

Bold(h)er

Beyond a Statistic

Noemi Perez:

Believe in yourself, because you're your first cheerleader, and you have to. And so, nothing and no one has the power to define you or your future. When you know that, and feel it, and live it every day, nobody can stop you. You're unstoppable at that point.

Lisa Bragg:

Noemi Perez was born and raised in Immokalee, Florida, where today and historically the population is mostly migrant workers and immigrants. Around 40% of the residents live below the poverty level. While they are caring and proud people, it's a place that has a lot of life defining statistics that are hard to break free from. But Noemi is working to change that cycle of life and has a bold vision for the future.

Welcome to Bold(h)er, stories of and for women to stand out, brought to you by BMO for Women. I'm Lisa Bragg.

If you know Naples, Florida, one of the richest addresses in the United States, just 40 miles northeast is Immokalee.

Noemi Perez:

It's pronounced Immokalee, and it means "my home".

Lisa Bragg:

Noemi, Immokalee is a fundamental part of your story. It's rural, it's agricultural. And you told me that the area has many generations of migrant and immigrant workers. But today, the faces are mostly from Mexico, Guatemala, and Haiti. Tell us about Immokalee, your home. Paint a picture of the type of day many would have there.

Noemi Perez:

Daily, they would get up about 4:00 a.m. Get ready to go out. Many of them walk, so transportation is a challenge, so they would walk to a local... We have small little mom and pop grocery stores. They would walk to the local grocery store. They would wait for the bus to come and arrive and pick them up. Meanwhile, if they have children at home, those children normally have a older sibling that would get up early morning, get their other younger siblings ready for school. Many of them, whether they walk or ride the bus to get their siblings to school. Parents normally would arrive about 6:00 or 7:00 in the evening. Some of them just enough time to maybe eat something, and then they would run off to maybe another job at the packing house. So, a lot of the time, it's give or take. It just depends on the family dynamic. Some of the families do have a grandmother, or an aunt, or someone who lives in the household with them as well that helps with the children.

But for the most part, the parents are the ones who are out in the fields 6:00, 7:00, in the morning, hot sun. In the winters, the rain. And then they don't get home until, like I said, 6:00 or 7:00 in the afternoon. So, very hard labor that they have to endure day in and day out. The work is very stringent. You're talking about lifting 50, when they fill a bucket with the produce, about 50 pounds, and having to lift over their shoulder up into a truck. Imagine having to do that nonstop six days a week, maybe seven, depending on how high of a demand there is for the work, and only being paid, at times, minimum wage. And so, for them, it's a need to put food on the table, to take care of their families.

It's very humbling for me, because I also did work in the fields for quite some time. When I married my husband, his family was in produce. And he went through a lot of the same types of challenges that our students have to go through. My parents were also, worked in the fields. But then, my father retired, because he was hurt, so he could no longer work in the fields. That's what he started in when he came to the U.S. And then, he became a pastor. My mom became pretty much the breadwinner in our household, because he was hurt and he was a pastor. As you know, probably know, pastors don't make a lot of money. They're considered more of servants, and they go out and help the community.

My mom opened up a little small business in her home. She was a home daycare provider. Many people call her the baby whisperer, because she just was so good at it, and kids love her, and she just has the patience. And so, I always tell her, "Mom, even though you consider it just a daycare, you were actually were a teacher, because you were the first person that the children began to learn from, so you cultivated that, or molded them into who they were when they went into pre-K or kindergarten." So, I said, "You had a really, really, huge and important job."

Lisa Bragg:

You had these great parents who really were trying to make a difference and make a difference in the world that they live in. You grew up in a very proud but very poor community. Was there a moment for you that was a formative moment that said, "I'm going to change things for myself and for the people of this community."? Was there one moment that you can say that you point back to that, that was a real game changer for you?

Noemi Perez:

I don't feel there was one moment. I feel there's bits and pieces of little things that I was able to really be exposed to. My dad, as a pastor, I often tell people that I was raised similar to a rockstar, because we often traveled, and not often, we traveled a lot. And so, we would have to, of course, go to school. The minute we got home from school, pack our stuff. He had to go to do a revival or he had to visit another church in another county. Sometimes, we were driving for long periods of time. I would do my homework during service, probably fall asleep under the pews. And then, get home about midnight or so, and then get up for school at 6:00 in the morning. That was one of the things that we often did as we grew up.

Seeing a lot of what my father did with people, because he was known as the walking man in Immokalee, because he would always walk everywhere. His health and keeping himself active was very important to him, especially after his accident, because he had an issue with his ankle. He was always walking and making sure that he would go out and meet with people. He always felt this calling to, whether it was someone he met on the street, he just knew they needed help in some way. If it was only by prayer, or connecting them with other resources, or giving them the little money that he had in his pocket, that's what he would do.

So, I saw that. And many times during the weekend, I would go off with him and walk with him around. I would see people come to him. I was very proud of him, because everyone knew him. And they knew that when they needed something or they were in need they trusted him enough to come to him to ask for that.

Also seeing my mom really being determination and just the grit that she had as having to become the sole breadwinner for our home, and supporting my father and his dreams and pastoring, and having the same type of vision in mind was very impactful to me as well. To see someone or a marriage that there was so much support within.

And then, just little things here and there with just talking to teachers and really... For whatever reason, as I grew up, I always was more... I guess, older people just were so much more interesting to me. I always felt like I was an old soul. So, my maturity level was much, I don't know... I was much more mature than most, and I thought about different things. Maybe it was the way I was brought up. I worried about things. I worried about financials. I mean, there was just little things that other kids wouldn't even think about that I would.

I remember, one time, we would often travel into another city called Fort Myers, which is about an hour away from Immokalee. We would travel about once every two to three weeks to buy groceries, because in Immokalee we didn't have a big grocery store. And so, we would often drive. I remember Martin Luther King Jr. Drive road, and there was this huge building on the corner. I always wondered, what do people do in there? What is that building? It just intrigued me so much. One day, I think I was eight or nine, and we were coming up to the building again. I was always mesmerized by it. I said to my mom, I said, "Do you see that building, mom?" And she says, "Yes." I said, "I'm going to own something like that one day." And she said, "Yes, you will." And so, it was that empowerment moment from my mom that I respected for everything that she did. And then, the fact that she could've said, "Are you crazy? No. How could you think about that?" But she encouraged that. She continued to fuel that flame.

And then, just different moments, I think, throughout my time. Yeah, I can't pick of one little thing. One of the things my father always said to me was, "You're going to have a lot of different experiences. Many of them are going to be bad, more than good." But he said, "No matter what, you always learn. You always learn. Don't ever take any bad experiences just something that's there to knock you down. You learn from it. You evaluate it. And you get back and you learn from it." And so, that's often what I did.

Lisa Bragg:

Sometimes, it's hard to see outside, though. So, you take these trips to Fort Myers and you'd see these big buildings. And your parents, obviously, had that positive mindset. I guess, to go back to your childhood, was it hard, though, to see beyond where you lived? Because, so often, you have to see it to be it. Any thought of that for you?

Noemi Perez:

It was hard. Growing up as a pastor's kid, you often always are in a bubble to think that your calling is ministry, and as a child of this type of individual this is what you're going to do. And you stay in your community. We didn't have a lot to aspire to. Many of the people who were around us, I mean, even growing up, there was a high pregnancy, teen pregnancy, rate. You didn't hear about a lot of students

graduating high school, much less going to college. It was you either figure out by 16 if school is for you. If it's not, don't waste your time, start making money, and whether that's going into the fields, whether that's working at a local grocery store or any store within Immokalee. Some of the times, you couldn't even think about going and working in Naples, or in Fort Myers, or anywhere an hour away, because you're like, "How do I get there? That's nonsense." Owning a business wasn't even talked about. Nobody ever mentioned that.

So, there was a lot of different dynamics. For me, it was, I think my escape was you see TV and there's different things that you see on there. But I can tell you teachers, certain teachers, were an impact for me. Because, they saw the potential I had. And they would often talk to me about that. They would often pour more into me to help me believe. I can tell you, that was a huge factor to me not giving in to the statistics that we often get from Immokalee.

My story is not traditional like others. You have people who graduated high school, went off to college, did great things, experienced great things in college, and then came back to their community. Well, my story's different, because I started off as a statistic. Why I say that was because I was a teen mom. I got pregnant at the age of 15, and I was married at the age of 15. I started to fall into that bracket of what people were considered, I guess, a failure. Because now, you've made this decision, and now you're part of this story now. And so, for me, I always felt that it wasn't the end. Although this happened, it wasn't going to define my future.

Many people I came across would often just make, I wouldn't say comments, but they would just give me, I guess, encouragement. I remember one time, I was very, very, broken at this point in time when I met this woman, but I was deciding what I wanted to do. I always knew I wanted to graduate high school. I always knew I wanted to go to college. Education was key for me. I knew that. No matter what, it was going to happen. And so, that was always a goal for me. My father always planted that in my mind was education is key, knowledge is power. No one can take that away from you. So, you go and continue to go and fight for it.

I remember I was at a moment where I had already graduated. I wanted to study something. Growing up in Immokalee, you don't have a lot of options. You see firefighter, you see police officer, you see a teacher. Well, I knew I didn't want to be any of those things. So there was a technical school, and they were giving out scholarships for certain things. They were like surgical technician, and cosmetology, and things like that.

I said, "Okay, well, I like to work with my hands, so let me see, let me take a stab at this." So, went in, filled out all of the paperwork. They were giving a scholarship. I had an interview. The woman was asking me questions. Why was I interested? What foresee with this? And it was surgical technician. I was trying to go in for that. What did I see with this career? Just different, different, questions. And so, I answered all of them, felt like I did an awesome job.

She calls me back in and says, "I'm sorry but I can't approve this scholarship, and I can't approve for your to go into the course." I said, "Why?" And she said, "Because, I feel you're just doing this just to do it, and it's not your passion." I was just so upset and hurt. Because, to me, it was like, now here's this woman that's getting in the way of something that I want to do, and that I felt like, "Okay, let me just try it. I don't know. You don't know." Mind you, I don't have a mentor at this point. I don't have anyone that I can go to, like a guidance counselor or anything, to talk to about any of this. I was just, on a whim, let me just do this.

I left there. And I said, "Okay, well, I guess, school isn't for me right now. I'm going to go start working." So, I started working at a grocery store, a local grocery store, as a cashier. I never forgot that. It was a huge impact for me. I think it was, at the same time, a challenge. It was like, okay, you're telling me no, but I'm telling you yes, and I'm going to do something. And so, I'm not going to let you, again, define who I am going to be in the future.

Funny story is I seen her in the community. And I've actually had a chance, now in my role, to work with her. I shared the story with her, and I thanked her. Because, I said, "Even though at that moment I didn't realize it, but you set me on my journey. I was going through a detour, and you moved me to where I needed to go." And she was like, "Oh my gosh." Because, at first, when I was telling her, she felt really bad. She was like, "Oh my God." And I said, "No, no, no, no. I bring this up to thank you." I will never forget that ever, because I remember how upset and hurt, but then again how determined that made me.

Lisa Bragg:

That's a formational moment. But what happened to leap you ahead?

Noemi Perez:

There was one woman that would often come through my line. One day, she stopped and she said, "I have an opportunity for you, if you're interested." She said, "We are hiring at the local health department, and they're hiring for an administrative assistant. This individual is very particular about individuals, people that she's interviewed. But I think you are her perfect match, because of your personality and everything." I said, "Sure." Because, at that time, I think I was getting paid \$7 an hour or something, and this is going to pay much more. I knew that. Maybe \$10 or whatever. Of course, because I'm thinking, "Yeah, more money, more help towards my family."

Went in for the interview. I'll never forget that supervisor. Because, she's one of the ones that I learned so much from. I would call her one of my bad mentors. But I learned so much. And so, went in, met her, she was very different. Just overall, just a different person. Very frank, not hospitable, didn't have a nice bone in her body. She ended up hiring me. The good thing is that I was very computer savvy. I'm a quick learner. So, anything she threw at me, I just did very quickly, and she loved that. No matter what, she never was really too disrespectful to me. But I didn't care. I was enjoying this. This is like, yeah, I got another job, and I'm learning. This is great. Also, I had other people who were there that I really cared for and got to know on a personal level.

Lisa Bragg:

Fast forward, you had a series of administrative jobs, mostly based on grants. You joined the Immokalee Foundation in 2008. What was it like that first feeling of joining something?

Noemi Perez:

Fell in love. Fell absolutely in love with everything that they were working, the programs that they were working on at that point, and then what they envisioned in the future. Just the fact that I was able to connect with students. I mean, it was scary. It was very scary for me, because, I mean, here I am. Teenagers are something else. And so, getting to know them... But I knew that I had to build trust. I had to build trust first and foremost with them. I could not come in and try to mandate anything.

It was an interesting first year. I mean, to this day, I call those students, my first students, friends. They call me. They're married. They have kids. I tell them to stop, because they make me feel old. I created longtime friendships with all of the students that I came across. Throughout my time here at the foundation, I took every opportunity. When people were scared to do certain things, I always looked at the positive in it. We were growing as a foundation, and there was things that we couldn't afford at times. We couldn't afford another staff member. Okay, well then, I'm going to put 16 hours a day, because these students, they're our responsibility, and this is what we signed up for.

I think, very early on, I always saw the foundation as not a job. It was part of my life. And so, I think seeing that and seeing it through a different lens gave me opportunity for different things. Because, I was a student advocate, I was promoted to a coordinator, then a program manager. Then I was a program director for about three years until the board gave me the position as the CEO. So, there's a lot of different things that happened. I wouldn't change it.

I remember, the second year, I can remember it like it was yesterday. We were in a small little office. There was five of us and we had desks all in that small office. At that time, they called it, the executive director was a female. I always highly respected her. She walked in, we were going to have a meeting, she walked in and went into the conference room. I just remember having just that moment. And I said to myself, "One day, I'm going to be in her shoes, and I'm going to run this organization, and that's my goal." And so, at that moment, I set that for myself, and I voiced it.

No one in the company, not even the board, everyone knew it, because they would ask, "What do you see yourself doing?" "I want to become the CEO. That's what I want to do. And so, if I have the opportunity, great. If not, what do I need to do. Why do you think I don't have that?" I guess, I was never afraid to vocalize my dreams and goals, even if people... Like eight years old, telling my mom that, I didn't care. It was like, I'm going to vocalize it. Because if I don't, then it's not going to become real.

Lisa Bragg:

A lot of people are afraid of that. What would your advice be to people, women, who they see that next job that they want and being able to vocalize it? Because, it makes it real when you do that.

Noemi Perez:

I think, for females, especially females, we're very often don't want to ruffle any feathers. We don't want to say anything. It depends on how you grew up too. I think, for Hispanics, I can speak on that, for us, our culture is taught to don't speak up, don't talk until you're spoken to. Don't share anything with anybody. Be very private. That's a huge thing in our culture, be very private. You don't need to share anything. I would say, what does it hurt? At the end of the day, what does it hurt? People would be surprised that, even the woman with my story with the scholarship, even then, I didn't always get a yes. I didn't always get, "Okay, yes. That's a great idea. Here you go." That moment changed me to the point where I was determined to, I don't want to say, prove her wrong, but I think it was more of determination for me inside. Because, I had a goal, I just didn't know how and what it was at that point. I just knew I had a goal here.

And so, my goal didn't end because whenever, as I mentioned to you, education was always important to me. Although I had a high school diploma, even starting with the foundation, I knew I wanted to go to college. So what did I do? Worked full time, was a full time mom, and went to college

full time. Because, it was a goal. It was something I had to. And now, when I started with the foundation, I was more pressed for time. Because, here I am, this was where the light bulb went off. Here I am providing guidance to these students and telling them, "Graduate, go to college," do this, do that. I'm a hypocrite. Here I am. That's the other part that really pushed me. Okay, now you have to go. You got to go do it, because these kids are relying on you for advice and guidance. And now, you're considered a role model. Here you are. And so, go off and do it, and I completed it. In four years, I was able to get my bachelor's in business administration.

I tell myself, my kids and my husband always laugh at me, because I say, "It's not over yet. I still have goals when it comes to my education." And so, I may not get there in the next two years, but eventually I'm going to check off that box.

Lisa Bragg:

What is your next goal? Have you vocalized it?

Noemi Perez:

I have, to a mentor, to my husband, to my kids, because I want to get them ready. But I do want to go for my master's and eventually my PhD.

Lisa Bragg:

That's great. That's great, great goals. What's your goal for the Immokalee Foundation? Tell us about that.

Noemi Perez:

The goal is huge. I think people, especially my team, gets a little nervous when I start vocalizing things. I want the foundation to be able to help every student in Immokalee. I know it's a big goal, because we have, just in the school system, from kinder to 12th grade, about 6,000 students. And so, currently we serve 1,400 ranging from kinder through post secondary. That's a big goal. I think that we have phenomenal donors, phenomenal partnerships, supporters, people who believe in what we do, and an extraordinary staff that is just so passionate about what we do. I think, sometimes, when I talk, they get scared. But they ultimately get excited inside, because there's nothing like the work that we do. We transform lives every day. And there's nothing more rewarding than that, to be able to see dreams come true. That's what we do. We don't do it alone. It takes a village. That's why all of these partners and everything that we've put together with this program is just so important to us and to the success that we have.

Lisa Bragg:

A lot of it is that you didn't let somebody define you. And now, you're not letting people define the kids that you're part of. Talk to me a little bit about that a little bit more.

Noemi Perez:

That's key. I haven't mastered that yet. Things still creep up here and there, depending on who you're talking to and who your audience is. When I talk about learning from different experiences, that has a

lot to do with it. It starts with self-love, first and foremost. You have to accept who you are. You have to love who you are. You have to know and really know that. God created you unique. There's only one you. There's only one you with your DNA. Use that to your advantage.

Sometimes, I feel that people, and I have fallen victim of this too, you want to fit in, and you get around a group that you want to be like, and you don't feel right, because it feels like work. You shouldn't feel that way when you're trying to be you. And so, people may tell you you're dreams are crazy. Use that as fuel to light that fire. It may not be the way that you envision it.

Even for me, my journey, I looked at that building, I didn't know what it was, what the title was, but now I meant I'm going to be a CEO one day. That's what I meant. I didn't know that. But I'm here today. I think that, that's what people, a lot of times, they want... You want an outline you want it to be very detailed to you, to say, "Here you go. This is your journey. Follow every step and you're going to get there." I don't even wish it was like that. I'm glad we have the way we do, because our journeys are just so different in every way. But I know many times people have fear, especially women, to vocalize, to share what their dreams and aspirations are. I would just say, find people around you who will continue to empower you. Even those that don't empower you are helpful to your journey. But don't ever give up on yourself. There's a reason why you have a dream. There's a reason why. Write it down, vocalize it, find different ways to get there.

For me, I used what I was good at. I was good at talking to people. I was good at making them feel good. I was good at making them feel important and equal. So quickly, I gained their respect, because they knew I wasn't fake. I don't care if you're a person on the street to the president of the United States. We all put our pants on one leg at a time. I'm going to respect each and every one, because as human beings, I think that's our mission is to respect one another and to value one another.

It's just take the leap. Nothing's going to happen. You're not going to die. Just do it. People may say, like this woman that said, "No, this is not you," she was right. She was right. No is a no maybe right now. But keep going at it and it'll shift into something else. That's the unique thing about life.

Lisa Bragg:

I think that's where you said about the person the street all the way up to the president, that what's going on today doesn't need to define the person you want to be or the person of the future.

Noemi Perez:

It's so funny how I think back. Had I been told I would be doing all these different things before I got to where I was going to get to, I would've been like, "You are nuts. I'm exhausted already." It's just so fascinating how I just think back and here's this little girl from Immokalee that, I mean, I put every stat that was the label that people had placed on me and I just crumpled it up and threw it away, and said, "No way." That's what, when people tell me, "You need to share your story. You need to share your story," and I'm always like, "Why? There's nothing interesting about me." But they hear it, and they say, "Because of that. Because girls need to hear that." I know it's true.

Now, I want to make sure that women, regardless of it's a woman or a man, but believe in yourself, because you're your first cheerleader. You have to. And so, nothing and no one has that power to

define you or your future. When you know that, and feel it, and live it every day, nobody can stop you. You're unstoppable at that point.

Lisa Bragg:

Now, in an earlier conversation, you were telling me the story of Oscar, who through the foundation and your efforts became a certified engineer. What does it feel like to see him and all the children you work with redefining Immokalee and breaking the stats?

Noemi Perez:

When you see them walk across the stage, whether it's their high school graduation, their post secondary graduation, their first career, that's what makes it worth it. All of the work, everything that you went through with that individual, it just all disappears, because that's what we do. We transformed Oscar's life. And not just Oscar, there's just so many students that we transform that had we not been in play guiding them and introducing them, networking... Because, we know that's huge. Networking, it's all about who you know. Those are the things that they learn. I wish, even though I appreciate my journey, I know had I had the Immokalee Foundation in my life, things would've been different. I probably could've avoided some heartaches and challenges.

For us to be able to relieve the stress of knowing what you want to do, and where your interests lie, and what you want to study, and here's your career. Here's here locally, and that's what he wanted to do. He wanted to stay her locally near his parents, because he's very close to them. We were able to create that great story for him. I have so many more that they come, and they'll text me, they'll call me. I just saw one student. I was at FGCU and she was in the library. She was like, "Oh my gosh. It's you." They tell me, this is crazy, not only do they thank me, but they tell me, "I'm so proud of you Miss Noemi. I'm so proud of where you're at. No one can do it better than you can." Those words mean so much to me. Even though you feel like you're pouring into them and giving all of this. But when they pour back into you, there's nothing like it.

Lisa Bragg:

You've been featured on so many top 40 lists, and this list, and that list, and won awards as a CEO, and the different... But does that, hearing the voices of all the young people you've helped, does that matter more to you than all those lists?

Noemi Perez:

Oh, yeah. Yeah. They gifted me, for Christmas, I think it was Christmas, different quotes of just different students. I think it was maybe 12 students. That's what I have at home, and that's what I look at every day. That's what makes it worth it. For me, my passion, and I know it is, first and foremost, faith, number one, because for me, that's something that my parents installed in me. Serving others, and that's community, family, whoever it is, that's another passion that I have. That all comes from how I grew up and in the community of Immokalee, because that's who we are.

We are a faith-based, loving, prideful community. I often share that with people is don't come here and feel sorry for Immokalee. There's a lot of great things in Immokalee. We are proud of who we are and what we have. All we need is for more of that encouragement. Pour some more seeds into the kids and into different people out here. It's not about a handout, it's a hand up.

That's what I share with everyone, when we talk about Immokalee. Because, yes, we have these statistics. Yes, it's an impoverished community. But they're so proud of who they are and the culture. Part of that culture is the culture we have at the foundation. We treat each other like family. When you change that dynamic, and you care about one another, and it's just people love to be there and love to be around. One of the things I always tell my team is our number goal and our mission to those kids. Whatever agenda we have, at the end of the day, the question is, is it for the betterment of those students? Not for me, not for you, because it's not my foundation, it's the Immokalee Foundation. I think that, that's key is never forgetting our call and why we're here.

Lisa Bragg:

Noemi, on Bold(h)er, we always ask these three questions. Tell us a time when you were bold?

Noemi Perez:

I guess, maybe I have a different definition, but when I am passionate and I believe in something, I feel like that's when I become bold. Maybe going after my contractor's license and sitting in a room full of men, I was the only woman, I think maybe that was pretty bold. I guess, I feel maybe every day, I'm like that, because I don't... It's not that I don't care, but like I mentioned to you, I've a huge responsibility. I represent our community, so I have to be the voice. I got to go out there, and I got to make sure that our community is good, and that our students are good. I don't know, maybe that.

Lisa Bragg:

When do you wish you were bolder?

Noemi Perez:

I wasn't always this way. I think that the journey, as I mentioned, has molded me into who I am today, and it continues to mold me. Because, I will tell you, three years ago, I probably wouldn't have wanted to do this, and that's the truth. It's taken me a long time to be comfortable in this type of scenario.

I mean, I think, because growing up, I didn't mention this, but I was bullied in middle school. I feel like maybe then I feel I should've learned to use my voice and really just spoken out instead of taking it. I think that, for the first part of my, when I got married and when I encountered certain things, I was normally quiet. As I mentioned, I didn't want to ruffle any feathers. It was just better for me just to zip it. And then, as I mentioned, different things just happened to help me bring me out and help me to understand that there was power in my voice, and I could use it for good. I would say, back then, when I was going through moments like that. Maybe not in my career. I mean, I think maybe there are moments in my career where I.. But I can't think of any. I'm very strategic too in how I voice things. I really good, I feel, with emotional intelligence. I know when and when not to.

Lisa Bragg:

That segues really well, though, into what the next question is, is what would you say to your 12-year-old self?

Noemi Perez:

I would probably say, enjoy the ride. Make mistakes. It's okay. No one has it all together. Pay a little bit more attention to my parents' words, because there was a moment in time, you may not believe this, but I thought I knew it all. The advice that others give you, it's not to hurt you, but it's to help you. I would tell her to be bold. Be bold and courageous.

Lisa Bragg:

Thank you to our guest, Noemi Perez, CEO of the Immokalee Foundation. If you want more information on the foundation, go to immokaleefoundation.org. I'm Lisa Bragg, and you've been listening to Bold(h)er, stories of and for women who stand out. Brought to you by BMO for Women. Thanks to everyone who recently rated the podcast. It makes a difference so other people can find it. Thank you for listening.