

Katy Murdza

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Moureen Kaki [00:00:02] Hello, hello. My name is Moureen Kaki, and I'm an oral history fellow with the Institute for Diversity and Civic Life. And it is June 6 at 4:28 p.m. Central Time, and I have here with me Katy Murdza. So Katy, would you mind introducing yourself and just telling us where you're calling from here today, please?

Katy Murdza [00:00:19] Sure. Hi, I'm Katy Murdza, and I am calling from Houston, Texas, where I currently live.

Moureen Kaki [00:00:27] Awesome. And Katy, one of my favorite questions to start these interviews with is, what is the earliest memory that you can recall, and how old were you, you think?

Katy Murdza [00:00:38] So I have a few of my earliest memories that are very, very vague. And some of it I'm not sure how much mixes with what people have told me. But in the first few years of my life, I lived in North Carolina because of my dad's job. And I think that I can remember the first time my parents left me. They met up with friends in a parking lot to drop me off while my sister was gonna be born, and then going to the hospital to see her is, I think, the earliest that I can almost remember.

Moureen Kaki [00:01:14] And how old were you there?

Katy Murdza [00:01:17] A little under two.

Moureen Kaki [00:01:18] Oh, my. Okay, I think that might be one of the earliest ages that I've gotten out of the interviews that I've asked for. That's cool.

Katy Murdza [00:01:26] Yeah, that's why, that I'm second guessing. Do I really remember that? But I think I have a vague memory of it.

Moureen Kaki [00:01:32] It's hard. It becomes weird when people tell you things over and over again, and then your brain just merges the two together and somehow makes a memory out of it. Yeah.

Katy Murdza [00:01:42] My mom left me with my giant teddy bear and very specific instructions on everything I liked and disliked for one night.

Moureen Kaki [00:01:49] That's funny. And is your sister your only sibling?

Katy Murdza [00:01:54] I have two younger brothers as well, so my sister's two years younger than me, and my brothers are four and eight years younger.

Moureen Kaki [00:02:00] Oh, wow. Okay, so you're the oldest.

Katy Murdza [00:02:01] Yeah.

Moureen Kaki [00:02:02] Hey same, except for I have three younger brothers, no sisters. Cool. And Katy, what was it like growing up? Did you grow up in North Carolina or is that where your family started?

Katy Murdza [00:02:14] No. We ended up moving up to New Hampshire. I grew up from the age of four in Hanover, New Hampshire, a small college town, and both my parents were from Boston and New York, so my mom says she wanted the kids to grow up with snow, which I always resented. I'm not a cold weather person, so I would ask her what she was thinking in wanting that. But yeah, I grew up in New Hampshire and then ended up moving around a lot throughout my twenties and settled in Texas six years ago.

Moureen Kaki [00:02:57] What led you to the decision to come to Texas?

Katy Murdza [00:03:00] So I came to Texas because I was very focused on immigration issues after I started to learn about them in college. I went to the border for a one credit seminar for a week over a break through a university to learn about border issues. And I went to El Paso, and I was so upset and interested in the issues that I learned there that I ended up doing it again a couple of years later in Arizona and then volunteering with one of the organizations I was connected with through that for six months full time on the border in Arizona, providing humanitarian aid to people who had recently been deported on the Mexican side of the border. And so I was finishing a master's degree and wanted to start working in anything related to positively impacting immigration policy and applied to a bunch of jobs. And the one that worked out best for me was advocating against the family detention center in Dilley, Texas, where mothers were detained with their children. And so I moved to Dilley for a year and a half and ended up later moving to San Antonio and Houston.

Moureen Kaki [00:04:20] Nice, nice. That's awesome work that you're doing and thank you for sharing that. Would you mind sharing the name of the organization that you were working with in Dilley?

Katy Murdza [00:04:28] Yeah, so I worked with the Dilley Pro Bono Project. My position was within the American Immigration Council, but it was a partnership between several organizations. I was the advocacy coordinator, so we all did a little of everything. And I certainly helped with legal services because we were representing often, sometimes thousands of families within the detention center. But my primary role was to collect advocacy information so families that were denied medical care or women who are pregnant in the detention center at times - we suddenly started to see babies under one when previously the cut off had been one year old. And so different issues that we would see like that, I'd be documenting as much as possible, so that the organizations that were partners of the project could do advocacy with that information.

Moureen Kaki [00:05:25] Wow, that sounds like incredible work. [inaudible] that you can share. I'm sure there are legal and privacy considerations here, but what's one of the most vivid memories or experiences that stand out to you from that time?

Katy Murdza [00:05:43] I think that the most important thing that I learned is really that there's no humane way to detain people at all, especially children. But I think a lot of attention was put on children, and that what I learned through the process is that we also need to be focusing on all types of incarceration and detention. But I think that ICE would promote the South Texas Family Residential Centers, as it was called then, as different from other detention centers, because it was designed for families, and that there were certain - I would sarcastically call them "amenities" - that they would promote when they gave their tours, that they had different activities. But they I would still be talking with family after family, mothers coming in saying, just absolutely desperate, crying that they've lined

up trying to get medical care, that they were being ignored, that their children's medical concerns were being minimized.

Katy Murdza [00:06:52] And I think just taking away that agency as a parent, as a human being, to be able to say - because the doctors or medical providers working for ICE would say, "You have to listen to me. I'm the medical provider." And I think that taking away that agency to get a second opinion or to even be able to go into a pharmacy and get over-the-counter medication for your child yourself or to just to have no other option to be completely dependent on a government enforcement agency too, just leaves people completely desperate. And we saw a lot of kids. Every story is unique, but also we see patterns through them in that children so often would regress in this environment. So start wetting the bed again, start biting other kids again, things that they'd outgrown, or just stop talking. Things like that, even though we did sometimes see people there for months, but this could happen within days or weeks, since at the time we were able to get most people out within about three weeks. But we would still see all of this within that time.

Moureen Kaki [00:08:16] Wow. That's really awful to hear about the way that people are forced in these conditions. And I appreciate you sharing that with us, and it couldn't have been easy to do this kind of work, and especially given that this was a pro-bono organization. I can't imagine that the incentive for doing this work on your part was necessarily the pay. So if I may ask you, what is it that inspires you and what motivated you to do this work? You mentioned a little bit of stuff about how your experiences what you learned about in college did that, but are there any other spiritual factors and things like that, that you would point to that motivates this work?

Katy Murdza [00:08:57] For me, it was just I'm very upset about many social justice issues, but when I started to learn about immigration, it just seemed so simple to me that we were treating people completely differently and really inhumanely, or just based on which side of a border you're born on, which documents you have. And I think a lot of the time the government or the common narrative tries to tell people that there's a greater reason why people are being treated differently and blame it on the people who are being treated poorly. And the more I've learned about different issues, I've learned that that's really never the case. But in this case, it just seemed so unbelievable to me, because I know I didn't do anything to have a passport. I know I didn't do anything to be born in the US. And yet I can go almost anywhere in the world with minimal jumping through minimal hoops.

Katy Murdza [00:10:00] And yet people are, when I was working on the border, losing their lives. There was someone - I was working with, when I provided humanitarian aid on the border, thousands of people. And often usually I wouldn't know what happened to them. And I would know that some people would die, but I wouldn't know if it was someone that I worked with because the nature of these deaths is often that they're unidentified or they go unidentified for a long time. But there was one case in which it did get back to us that we heard that someone that we remembered working with had died, and I'm sure that happened other times. And this was someone who was trying to get back to their partner and toddler daughter after being deported. And just that people were losing their lives to get something that was just given to me has always been infuriating to me.

Moureen Kaki [00:11:04] It's such an arbitrary decision, the ways in which we make these calls, when you think about it, so I think the work that you're doing is really necessary and important, or the work you were doing. But is this work that you've continued? You said

that you started in Dilley doing this a year and a half ago. Are you still continuing with immigration? What has it been like in the few years since?

Katy Murdza [00:11:27] Yeah, I'm still doing immigration work. It looks a little bit different, or quite different, I guess, in that I used to be going into a detention center for many hours a day and living in a small town on a cattle ranch with my coworkers. But I ended up moving to San Antonio and being able to work remotely. It was a very good experience in Dilley to learn so much about detention and the immigration systems very quickly. But as you can imagine, it's very high burnout. So I ended up working remotely on advocacy against detention from San Antonio for a while. And during that time, I got involved in the SA Stands Coalition, which is a coalition in San Antonio of organizations and community members that are advocating for policies at the city and county level that benefit immigrants, primarily by decreasing deportations in the community and increasing social services that are available to immigrants.

Katy Murdza [00:12:32] And so I got involved in that in my free time once I made that switch to being able to work a normal 9 to 5 job instead of being in a detention center all the time, and live in a bigger community. And so I got really involved in the coalition. And so when I was looking to make a switch in my job, the position with the Immigrant Legal Resource Center [ILRC] was open. That does a lot of the facilitation work for the SA Stands Coalition and a similar coalition here in Houston, Houston Leads. And so right around that time I happened to be moving to Houston for my partner's job. And so it worked out really well in that I was able to - I kept thinking, "I don't want to leave my organizing work in San Antonio, but I do want to get involved in my new community, and I also need a new job, and I can't do all three of those things." So I was able to, through this job, I can stay involved in the work I was doing in San Antonio and also be involved in the immigration coalition here in Houston.

Moureen Kaki [00:13:38] Yeah, that's awesome. I'm glad you found a way to do them both. That sounds like you're really committed to what you do, which is wonderful. And of course I know that from the collaborations we've done through SA Stands. And yeah, but it's great to hear that. And what was San Antonio like for you? Because moving from Dilley to San Antonio was your first time in San Antonio, right?

Katy Murdza [00:14:00] Yeah, when I lived in Dilley, I would come up to San Antonio about one day a week. I was very tired of driving on 35. I rock climb, so I would go to the climbing gym and get some groceries. There's more grocery availability up in San Antonio. So I'd get some things that I couldn't buy in Dilley and drive back down. And so I was starting to become familiar with San Antonio, and I really liked it, which is why I asked my job if I could work remotely from there at the time. And I became very attached to San Antonio. It was a really wonderful community. I could quickly become involved in organizing. And a lot of people tell me who haven't spent time in Texas that they just hear negative things about Texas. And I think that that's really just a minority of people whose voices are often the ones shared by the media, and also the government of Texas.

Katy Murdza [00:15:04] But I tell people, "The people I spend time with in Texas are great." I actually like being around people who are really tough and are having to put up this big fight. I think that through that you meet really great people. And so I became involved in the organizing community, both in SA Stands, but also with other groups that would work with us and found that I was able to meet people and just learn a lot from them very quickly. So I had said that I was never gonna leave. I met my partner and ended up coming here to Houston, and I was saying that I wouldn't like Houston, and then I do like it,

too. But now it's nice because I still go back there for this work that I'm doing. And I feel like sometimes people are hinting at, which one do I like better? I put that on myself, too. But I get to love both in different ways.

Moureen Kaki [00:16:03] Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's cool though. It's definitely a different vibe, Houston, for sure, but it's also been one of my favorite places in Texas. Yeah, that's fun. I think Austin is the only one that's easy to kick out the window. I'm just kidding Austin, sorry. Half of our team is in Austin, so they're gonna be listening to this. But yeah, yeah. No, that's great Katy. I'm really glad that that worked out, and that your experience in Texas been good. Some of the things that you're saying about the way that people who are not from here hear negative things are like, "How could you actually enjoy it?" So it's good. Do you get any homesickness from growing up, up north? I know you said you weren't a snow person, but before we were on the call you said you weren't a heat person either. So does the Texas heat at least make you miss the northern weather a little bit?

Katy Murdza [00:16:50] So over the past few years, I've been going just once a year in June. We're actually going next week. And it's the perfect time of year to go up there and get away from here. But no, I mean, I've been really moving around a lot for the ten years before I came to Texas. So now this really feels like home, because I didn't have an attachment to somewhere. I grew up in a pretty small town. That's a nice place to grow up, but I don't see myself settling down there. I really like being in a place where there's a lot going on and a lot of different organizing groups doing different things.

Moureen Kaki [00:17:30] Yeah, that's awesome. What are some of the things that - you mentioned rock climbing. What are some of the things you do outside of the organizing spheres besides work climbing?

Katy Murdza [00:17:43] So I also like, really in the half of the year that's tolerable in Texas, I like getting outside, hiking, running just a little bit, short distances, and rock climbing both inside and outside. Most of the outdoor rock climbing in Texas, unless you go to West Texas, is near the Austin area. So I've moved further away from that a year ago. But I really like exploring. I mentioned I've spent a lot of time in smaller towns and Dilley. I lived in rural Panama for a couple of years and just a lot of the places that I ended up in were smaller towns. So that's part of, I think, why I got excited about San Antonio. And then Houston, there was just so much more to explore and a lot going on. And so I like to explore the city, especially in Houston. There's so much diversity, people from all over the world are going to different cultural festivals and trying different food and seeing the different parks and all of that.

Moureen Kaki [00:18:52] That's awesome. And was there any time that you experienced a bit of a culture shock going from the small-town life to hitting San Antonio and then going to an even bigger city in Houston?

Katy Murdza [00:19:07] I guess the worst part - everyone complains about this - but the traffic in Houston. Actually, now I live closer to downtown, and I'm on the light rail, and I take that when I can or I bike on a bike path when I can. There's actually a lot more options, at least in the part of Houston that I live, than I thought when I was moving here. But that was part of why I had a negative idea about Houston is I used to just visit my aunt uncle in the suburbs and driving from San Antonio, I'd get stressed. I wouldn't know how to use the toll road and all that, but I have gotten used to it. But no, I mean just that. Houston's so big it feels like it would be hard to ever fully explore it. I feel like I've seen so much, and there's so much I haven't seen just because it can be quite a drive from one

part of Houston to another. But other than that, I think I always wanted to live somewhere a little more exciting

Moureen Kaki [00:20:05] Yeah, well Houston is definitely a good place for excitement, and it's huge, both in size and population, just the density even compared to San Antonio. That's awesome. Well, happy continued exploring Houston, and let us know if you find any cool places that we definitely need to check out. But yeah, I want to backtrack to something you said earlier about college being this motivational kickoff for you in a sense. Was there a specific experience or anything, like a particular reading or any moment that you could point to where you - it's hard to pin these things to a moment, but if there's any experience broadly or particularly that you could describe that helped with that kick off for you, I'd be curious to know what that was.

Katy Murdza [00:20:54] I think I was interested in social justice broadly, but I didn't have a specific interest or an issue that I was most focused on. And so after signing up for the immigration trip, which I think probably was a matter of scheduling, I don't remember it being the issue that I was most interested in at that time. The first time I stayed at Annunciation House in El Paso for a week, and then I later went to Arizona and was connected with several organizations there. The time that I was in El Paso and Annunciation House, we were staying in the shelter where there were families who had recently come to the United States. So I think that was a very powerful experience to hear about their stories directly, which now I've done a lot of, but at the time I hadn't. And then also just those connections to organizations, because after the Arizona trip, when I was graduating, I reached out to various organizations and No More Deaths, who I had met with on that trip, and so I ended up volunteering with afterwards. And that was the first step into a career in immigration.

Moureen Kaki [00:22:22] And where are some of the other places that you traveled. You mentioned rural Panama, which when you said you traveled, I was expecting for some reason explicitly within the United States, which is still cool, but that hit me out of nowhere. Where are some of the other places you traveled? And feel free to share any memories that are particularly associated with those places, too.

[00:22:38] Sure, yeah. So I was in Nogales, Arizona, and then working in Nogales, Sonora, for about six months after college. And then during college, I studied abroad for a semester in Chile and then a semester in France. And I did the Peace Corps in Panama after I finished in Arizona. And that was actually the time that I was in Arizona. I was I had nine months waiting to go into the Peace Corps. I was in a teaching English project, which I don't have a passion for teaching English at all. I was trying to figure out what to do after college, and I really liked languages. I had studied Spanish and French, and so that's why I had studied abroad twice, was to be able to experience both languages.

[00:23:29] And even though in both cases I lived with host families and did have some opportunities to integrate, I still left with a desire to be more integrated into a community. I felt that when I went on these programs, it was hard to get away from spending time with other American students to a certain degree. And I really wanted to speak Spanish all of the time. And so that was my main personal motivation for going into the Peace Corps was that there was a structure of support where I could be connected to a way in which I could be fully the only American in a town or that I was regularly interacting with. And so I did that for two years and then did a master's program in Monterey, California in international policy, focused on immigration, and then came to Texas after that. So yeah, that's why

when you said, did I miss anywhere when I came to Texas, I wasn't really sure where my home was anymore, I guess [laughs]. This is my home.

Moureen Kaki [00:24:43] Yeah, yeah.

Katy Murdza [00:24:46] I was still trying not to move too much anymore, I guess.

Moureen Kaki [00:24:49] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, it sounds like you made a lot of homes in a lot of places, which is really cool. Definitely not a bad way to do it. Yeah, that's awesome. And who are some folks - and maybe there is no exact answer to this, and that's okay, too. But are there any folks that you would say you would call mentors or people who have inspired you to continue to do this work?

Katy Murdza [00:25:15] Yeah, I think it's really hard for me to pick one person. I think that I've been so fortunate to be connected with organizers here in Texas, because before I moved to San Antonio, I was working in advocacy, but I really couldn't call myself an organizer before I got involved in SA Stands Coalition. I think I told you how I ended up focusing on immigration, but I think something that's been really important for me in the last few years is stepping back from that a little and seeing the connection between - I was focused on immigration for a very long time and then having that lead me to - I was focused, I was advocating for an end to family detention and having that lead me to work ending all detention and fighting against policing and prisons and issues that are all interconnected. And so through that learning about abolition from organizers within SA Stands. I was volunteering with Defund SAPD for a while in 2020.

Katy Murdza [00:26:31] And I just feel like a lot of what I believe and share now on those topics, it's not from one single person, but it came from many, many organizers who I learned from in those spaces, and that's continuing. Here in Houston, there's the Houston Abolitionist Collective that I'm also a part of. There's various coalitions of criminal justice groups. And then I also have been involved some with groups that are fighting against the freeway expansion and for increased transit and bike lanes and those sorts of things. And really, there's just a common theme of how we spend our resources in the US, in Texas, and all of our communities in terms of just that we put a lot of our money into enforcement, into policing, into prisons, detention centers, borders, the military. And there's so much that our communities need. And so even though when I first got here and people were talking about transit issues, that wasn't something that I've been involved in in the past, I started to see that it is overlapping a lot, because that's something that our community should have, and it comes down to the same reasons that we don't have these things.

Moureen Kaki [00:27:59] Yeah, absolutely. And thank you for sharing that. It's funny because organizers all tend to give the same answer. They don't know how to credit one individual person or thing, and they all end up crediting each other. So it's like a feedback of the gratitude between us. You can't expect any less either.

Katy Murdza [00:28:20] I was talking with some people yesterday about how many monuments and statues we have in the US to people who are historical figures that are very problematic. And I was talking about how I would rather we see people that reflect my beliefs more instead of those people. But what I really wish is that we would see more celebration of movements and groups of people, because I think that would get away from - I mean, all of us are imperfect. There's many people who are more problematic than others, but I think what's really the beautiful thing to celebrate are the ideas and the movements.

Moureen Kaki [00:29:02] And speaking of ideas, you mentioned about how you didn't necessarily take a step back from immigration organizing, but took a step back in terms of the view and seeing what's connected and how all forms of detention and immigration go hand in hand. Could you explain the connection between these two things as the way you see it a little bit more?

Katy Murdza [00:29:24] Yeah. I think that working in a detention center, I mean the government will say that we have jails and prisons and juvenile detention centers and family detention and detention, but all of it is the same idea of punishment or really this idea of revenge against something. And in some cases people have caused actual harm and in some cases they haven't even caused harm such as someone coming to the border to seek asylum. But regardless, it's a completely ineffective way of dealing with whether there is a problem or just the nonexistence of a problem. And as I mentioned, my main concern is the human rights violations. But also we're spending all of our resources on these things so that our communities can't have other things. And it's all a distraction where we can scapegoat the people who - because once you're in, whether it's a detention center or a prison, then people assume that you have done something wrong and that you don't have something to contribute to society. So then it's easy to scapegoat those people and say, "That's where our problems come from, and we need to put more and more of our priority on that."

Katy Murdza [00:30:45] And so detention centers are nearly identical or even identical to prisons in that often the same facilities are just recycled as these different types of incarceration. If we manage to close one of them, it's still sitting there, and someone wants to benefit from using it for a similar thing and they recycle it to just detain a different group of people. And then beyond that, you see the intersections of so many other issues because we see the problems that come from having trans people in detention. We see the connection between racism and detention and environmental health and all these other issues that we're fighting for. And so I think that's why, like you mentioned, organizers all working together and supporting each other. We end up realizing that our work overlaps and trying to support each other.

Moureen Kaki [00:31:52] Thank you so much for that answer, Katy. And you mentioned earlier the distinguishing point growing, when you identified yourself as an organizer. Can you talk to us about what it means to organize and advocate for an idea versus just supporting an idea, in theory.

Katy Murdza [00:32:12] Yeah. I would love for someone to give me the answer on that. I'm always still working on it. Because I've had several different roles that the skills and the work overlap but are different. I used to do advocacy, and so I was mostly documenting problems and then putting them in different formats to show to the public and to elected officials, trying to get them to take action on it. And now in my role as an organizer, I still mostly do capacity building and campaign strategy for a coalition of organizations. So it's really organizing existing organizations for the most part, while we do have community members who join directly as opposed to, for example, going door to door or trying to get individual people to mobilize.

Katy Murdza [00:33:14] But I guess for me, a lot of it is providing the connections between different resources and groups and, I guess, getting people to work together, because we are so powerful if we do work together. But our society is very discouraging, and we're very much purposefully discouraged from working together against those in power. So I

think being strategic and bringing our power together and finding ways that different people can bring - I guess finding places for different people to plug in with the skills and the resources that they have. But always still trying to figure out my role and how to go about it.

Moureen Kaki [00:34:10] Yeah, but I think that's a constantly changing thing. And I think that's a mark of you as a good organizer, is that it's not static. Needs change in a given moment, in a given community. And the fact that viable to that and prepared to change speaks a lot to your investment in this and your abilities to be a good organizer. So for whatever it's worth, I thought it was a fantastic answer.

Katy Murdza [00:34:32] Thank you.

Moureen Kaki [00:34:33] Yeah, of course. Thank you for the work that you're doing, because it's not easy. It's not easy to stay committed to these ideas and it's even less easy to stay committed to these ideas when it's not family members that you're relying on, to where you're needing to do this out of a personal response, not necessarily an issue that you're voluntarily joining and putting your energy into, to commit to. And you also said something a little bit earlier, when we were talking about monuments and mentors and things like that. You mentioned it would be cool to see an ode to these ideas and movements that make things happen. What are some of the ideas, if there are specific philosophies that you can name that guide your work or your - not the theory, but the theory.

Katy Murdza [00:35:33] Yeah, I think I was interested in abolition before 2020, and many other people have continued to learn so much since then and have seen the opportunity. While there's also been a lot of increased challenges, also the opportunity with more people speaking about it and connecting issues like I talked about before, between our criminal legal system and immigration, policing, prisons. So that's something that's very important to me. I think just an anti-racism, anti- every form of oppression like I talked about before, how all of it really overlaps in our work. So while I think all of us are affected by these systems of incarceration and the unjust allocation of our resources. And we, over and over, see they disproportionately impact Black people, people of color in general, LGBT people, and disabled people. And I see that in detention, and I know that that exists within every issue. So yeah, those are some of the main themes of how I see this work.

Moureen Kaki [00:37:09] Got you. And what is the organization that you're working for now? Sorry, I think you may have said.

Katy Murdza [00:37:15] I'm the Texas regional organizer for the Immigrant Legal Resource Center. They're based in San Francisco, but we have a Texas team.

Moureen Kaki [00:37:24] That's awesome. And this is a recent position that you started, right?

Katy Murdza [00:37:29] Yeah, I started in December. But like I mentioned, I've been working with the SA Stands Coalition as a volunteer for several years, so I worked closely with the ILRC through that.

Moureen Kaki [00:37:41] Okay, wonderful. Awesome. And Katy, that's pretty much all the questions that I had for today. I want to give you just a final end space in case there was

something that you wanted to add that I didn't touch up on or basically anything, anything to expand from earlier, anything that comes to mind, given what we discussed.

Katy Murdza [00:38:05] Yeah, I think something that I really like about my current work, I know I've mentioned how it intersects with the criminal legal system, but just when I first got involved in immigration, I often saw the good immigrant/bad immigrant dichotomy. I'm trying to use examples of - I worked in family detention, so I saw a lot of resources, a lot of volunteers going - and understandably, people don't want children to be detained and neither do I. And so a lot of resources go into that. But I think I saw how then those mothers and children who are in detention would have arrived at the border with an adult family member who is now separated and in an adult detention center. And those places were a lot harder. It was a lot harder there to find lawyers, to get people to pay attention to you. And so I just saw many examples of people looking for the most compelling immigrant story to put in advocacy and communications.

Katy Murdza [00:39:12] And so it's been really important to me to see organizations, my own included, and others that I work for, not shying away as much from including someone who has a criminal history, talking about how interactions with the criminal system can increase their likelihood of deportation. And a lot of the campaigns that our coalitions work on are working with criminal justice organizations to decrease arrests in our community, because arrests are the cause of the majority of deportations. But when we decrease arrests for immigrants, even though we're an immigration coalition and that's our main focus, it benefits the rest of the community as well. Because even if someone isn't at risk of deportation, there's all these other harms of arrests. And so that is another idea and theme that has been very important to me. And it has been a great privilege to meet other groups and individuals who have a focus on that as well.

Moureen Kaki [00:40:28] Yeah, that's a wonderful and incredibly selfless, especially in the context of an oral history interview, point to end on, and I appreciate you sharing that. It reminds me of a panel actually, that I was discussing with a friend recently, that came up about how even just trying to get funding for non-profits, people are so focused on building the ideal victim. They have to be worthy of sympathy in order to generate this revenue in the most right way. And it's much harder to do that, I imagine, for individual adults. And then even more so to justify when we put these labels, like a criminal, which is arbitrary, but one, wholly negative, and could mean a slew of things from, like you said, not having actually caused any kind of harm or even physical damage - which is not harm, in my opinion - to people, be labeled in the same category potentially as somebody who committed sexual violence or something like murder or something.

Moureen Kaki [00:41:32] The spectrum is insane. But even that, the fact that we have to create this perfect victim and model for people to garner even a little bit of sympathy, enough to help, is just a sad state of affairs. But the great news is, to end on a hopeful note, the great news is people like Katy and amazing people who are selfless and wonderfully committed to the things that they do are doing good work to counter that. So I really appreciate you, Katy, for the work that you do. It's not easy work and for coming today and taking the time to talk about it and about yourself. I have no doubt that anybody who listens to your interview would be inspired by the work that you do, and hopefully they are. I appreciate you sharing that.

Katy Murdza [00:42:18] Well, thank you so much for reaching out. This is a great project, and I'm really happy to be a part of it.

Moureen Kaki [00:42:23] Yeah, I'm excited that your voice will be added into the collection, so yeah, thanks again.