



At the Southern border this Summer Benjamin said he wanted entry into Texas to find a job in Dallas, federal immigration documents say. He had no fear or concern about being returned to his native El Salvador.

**But Benjamin barely babbles.
He's 2 years old.**

Fabrication is how the boy's attorney Paul Zoltan characterizes the alleged interview that led to his removal from the United States. The Dallas attorney has brought a complaint on the boy's behalf and that of his 8-year-old sister and his 28-year-old mother, Roxana, to federal immigration authorities. The trio have immigration documents with nearly identical responses, but none are signed.

Rapid deportations in which asylum seekers aren't given the chance to appear before a judge or find an attorney who might scrutinize documents, aren't uncommon. There were 1.5 million expedited removals from 2008 through 2021 — nearly a quarter of all border arrests.

"My sister never thought they would use lies to deport her,"

said Roxana's brother Jose, who lives in Dallas.

Speaking from El Salvador, Roxana insisted she and her two children were never interviewed. She did tell officers she had a brother in Dallas. But Benjamin didn't say he came looking for work, or to go to school, "He never said that! He can barely talk," she said.

They came looking for asylum because she had received death threats from gangs.

"They never interviewed me. Never. They didn't give us a chance to explain our case," she said. Now, she lives in fear and has blocked numbers on her phone. "I'm afraid. They could hurt my kids."

Immigration forms filled out by border agents — including documents labeled "sworn statement" — contain important determinations for asylum seekers only if they fear return to their homeland. The immigration document is somewhat analogous to a police narrative on an arrest form. **The Customs & Border Patrol Code of Conduct** prohibits employees from knowingly making "false, misleading, incomplete or ambiguous statements, whether oral or written."

"The whole thing is set up for failure," said attorney Mich González of the **Southern Poverty Law Center**. It is particularly difficult for indigenous people who don't speak Spanish, he said, and for those from West African nations whose first language isn't French.

Appeal is not possible because of the rapid nature of an expedited removal.

"Expedited removal is literally set up in such a way that it really shoves people through the process with very little recourse," González said.

Often the forms indicate the immigrant denied being afraid of returning home and is instead coming to the U.S. to seek work, said Anwen Hughes, the director of legal strategy, refugee programs, at **Human Rights First**. The fear of return question is crucial to begin the asylum process.

"In order to get a credible fear interview, their fear of return has to be recorded because otherwise they get removed," Hughes said.

Zoltan said his client, the young mother, has a strong claim for asylum that would meet the initial credible fear threshold, though that isn't what her documents say.

"I have absolutely no doubt these answers were fabricated,"

Zoltan said.

UKRAINE FALLOUT: Troubled waters in The 'Sea of Peace'

Since the end of the second world war the Finnish government, no matter who was in power or the composition of parliament, has made a habit of not commenting pointedly on the political situation in Russia. Pursuing good relations with all of our neighbors has been the foundational premise of Finland's foreign policy.

The postwar economic relationship between Finland and the Soviet Union, deliberately unencumbered by disputes over human rights, served both sides. Finnish companies expanded their activities in Russia, where cheap raw materials and cheap labour were on offer. Wealthy people from the St Petersburg area bought vacation properties in eastern Finland, and Finns bought investment homes in St Petersburg. In Lapland and eastern Finland especially, trade and tourism flourished, thanks to Russian tourists shopping and holidaying.

More border crossings were built and a fast train connection between Helsinki and St Petersburg was opened. Russians moved to Finland to work or to study and the Russian-speaking minority in our country grew to nearly 100,000. Young Finns also studied at universities in St Petersburg and Moscow. There was active cultural and scientific exchange. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, the border between Finland and Russia was once again a lively space, as it had been before the 1917 revolution.

When Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February of this year, Finland's political leadership began urgent negotiations to join Nato. Some rejoiced at the decision, others didn't. The tremendous rush to membership surprised me.

Finland has long projected itself as a peace broker and our military non-alignment has been a source of pride. After Russia attacked Ukraine, a clear majority of Finns said they favored joining Nato. The change was surprising because just one month earlier only 28% supported membership.

Russia's aggression has brought about other huge changes in Finland. With EU sanctions, the period I described above has been relegated to history. The train connection between Helsinki and St Petersburg has been severed and crossing the border is difficult. Finnish companies have sold their Russian businesses to Russian buyers.

Increased energy costs, rising food prices and inflation, meanwhile, are punishing Finns and the whole of Europe. Unable to buy wood from Russia, the forestry industry must acquire an equal amount of timber here in Finland. This situation has led to large-scale destruction of our forests, to the point that it threatens Finland's pledges to the EU regarding forest carbon sinks.

As a solution, Zoltan wants the family flown back to Texas so Roxana can have what he calls a proper asylum interview.

If his Salvadoran adult client were to pass that, she would enter an overloaded asylum system in which some 400,000 applications await processing at one immigration agency and 660,000 more are slowly making their way through the crowded federal immigration courts.

Hughes said she has seen forms filled out with answers her clients deny having given about fear of return. In one case, a client who is deaf and mute and communicated in a sort of sign language was alleged to have given responses in Spanish.

"You would be astonished at the level of detail Customs and Border Protection allegedly extracted under oath from this man,"

she said.

In another case, Hughes said, a 3-year-old boy allegedly said that he, like Benjamin, was coming to look for a job. "They listed him as coming to the United States to seek employment, which, you know, isn't high on the order of priorities of most 3-year-olds I know," Hughes said.

A group of clients in New York all came through McAllen and had identical responses, she said. "We all get that these forms don't purport to be a transcript," she said. But all said they were looking for jobs in McAllen, even though New York was their final destination, she said.

Benjamin, his sister and his mother arrived in the Rio Grande Valley after the family paid human smugglers \$18,000 to get them into Texas, their Dallas-based

The crisis is tough on the 35,000 people living in Finland who have both Russian and Finnish citizenship. If it continues to escalate, their dual citizenship could cause them problems.

The measured tone of Putin's response toward Finland's Nato application was a surprise. I thought that Russia would react immediately and aggressively because Putin has long stressed the importance of Finland's military non-alignment. Our 1,340-km (833-mile) border will soon become the longest common border between Nato and Russia.

But it is impossible for me to see Nato as an alliance that will foster peace. With Finland and Sweden joining, the military significance of the **Baltic Sea**, which we have long called the **Sea of Peace**, will totally change. And I fear that, as a border country, Finland will be on the frontline if a nuclear war begins.

And because the economies of the US and Europe are headed for recession, the uncertainty risks fueling rightwing populism. People's memories are short, and old mistakes are being repeated in the expectation of a different result. In this fog of interconnected crises, the western world has isolated Russians. The Russian government, for its part, punishes its own citizens when they oppose the war and when they seek democracy.

What concerns me especially are Finnish and EU plans to cut any remaining scientific and cultural ties with Russia. Severing these connections merely helps the Putin government in its efforts to isolate Russia from Europe's supposedly decadent sexual mores, pluralism and human rights.

If Russian people are isolated and left entirely to the Putin sphere of influence, there is a risk that what happened in the Weimar republic after the first world war could repeat itself. If we build walls between people and isolate the Russian people from the rest of Europe, the consequences could be appalling.

Every war, whether short or prolonged, has thus far ended in a peace agreement and subsequent reconstruction. The higher we build the wall to separate Russia's 146 million people from the rest of Europe, the longer the negotiating table for our peace agreement will grow...

"Literature, art and research have the capacity to bring people together to build bridges to peace — even those living in different realities."

From an essay by Finnish writer

Anni Ylävaara
theguardian.com
voxeurop.eu

brother said. The brother, who is bilingual, said when he read the expedited removal forms of his sister and her children, he knew they were false. Responses are nearly identical.

The script on Benjamin's sworn statement reads: "U.S. law provides protection to certain persons who face persecution, harm or torture upon return to their home country. If you fear or have a concern about being removed from the United States or about being sent home, you should tell me so during this interview because you may not have another chance."

When 2-year-old Benjamin had his chance to answer questions, he allegedly said:

Q: "What was the purpose for your entry into the United States?"

A: "To seek employment."

Q: "What was your intended destination?"

A: "To Dallas, Texas"

Q: "Do you have any fear or concern about being returned to your home country or being removed from the United States?"

A: "No"

The three pages documenting Benjamin's interview also indicate the child understood when the border agent dutifully informed him of his rights and that the child declined to speak to a consular officer.

At one point, the agent asked whether the small boy was pregnant. He allegedly responded no.

- Dianne Solis
dallasnews.com