACA is not a solution, it is a part of it when you don't have anything else. But it's not the end game.

In regards to immigration, he feels like there is no point in trying to fight the fact that there are immigrants who get wrapped up in crime, but they are not.

On that note, Rosy Calvo said that DACA recipients should not be targeted, but the men and women who are here illegally and committing crimes should be.

"I think they should work on something with all these students, the ones called the Dreamers, so that they can stay and obtain legal status and be productive citizens of this country. Those aren't the ones that I think should be targeted."