

# Divided Families

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WALTER CRONKITE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM  
AND MASS COMMUNICATION

A photodocumentary project funded by the  
Howard G. Buffett Foundation



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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

On the cover: Rainny 'Lluvia' Mejia looks out the window as she and other children from the orphanage take a field trip to the Aconchi hot springs in Sonora, Mexico. Photograph by Deanna Dent

On the back: Hector, 20, left a fiancee behind in Arizona when he was deported to Mexico. He says they still plan to marry. Photograph by Ashley Lowery





# Divided Families

Left: Student photographer Courtney Sargent shows youngsters in Ixtapan de la Sal, Mexico, photos she has taken of them. Top right: Students Jordan LaPier (left), Amanda Soares (center) and Ian Lee (right) tape a Cronkite NewsWatch special on Divided Families. Bottom right: Cronkite student Teana Wagner (white shirt, center) walks down a street in Durango, Mexico, with friends and members of the Valdez family to a service for Maria Graciela Hernandez Escobedo, who died while trying to cross the Arizona desert.

A young mother whose son is already beginning to forget his father.

U.S. children abandoned in a Mexican orphanage.

Two men who have searched for their missing brother for years.

Border Patrol agents who toil miles from their families.

Senior citizens whose only hope is to see their loved ones once more.

These are the some of the people whose lives and whose families are divided by the U.S.-Mexico border.

The line drawn between Mexico and the U.S. has always meant divisions that go far beyond geography or nationality. For many years, families have lost loved ones to distance and the desert, to the pull of new lives and the rejection of old ones.

This is more true now than ever. As it has become more

difficult to cross the border — legally or illegally — it has become increasingly difficult for families to stay together.

It was with this in mind that a group of advanced students in the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University set out to do a semester-long reporting project in the fall of 2007. Seventeen students — reporters, videographers and photographers — made more than 30 trips to the border, deep into Mexico and to various parts of Arizona to find and tell the stories of divided families. They produced 22 stories, hundreds of photographs and nearly a dozen video packages. A number of the stories and photographs are highlighted in this publication. The entire project can be accessed online at <http://cronkitezine.asu.edu>.

The students' work was supported by a generous grant from the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, the Illinois-based

nonprofit organization founded by the international photojournalist, author, environmentalist and philanthropist. It is the second time that Buffett, who has said it's important for journalism students to explore countries beyond their own borders, has supported a Cronkite School student journalism project. In 2006 his foundation underwrote the "Children of the Borderlands" project in which students produced photo documentaries depicting the lives of children along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Participating in the "Divided Families" project gave students "the opportunity to see border issues first hand and share stories about the lives of people directly affected by immigration policies," said Courtney Sargent, one of the photojournalism students in the project. "The importance of covering immigration issues became clearly evident after seeing the dichotomy between the two sides of the border."

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## U.S. Children Stuck in Mexican Orphanages | 4

*Ryan Kost, reporter • Deanna Dent, photographer*

The three Mejia children are U.S. citizens — and they have the papers to prove it. Still, they are stuck in a Mexican orphanage, abandoned by their mother and overlooked by authorities who have done nothing to reunite them with their relatives in Arizona.

## Left Behind : A Teenager Tries to Hold on to Life in America | 10

*Amanda Soares, reporter • Deanna Dent, photographer*

Humberto was left behind the morning immigration officials came to his house in Rimrock, Ariz., and took away his mother and two older brothers. His family is one of many around the country broken up by deportation.

## American at Heart: Family Starts Over in Mexico | 12

*Aja Viafora and Amanda Soares, reporters • Ashley Lowery, photographer*

Hector and Marcos are about as American as two young men can be. They had lived most of their lives in Arizona before being deported to Mexico last year. Now they are struggling to adjust to a country that is theirs by birth but feels as unfamiliar as a foreign land.

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*Ryan Kost, reporter • Ryan A. Ruiz, photographer*

While much is said about immigrant families divided by the U.S.-Mexico border, little attention is paid to the U.S. Border

Patrol agents whose work often keeps them separated from their families for long periods.

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*Brian Indrelunas, reporter • Ryan A. Ruiz, photographer*

The Zavala family legally immigrated to the U.S. about five years ago, but every weekend, they are drawn back across the border to the church that sustains them. Damian Zavala, 21, looks forward to seeing one church member in particular — his wife.

## Woman Reunites Family in Death | 24

*Teana Wagner, reporter • Ashley Lowery, photographer*

Maria Graciela Hernandez Escobedo set out with her two daughters to find her husband and son, who were working in the U.S. She died under a bush in the high desert southeast of Bisbee, Ariz., her daughters at her side. Now her husband, Hector Valdez, is raising the girls in Mexico.

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*Aja Viafora, reporter • Branden Eastwood, photographer*

For nearly four years, Armando and Ken Montufar have been searching for their brother who went missing after crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. The last time anyone heard from Porfirio Montufar, he was at a gas station in Yuma, Ariz., waiting for a ride home.

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*Brian Indrelunas, reporter • Deanna Dent and Courtney Sargent, photographers*

For years, immigration laws in the U.S. have given an edge to families. But that could change under several proposals

to overhaul the immigration system, giving an advantage instead to those who speak English, are educated and have needed work experience.

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*Leah Duran, reporter • Ashley Lowery, photographer*

Juan Carlos is preparing to leave behind his wife and daughter to seek work in another state. He says Arizona is becoming increasingly hostile to people like him, in part due to the new employer sanctions law that severely punishes businesses that hire undocumented workers.

## Remittances Change Lives | 34

*Kristi Eaton, reporter • Deanna Dent, photographer*

For many Mexicans, money they receive from family members in the U.S. is the difference between living on a few dollars a day and living on nothing at all. While the amount of money flowing from the U.S. to Mexico remains high, it's not rising as fast as it once was.

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*Deanna Dent, reporter/photographer*

It had been more than three months since David Rios had seen his wife and 1-year-old son, and already little David Jr. had forgotten his father. Rios, who came to the U.S. when he was 3, chose voluntary deportation so that he would have a chance of returning to the U.S. legally one day. The wait could be a long one.



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# Familias divididas

# Divided Families

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## Child Detainees: Undocumented Teens Sent Home | 42

*Ryan A. Ruiz, photographer • Kristi Eaton, reporter*

Every month, thousands of undocumented teenagers are caught trying to cross into the U.S. illegally. Many are sent to Mexican-run shelters along the border, where they stay until they can be returned to their families.

## David's Story: A Boy Returns Home | 46

*Kristi Eaton, reporter • Ryan A. Ruiz, photographer*

When David Juarez, 15, set out from his home in Zamajapa, Mexico, he was headed for Mississippi, although he had no clear idea where Mississippi is. He traveled by himself nearly 1,000 miles before he was caught illegally crossing the Arizona-Mexico border. A week later, he was back home in the mountains with his mother and younger brothers.

## Man Barks at Dog, Faces Deportation | 48

*Angela Le, reporter • Branden Eastwood, photographer*

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*Angela Le, reporter • Branden Eastwood, photographer*

If Juan Villa of Tucson loses his fight to remain in the U.S., he must make what amounts to an impossible choice: leave his family behind in Arizona, where they have friends and a future, or take them with him to Mexico and start over.

## Fighting the System: "Onion King" Takes on Government | 52

*Jordan LaPier, reporter/photographer*

Jesus Bustamante of San Luis Rio Colorado, Mexico, was denied permanent residency in the U.S. because authorities believe he's been involved in drug trafficking. The man known locally as the "Onion King" has waged a six-year legal battle against the U.S. government, a battle he says has disrupted his family and hurt his children.

## 'When Are You Coming Home?' | 54

*Leah Duran, reporter • Adrian Barrera and Michael Struening, photographers*

Feliciano thought America would give him everything he wanted — money, education for his children, a future. What it did not give him was his family. After a three-year separation, Feliciano recently reunited with his wife and children — via a teleconferencing service that connects families in Latin America and the U.S. through broadband television.

## \$40 to See a Loved One | 55

*Adrian Barrera, reporter*

Gabriel Biguria started his video conferencing business in Guatemala five years ago as a way to connect people with their relatives in major U.S. cities.

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*Adrian Barrera, reporter/photographer*

A few weeks before Pricila's 33rd birthday, her husband Feliciano told her that he had found a way for them to see each other after three years apart. It would involve a TV screen and broadband technology.

## Empty Towns: Mexican Men Drawn to U.S. for Jobs | 57

*Adrian Barrera, reporter • Deanna Dent and Branden Eastwood, photographers*

Nearly half the population of the state of Zacatecas in north-central Mexico has left for the U.S. over the past couple of decades. Most are young men, and many never return.

## Stranded on the Border | 59

*Codie Sanchez, reporter • Courtney Sargent, photographer*

Each year more than 1 million Mexican immigrants leave their homes in southern Mexico and make their way north to work in maquiladoras, or factories, along the U.S.-Mexico border. They dream of helping their families by finding good jobs, but their wages often fall short of expectations.

## Generation Abandoned: Elderly Left Behind When Relatives Cross Border | 63

*Codie Sanchez, reporter • Courtney Sargent, photographer*

Senior citizen homes all along the Mexican border are filled with elderly residents who couldn't make the harsh and dangerous trip across the desert with their families. And with tighter border enforcement, it's hard for families to return for visits. These men and women are the forgotten faces of immigration, a generation abandoned.

## Student Bios | 72

Meet the student reporters, photographers and videographers who worked on the project.

# U.S. Children Stuck in Mexican Orphanages

*Ryan Kost, reporter • Deanna Dent, photographer*

Alize Mejia tears up as she waits for dinner at the Casa de Elizabeth orphanage in Imuris, Sonora, Mexico.



IMURIS, Mexico — More than one year ago, Lourdes Garcia walked out of her home, a sad heap of plywood and tin set upon a crumbling street in Nogales. This is what she left behind:

Rainny Mejia is 9 years old. She's a ghost of a child, forever observing, rarely participating. Junior Mejia is 7. He's caught between two worlds, one of silly faces and monkey bars, the other of stark reality and abandonment. Alize Mejia is 5. Every step she takes is a calculated stomp punctuated with a giggle.

That night, as they had so many times before, the three young ones slept alone. They would wake up the same way.

Today, the children live at Casa de Elizabeth, a Mexican orphanage in this Sonoran town south of Nogales. Though they are all U.S. citizens whose only connection to Mexico is their mother, they have spent the past 12 months of their lives here. In that time, nothing has been done — on either side of the border — to return them to the U.S. or to their relatives who cry for them but don't know how to bring them home.

The plight of the Mejia children, though unusual, is not unique.

In Mexican border cities like Imuris, orphanages have seen other American children come through their doors. Of five orphanages contacted along the border, representatives at three agreed to talk. All three said they have housed or currently house American children.

Sometimes relatives in the U.S. don't know how to get them back; sometimes no one appears to be looking for them at all. Meanwhile, authorities on both sides of the border provide contradictory information about how such cases are handled.

Mexican authorities say they have contacted the U.S. when American youths are abandoned or abused south of the border but have gotten little response. U.S. officials say that when they hear of such situations they intervene as quickly as possible.

This fracture in communication can destroy futures — leaving children stranded in one country, citizens of another.

### Left Alone

One thing Rainny remembers about her mother is that she liked to dance.

When she woke up on that cold and clear morning in March to find her mother gone, Rainny imagined that was why. Her mother was out dancing. It wouldn't be the first time she was late getting home.

In the days that followed, the children would stay alone. Rainny would cook for her brother and sister. During better times, her mother had taught her how. Eggs. Beans. Tortillas.

It wasn't until two days later that Mexican authorities came for the children. Here's what they found:

Three young children sharing a small shelter with roaches.

Soiled clothes tossed about.

Trash covering the concrete floor.

A broken bed.

A refrigerator, empty and filthy.

Authorities would make one other note before taking Los Niños Mejia — the three Mejia children — to their new home, Casa de Elizabeth: "According to the neighbors, they are American minors."

### A Flawed System

Mexican authorities took four pictures the day they came to collect the Mejia children. In one of the images, the children stand huddled. Only Rainny dares look at the camera. Alize stares at her feet, and Junior looks past it all into nothingness.

The photograph was taken at one of the most pivotal moments of the orphans' young lives. It should have marked a time of hope for them, a rescue from a country they hardly knew, a return to Lake Havasu City, to family and to home.

Instead, after the picture was shot, the system failed them, much as their mother had.

Neighbors knew that Rainny, Junior and Alize called the U.S. their home. They told authorities as much. But rather than notify the proper officials, Mexican authorities moved the children into the orphanage.

"We've spoken with CPS (in the past)," said Eduardo Chávez, the children's case manager for Desarrollo Integral de La Familia, the Mexican version of Child Protective Services. "They say they can't come because (the abandonment) didn't happen in the U.S." When the children were picked up, as he says often happens, nobody bothered to call the U.S. for what they assumed would be the same response.

Essentially: When children are abandoned in Mexico, they'll likely stay in Mexico.

Deborah Nishikida, a program manager for Child Protective Services, said that's not the case — so long as the U.S. is alerted.

Instances in which children have been abandoned on the wrong side of the border have been a persistent, though somewhat infrequent, occurrence, she said. In her experience, when it does happen the U.S. is able to work with Mexican authorities to get the children placed in the right country.

She said Chávez's assertion that the U.S. ignores DIF's calls "struck me as being odd because we have several cases open now" that the department is working to fix. In those instances, she says, DIF has dialed the CPS hotline.

"I would believe that if (the children) are U.S. citizens ... there has to be something that can be done," she said.

The Mejia children had come to Mexico one year earlier with their mother, a Mexican national running from an Arizona arrest warrant full of drug charges. Up until then, they'd



Rainny Mejia (center) waits with her classmates at Casa de Elizabeth orphanage in Imuris, Mexico.



spent much of their lives in the U.S., attending school, speaking English, eating at McDonald's — by all accounts, being "American." But once she abandoned them in Nogales, the children, rather than being sent back to the states to live with legalized relatives, were shuttled to Casa de Elizabeth.



Top: Alize Mejia (second from left) gets ready for recess at her school outside of Casa de Elizabeth orphanage.

Bottom: Junior Mejia peers out his bedroom window at the orphanage in Imuris, Mexico, where he has lived since March 2007.

They are not alone.

The director of one orphanage along the border, who asked that his name not be used for fear he might anger the Mexican government, said he has seen at least two cases at his orphanage in the past 14 years. He called it a "gray area."

Another orphanage along the border reported that it has two American children from two different families who have been living there for the past five years. An employee with the orphanage, who also asked that his name not be used, said he had contacted the U.S. consulate about the situation and was told the children can go to the U.S. once they are legal adults.

A woman at a third orphanage said that institution also housed an American child but that she had recently returned to the U.S. with the help of her American aunt and Mexican authorities.

### **Making the Call**

Consuelo Rivera Maldonado looked on from her small corner shop as flashing lights, sirens, social workers and police fell upon her small neighborhood in the rocky hills overlooking Nogales, Mexico. It was like nothing she had ever seen in the more than 20 years she has called the city her home.

But she knew they were coming; she called them. While it was hard to watch the officers take the children away, she believed they'd find a better place away from their broken home. They couldn't stay there, fending for themselves, a mother nowhere to be found.

Maldonado has a raspy voice but a comforting tone. Her skin, the color of rust, is leathery, more a product of her life's hardships than her age. The woman, 58, owns a small shop just feet from the home where the children lived. That's how she came to know the little ones.

In the year the children lived there, they were left alone often, Maldonado said in Spanish. "Ella no les puede tener." Their mother didn't care for them like she should have, she said. The drugs and drinking made sure of that.

"How could you bring these little kids into the world if they're going to suffer like this?"

Maldonado would sometimes sneak food to the children, passing it through the window when Garcia had locked the doors shut and left. But for the most part, Rainny was responsible for her brother and sister. She would make sure the two were fed, cleaned and cared for.

It was on days that the three would come to sit at Maldonado's store and wait for their mother to come home that she grew to love them. Rainny would play with the woman's long, salt-and-pepper hair. She would also spit out quick-fire English.

Are you saying bad things? Maldonado would ask her.

No, Rainny would reply, I said, Te amo mucho. I love you very much.

As time passed, Maldonado's patience ran out. She reached for the phone and placed a call to DIF.

When Garcia finally came back, but for the mess, the house was empty.

Maldonado told her what had happened. "I thought she would be very angry at me ... She cried a lot, but she wasn't angry," Maldonado said.

"There's nothing here for them."

### **A Home of Peace**

Just off a bumpy dirt road in the small town of Imuris is an equally bumpy trail leading to Casa de Elizabeth. A battered billboard out front calls this place "A home of peace and promise for the children of Mexico."

Though Los Niños Mejia are not from Mexico, they have been welcomed here all the same.

They're looked after by Manuel Vergara, the shelter's director, who makes his home at the end of the trail, just in front of the cast-iron gate that separates him from the orphanage.

Vergara is a calm man who speaks with quiet precision — except when he talks about the orphanage. Then the words come fast, and they do not stop.

For many here, he is Tío Manuel — Uncle Manuel. They, in return, are very much his children.

"I don't want to take their parents' place," he said in Spanish. But he's all most of them have.

The walls outside his office are covered in black-framed portraits of the more than 60 children who have come to make their home here. Some smile boldly. Others look cautiously at the camera.

Vergara knows Rainny, Junior and Alize are American. He has copies of their birth certificates in the meticulously kept folders that line his secretary's bookshelf. In addition to them, there's another boy here caught in a similar situation. The orphanage has a U.S. birth certificate on file for him, too; it says he was born in Maricopa County. Where and why the child's parents have gone Vergara doesn't know.

"It's not rare," he said plainly. "We're on the border."

But it doesn't matter, he said. "We're a family. What's important is that the children have a need." Vergara believes that need can be filled in Mexico just as well as it can be filled in the U.S.

"Children don't see borders," he said. "They look for love. They look for family. They look for understanding."

He tries to give them all of that.

### Orphanage Life

The early morning sunlight shoots light through a smudged window into a powder-blue room. There are few toys and few frills here. Small shoes sit in a straight line against the wall. The pet dog, Pinto, has pooped on the tile.

Cold air floods the room through a baseball-sized hole in the same streaky window. Rainny Mejia stirs in her little bed, as do the three other young girls who share this space.

An alarm goes off. Beep. Beep. Beep, and other girls begin to raid the room. One jumps onto the shelves and starts handing out clothes: a red polo here, a pair of jeans there.

By the time Rainny joins the line of children waiting their turn in the cafeteria — a cold room bathed in fluorescent light that doubles as a church most Sundays — Junior has already started attacking his meal. Alize has begun to play with hers.

Rainny gets her breakfast — one scoop of potatoes, one scoop of beans and a bit of bread — and darts across the chipped Saltillo tile to a cold metal chair.

Then it's off to school.

A is for ardilla (squirrel). R is for ratón (rat). J is for jirafa (giraffe).

The alphabet runs around the walls of Rainny's and Junior's classroom. Each letter and its corresponding animal is one more reminder that they are in a world far removed from what they once knew.

Their teacher begins tracing oranges and houses on the board. On one side of a plus sign he draws 10, on the other he draws 12. What, he asks the kids, is 10 plus 12?

Outside, Alize is bouncing about, waiting to head to her own school just down the road.

Older girls walk her and the younger children down the dirt path each morning. As usual, she laughs as she takes each step in her half-walk, half-dance stride, kicking up the dust behind her.

The preschool is full of bright candy blues, reds, yellows, greens and pinks. Cartoon animals



Top: Junior Mejia (left) and Alize Mejia (right) share a laugh as they wait for Sunday school to start.  
Bottom: Children play atop a tractor outside the gates of Casa de Elizabeth orphanage in Imuris, Mexico.

cover the walls.

The teacher calls to Alize and a few other classmates. They fall into a formation, their small arms holding a bleached Mexican flag high above them.

"Es mi bandera," they chant together. This is my flag. "Símbolo de la unidad de nuestros



padres y nuestros hermanos." Symbol of the unity of our parents and of our sisters and brothers.

After nine months, the three children have adjusted to this new place.

They remember their life before but only vaguely. They played with friends on asphalt



Top: Alize Mejia (second from right) joins a parade and sings the Mexican anthem with her classmates.

Bottom left: Children share sparse bedrooms at the orphanage.

Bottom right: Junior Mejia practices writing in Spanish during a class.

streets. They handed out candy hearts on Valentine's Day. They lived near a lake. They ate chocolate chip cookie-dough ice cream. They spent time with their mom and dad.

They also remember an aunt and a grandma. They miss them both.

### Remembering the Children

Many hours and a border away from Casa de Elizabeth, Lake Havasu City rests along the Colorado River in western Arizona.

On one of the many suburban streets, just down the road from a Bashas' grocery store, is a white, stucco duplex. Outside, a man grills carne asada with his granddaughter. Inside, two women wait: the children's great grandmother, Susana Flores, 67, and their great aunt, Ana Aheredia, 39.

These are the two the children remember.

Both women share the children's deep brown eyes, their combination of strength and softness. You can hear it in Flores' rich, soulful laugh, though she doesn't laugh much when she talks about her great grandchildren.

It's been more than a year since these two women have seen Los Niños Mejia. When the children were growing up in Lake Havasu City, their mother would leave them with her aunt Aheredia and grandma Flores often.

"A couple minutes would turn into hours. A couple hours would turn into days. And days would turn into weeks," Aheredia said. "I would take the kids so many times."

Aheredia said she never understood it. "Why do you do that to your kids?" she would ask. "They're so beautiful."

It wasn't always that way. When Lourdes Garcia first met Alex Mejia, the children's father, everything seemed to be going well, Aheredia said. He had a full-time job at a plastics shop in town, making good money. They seemed happy together. "I would always say, 'I'm so proud of you guys. You're doing so good.'"

Then the couple fell into drugs and drinking, and the relationship began to fall apart. He





beat her. They bounced from home to home, unable to pay the rent.

Eventually the two split, and, as far as Aheredia knows, Alex was deported to his native El Salvador. Garcia, for her part, stuck around Lake Havasu City until a warrant was issued for her arrest after she missed a court hearing.

Garcia told Flores and Aheredia that she was going to Nogales, Mexico, to visit her mother. They thought it would be a short visit. She didn't come back.

Then a month or so ago, they saw Garcia again. In black newsprint, her mugshot stared at them from the pages of the local paper. The headline above the photograph read "Mohave County's Most Wanted." The Sheriff's Office there says she's wanted for a variety of drug-related offenses.

Call the authorities, the advertisement says, if you have any information regarding the whereabouts of this woman.

As far as the two women know, she's still living somewhere in Nogales.

### Sorrowful Stories

Many things have changed since Aheredia and Flores last saw Rainny, Junior and Alize.

The time away from the states and their family is slowly transforming them. Spanish is their language now. Even their names have changed. Rainny's not Rainny; she's Lluvia — the Spanish word for rain. Alize is now Lolita — her middle name. They're withdrawn. They treat relationships with the same transience with which their mother treated them.

But Grandma Flores knows none of these things.

"Every time I find something (of the kids), I start crying," Flores said from her cluttered home. Pictures of her large extended family line her shelves. She can point to any of them and tell an anecdote — sometimes a funny one, but more often not. Her family is full of sorrowful stories. The tale of Los Niños Mejia is one of them.

"It would be better over here," Aheredia says.

"I could take them," Flores says, her voice weak.

"I know, Mama," Aheredia says. "I know, Mama."

But maybe that's just a dream.

The homes these two women have made are small. Flores doesn't work. She has a bad knee. Heck, she says, even the good one is bad. Still, she insists she would try to make do if only she could get the kids back.

But how to do that?

The two, who are U.S. citizens, don't understand what legal rights they have to the children. Until a reporter and photographer came to talk with them, they had no idea who the case manager was for the children. Even with that information, they're not sure where to start.

Should they contact the Mexican authorities? That's where the children are.

Should they contact U.S. authorities? That's where the children should be.

This back and forth confuses the two women. Besides, they say, they're not in a financial position to wage a war to bring them home. They're not even certain that they could care for the children if they made it across the border.

At the least, they would like to see the children in foster care in the U.S., close enough that they could visit. Perhaps soon they'll be able to go see the children. Maybe then they can talk to the right officials, get everything sorted out.

Flores kisses a photograph of her great-grandchildren and holds it against her chest as she starts to cry. "I miss them so much," she says.

Flores starts talking to the children, to herself, to God. Please, she begs, bring Los Niños Mejia home.



Top: Consuelo Rivera Maldonado called Mexican authorities when she realized that the three Mejia children had been left alone in the house next door to her shop in Nogales, Mexico.

Bottom: Susana Flores, 67, great-grandmother to the Mejia children, cries when she sees a photograph of the children at the orphanage where they are being cared for in Mexico.

*Photographer Deanna Dent contributed to this report.*



# Left Behind

## A Teenager Tries to Hold on to Life in America

Amanda Soares, reporter • Deanna Dent, photographer

RIMROCK, Ariz. — Humberto was getting ready to go to school one morning when he heard the police bang on the front door.

"It's them," his brother said, looking through the living room window at Immigration and Customs Enforcement minivans.

The officers showed Humberto's family what they expected to see — documents ordering that his mother and two older brothers be deported.

While the three changed out of their pajamas and packed some clothes, police asked 15-year-old Humberto for his name.

"Don't say anything," his brother told him.

A few minutes later, Humberto, his grandmother, two younger brothers and a younger sister watched officers handcuff his mother and two older brothers. His little sister started bawling when she realized they were being taken away. Humberto tried hard to hold back his own tears and show his mom that he was going to be OK.

He turned his anger on the officers. "Thanks for taking my family," he muttered sarcastically.

"You're welcome," one of the officers retorted.

On that April morning a year ago, Humberto watched the minivan carrying his family disappear down the street. He hasn't seen his mother and older brothers since.

### The Decision to Stay

Humberto, whose last name is being withheld because he is in this country illegally, came to the U.S. when he was 3 months old. He prefers Big Macs to burritos. For him, moving to Mexico would be a shock, he said in an interview at his home here.

"I don't feel Mexican," he said in perfect English.

Between his mother's job as a maid and his brothers' work in construction, Humberto and his siblings were able to study and have a comfortable life in this small town about 90 minutes north of Phoenix.

"Imagine having a good life and them taking it away from you," he said.

Like any American high school freshman, Humberto enjoys going to the mall and watching TV as well as exploring the mountains near his home. He and his friends shoot baskets together and play video games.

In fact, Humberto would like to create his own video games someday. "I want to go to college to get a degree in technology and work for a design company," he said.





Humberto, right, helps his grandmother babysit for extra money. Humberto, 16, was left behind with his grandmother when his mother and older brothers were deported to Mexico.

Humberto knows that he will not be able to get a college education or become a video game designer in Mexico. He may not be able to find a job at all. That's why, when his mother sent for his three younger siblings a few months after her deportation, he stayed with his grandmother here.

"To be able to hug my mom would be one of the best moments ever," he said, his eyes teary as he looked around an empty home. "But to go over there breaks the chance of residency here."

#### **Divided Families**

Humberto's family is only one of many around the country broken up by deportations. Families are divided because one or more children are U.S.-born citizens and remain in this country when their parents are deported.

Humberto is a rare case: a child here illegally who was simply lucky enough — or young enough — not to be questioned.

Fugitive Deportation Operations is one of the federal efforts created to make sure illegal immigrants with deportation orders do leave the country. Composed of Immigration and Customs Enforcement deportation officers, its teams come to the homes of illegal immigrants and sometimes arrest entire families. Many times, those families are separated, said Evelyn Cruz, an immigration law professor at Arizona State University.

"Cases such as this one happen every day," Cruz said.

Cecilia Menjivar, an assistant professor of sociology at ASU, fears that children in Humberto's situation could be scarred for life.

"Think about the trauma of your parents dying, in addition to the stress of being illegal," she said. "The impact is the difference between life and death almost."

Lynn Marcus, director of the Immigration Law Clinic at the University of Arizona, said it's not just the children left behind who are hurt — it's those who are forced to return to a country they barely know.

"It's completely mind-boggling to envision adjusting to a culture and a city that's not your own when your country is the U.S.A.," she said.

#### **'It's All on Me Now'**

Humberto said he couldn't eat or sleep after his mother and older brothers were deported.

"It feels like I don't have anyone to look after me anymore," he said. "But I still need a mom."

Humberto said he has had to give up much of his

free time to help around the house. He does the grocery shopping and pays the bills since his grandmother doesn't speak English.

"It's all on me now," he said.

Since neither Humberto nor his grandmother can drive, they have to rely on neighbors to give them rides to buy food and medicine. He also had to give up basketball because his brothers aren't around to drive him to practice.

"It's really hard because I know I have to grow up," Humberto said. "But it seems like I'm getting older a little too fast."

Humberto, who is 16 now, said he misses his brothers being around to help him with homework.

"I used to have a hard time (with algebra), but my brothers helped me," he said. "Now I'm in geometry, and it's really something different to have to do it by myself."

#### **The Future**

Elias Bermudez, leader of the Phoenix-based organization Immigrants Without Borders, said he believes that any hardships Humberto may have to face alone in the U.S. are preferable to the life he would have in Mexico with his family.

"If he goes back to Mexico, he will suffer greatly," Bermudez said. "Just waking up every morning and looking around is depressing."

Although it may seem impossible that Humberto's family will ever be able to reunite in Arizona, Bermudez said they shouldn't lose hope. He believes that the increasing number of illegal immigrants being deported will affect the U.S. economy and lawmakers will then realize how necessary immigrants are to the labor force.

"There will be an uproar of activity to deal with this issue," he said. "Then these families will be coming back through the ports of entry, not through the desert."

As for Humberto, regardless of what new immigration policies might come, he said he will never lose hope that his family will be together again.

"I used to tell my mom all the time that I'd buy her a house with a garden and that she would have a really nice car," he said. "I just want to take care of my mom."





# AMERICAN at Heart

## Family Starts Over in Mexico

Aja Viafora and Amanda Soares, reporters • Ashley Lowery, photographer

IXTAPAN DE LA SAL, Mexico — Hector and Marcos are about as American as two young men can be.

They wear jeans and T-shirts. They are rarely without their cell phones. They like American music and American movies.

But after spending most of their lives in the U.S., the two brothers were deported last year along with their mother. They now live in a tiny, dim house thousands of miles from the place they grew up and from the country they consider home.

They miss their friends back home in Rimrock, Ariz., where they lived in a house that seems luxuriant in memory. They miss ice cream, shopping, running water, space and privacy.

They miss their brother, Humberto, 16, who was not taken the morning that Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials came to their home with deportation papers. They worry that he isn't old enough to properly care for their grandmother, with whom he still lives in Rimrock.

They are struggling to master Spanish, to make new friends, to adjust to a country that is theirs by birth but feels as unfamiliar as a foreign land.

### Fewer Opportunities

Marcos, 24, and Hector, 20, are strapping young men who used to go to community college and earn good money working construction. They don't want to give their last name in order to protect family members still living in Arizona.

Hector wanted to become a doctor and Marcos wanted to work with cars. They are learning to temper their expectations.

They both now work at a hotel in nearby Mexico City making about \$15 a day – about a tenth of what they used to make. They say the jobs are good by Mexican standards, but their chances of advancing are limited because they don't speak Spanish well enough and because they are considered too American.

The possibility of going back to school, of furthering their education, is "very low," Hector said, because of the cost and the language.

Besides, they have their little brother and their grandmother to think about. They try to send money to them whenever possible.

Because the family did not accept voluntary deportation, but waited to be forced out by authorities, the brothers and their mother cannot legally re-enter the U.S. for 10 years.

Still, the brothers, at least, are convinced that they will return. Hector is engaged to a girl from Arizona, and he hopes to one day marry her.

Marcos shrugs off the question of how he's going to get back. It just takes money, he says.

### Trying to Adjust

Marcos was 6 and Hector 4 when their parents left this town of nearly 35,000 two hours southwest of Mexico City and made their way to the U.S.

Now they are back, sharing a three-room house with their aunt and three cousins.

The aunt and cousins sleep in one bedroom; Marcos, Hector, his mother, Filogonia, two younger brothers and a younger sister sleep in the other. The younger siblings were born in the U.S. and are legal residents, but their mother brought them back to Mexico to live with her.

A kitchen and a makeshift wash room connect the bedrooms. The family must heat water on the stove and carry it to another room where they bathe from buckets.

The walls are bright green and the floors a brilliant blue. Photographs of the family, a painting of The Last Supper, crucifixes and Madonnas line the walls.

Two large beds take up most of the space in the bedroom that Marcos and Hector share with their mother and siblings. Deodorant, makeup, lotion, perfume and other toiletries are strewn atop the dresser. Personal



Hector, 20, left a fiancée behind in Arizona when he was deported to Mexico. He says they still plan to marry.

Marcos, 24, shaves in the single room his entire family shares in Ixtapan de la Sal, Mexico. He was raised in Arizona.





Gustavo, 11, loves to play soccer at a field near his house. The game is helping Gustavo, who was born and raised in Arizona, settle into his new town, Ixtapan de la Sal, Mexico.

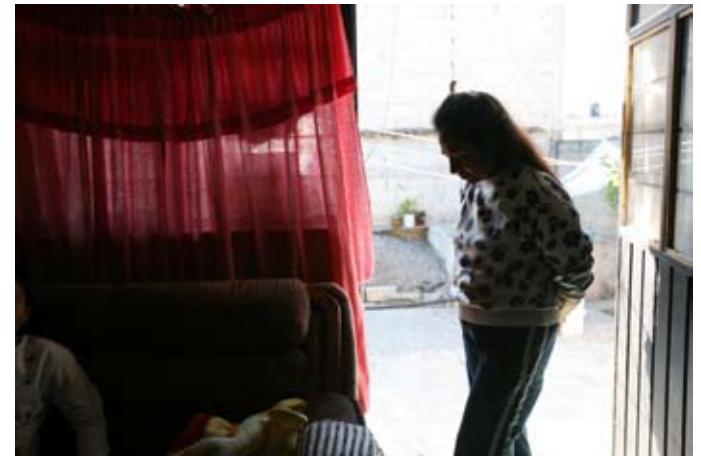




Above: Filogonia brushes daughter Michelle's hair for school while her son Hector, 20, gets ready for work.

Top right: Filogonia (left) gets milk from her sister outside their home in Ixtapan de la Sal, Mexico.

Bottom right: Filogonia left her mother and another son, Humberto, 16, in Rimrock, Ariz., when she and her eldest sons were deported to Mexico last summer.



space doesn't exist.

The transition has been most difficult for the older brothers, but 11-year-old Gustavo and 10-year-old Alex also struggled to learn the language and to fit in.

The children still talk to each other in English, although 5-year-old Michelle has picked up Spanish quickly.

Gustavo said speaking Spanish in school makes it harder for him to learn. But that's not what bothers him most.

"The friends and food are better over there," he said simply.

Still, Gustavo is starting to adjust. He loves soccer, and he spends a lot of time kicking the ball around with other youngsters his age.

Alex mourns the bicycle he had to leave behind.

Filogonia, 47, knows that in time her children will adapt. But she doesn't think she ever will.

"Everything was fine," she said of life in Arizona. "But here, now, no."

She misses Humberto, the son who was left behind in Arizona, but at the same time she's glad that he's there.

"Things are much easier there," she said in Spanish. "There are more opportunities; the United States has everything. There are good studies in the United States. Here, there aren't any."

She said she was just 6 when she was sent to work in a tortilla shop. She had to quit school in the eighth grade.

"I don't have many good memories of my childhood; my childhood wasn't fun and games," she said. "I want a better life for my kids. There is no such life here."

#### Out of Place

Hector says that he, too, is glad that Humberto is still in Arizona, but he worries just the same.

"I'm glad he stayed behind, but I'm also worried he's not having the support a kid needs at that age," he said. "The only role models he has now are his friends, and I don't know what kind of people they are."

He wants to go back to check that things are OK. He wants to see his friends – the ones he grew up with, the ones he considers family.

"I sometimes feel out of place," Hector said. "I do not have a home here; my home is in Arizona."



Senior patrol agent Sean King looks for signs of illegal crossing in the form of fresh footprints in the desert north of the Tohono O'odham nation in southern Arizona. The boundaries of the Tohono O'odham nation straddle the U.S.-Mexico border, making this a popular crossing point for illegal immigrants and smugglers.



# BORDER PATROL



# DESOLATION, ISOLATION MAKE BORDER PATROL JOB DIFFICULT

Ryan Kost, reporter • Ryan A. Ruiz, photographer

PAPAGO FARMS, Ariz. — Just over the western horizon, 2 1/2 hours outside any major city, dust flies into the air.

Border Patrol agents are tracking ghosts. Until the agents see the migrants crossing here in person they're nothing but a spiral of dust or a footprint soaked up by soft sand.

It's a difficult job, made more difficult by the desolation of the place and the isolation from families and loved ones.

Out here, there's no Blockbuster, no after-work bar and, often, no family nearby.

Much is said about the immigrant families divided by the U.S.-Mexican border. But little attention is paid to the Border Patrol agents whose work keeps them away from their families, often for long periods at a time.

For these women and men, separation is part of the job.

"It's extremely difficult at first," Border Patrol Agent Mike Scioli said. But "it's pretty much the nature of the beast for this job."

The test starts almost immediately when a Border Patrol agent is hired. Recruits are placed in a 12- to 16-week training program in Artesia, N.M. Families don't follow them there.

"There's so much to learn that's it's difficult to do that," Scioli said. "You're typically studying. You're resting your body. Your legs take quite a torment from the five to six miles you're running every day."

Once they graduate, agents are sent to the Southwestern border, considered the most porous U.S. border, where most illegal immigrants cross into the U.S. For many, this new place is far removed from their hometowns.

Scioli is one of about 3,000 agents who work the Tucson Sector for the Border Patrol. They are responsible for a stretch of the border that runs the 262 miles between the Yuma County line and Arizona-New Mexico state line. It's one of the smallest pieces of the border, but it's the busiest in the Southwest.

For the time being, Scioli is working media relations for the Border Patrol, but that's a recent change. He came from the front lines, enforcing drug busts and picking up border crossers. And, like many agents, Scioli doesn't hail from a border state. His hometown is Buffalo, N.Y.

Public perception, he says, is that most agents have grown up in the Southwest, not far from the border they patrol. But in truth, agents hail from all over the country.

Scioli, who is single, came to Arizona alone, but many agents bring families with them, renting apartments or houses in small towns along the border or further away in Tucson or even Phoenix, depending upon where they're stationed.

Agent Christopher Knab works at the Tucson Sector headquarters. He lives in southern Arizona with his wife, but he had to leave behind his extended family in Maryland. It has been about a year since he last visited family there, though he hopes to make it back sometime this summer.

"Work," he said, "generally dictates your schedule."



The boundaries of the Tohono O'odham nation straddle the international border between Mexico and the U.S. There is little more than rudimentary cattle fencing at the national divide.



Border Patrol agent Christopher Knab, a Maryland native, holds a picture of his wife. Many agents endure long separations from their families while on duty.



The border wall at the Nogales, Ariz., port of entry runs only the length of the city limits. Beyond that, little more than cattle fencing divides Mexico and the U.S.

### First responders

Agent Alex Hernandez sometimes works as a “first responder” out of the Papago Farms camp southwest of Tucson, one of the small posts that dot the border. Agents are placed here, usually for a week at a time, “because that’s where we have a lot of heavy action,” Scioli said.

There’s not much to look at except acres of dead, yellow roughage. The nearby border that the agents protect is marked by little more than wire strung between wooden posts in some areas. It’s nothing like the rusted spine that divides Nogales, Mexico, and Nogales, Arizona.

This camp is a palace compared to most. It has recently been upgraded from the traditional metal boxes provided to agents in most other areas. There are bedrooms — two agents to each — a full kitchen, even cable TV. But it’s still very isolated.

Hernandez sometimes works here. Like the other agents at border camps, he’ll stay for a week and then he’ll head back to a larger facility where he is typically stationed.

Hernandez has been a member of the Border Patrol for the past nine years. He’s been volunteering for these shifts for a long time, even though it means separating from his wife and four children in West Phoenix. He calls home three to four times a day.

“What makes it easy is here you can immerse yourself in your job,” Hernandez said.

There are advantages to working the camps. Agents find the pace exciting; there is rarely any down time, and though they’re not paid extra for working on the border, they do make overtime.

Though Hernandez says his family has gotten used to his occasional absences, the separations can be hard, says Vanessa Creliá, one Border Patrol spouse. That’s why she has been working for nearly 10 years to create a support system for the spouses of agents deployed along the border.





Detainees wait in a holding cell at a Tucson Border Patrol station.

Crelia's husband joined the Border Patrol in 1998, and the couple had to relocate from Oklahoma to Arizona. To prepare for the move, Crelia went to an online forum and was able to make contact with another Border Patrol wife, who gave her help and advice before the couple even arrived in the state.

The effort touched Crelia, who decided she should return the favor. A year after her husband entered the Border Patrol, Crelia created BPSpouses.com, which stands for Border Patrol Spouses. Her Web site, which offers help locating schools, communities, friends and even shopping, has been going strong ever since.

About 50 volunteers help new recruits and spouses get adjusted through the site, which isn't officially supported by the Border Patrol. Crelia says the site gets about 400,000 hits a year. She's not sure how many people have been helped, but she knows the group is filling a need.

"If you moved from one state to another and you don't know anybody there, you're not going to have the same welcome," Crelia said. "For some people, it's more difficult than others ... We give them comfort."

Crelia is currently helping the Border Patrol create an official program that would give agents and their families information on adjusting through PowerPoint presentations and manuals, she says. Spouses give up a lot — including careers of their own — for the Border Patrol, and they deserve help adjusting, too.

As for the agents themselves, Scioli says the biggest help they get comes from each other.

"Your co-workers are your family," he said. "That's all you have. A lot of times, on and off work, these are the people you hang out with because your family is miles away.

"That's the only way I could adjust."



A Border Patrol agent searches a detainee during processing at a temporary Border Patrol station in the desert north of the Mexican-American border on the Tohono O'odham nation in southern Arizona.



Left: Daniela Burruel, 22, (center) and Saul Zavala, 16, (right) pray during a service at Templo Mikedash in San Luis Rio Colorado, Mexico.

Bottom: Damian Zavala, 21 (left) is greeted by a member of his congregation during Sunday service.





# Church Draws Family Back

Brian Indrelunas, reporter • Ryan A. Ruiz, photographer



SAN LUIS RIO COLORADO, Mexico — On a Sunday morning at Templo Mikedash, it's hard to miss the Zavala family.

Efrain, 22, sings and plays his guitar as part of the Methodist church's band. His brother Damian, 21, leads the congregation in prayers. Another brother, Saul, and their mother, Isabel, sing and pray along.

The family started attending Templo Mikedash while living here, a Mexican border town that's home to this congregation of about 100. And they still attend, even though they now live across the U.S.-Mexico border in Somerton, Ariz.

"We have a Methodist church just like five minutes away from our house, but we have to drive 20 minutes to come here to this church," Damian said. "We have a place to stay here, and we feel like this is our home."

The Zavalas' ties to their church and their past have led them to live a life that is itself divided by the U.S.-Mexico border.

During the week, the Zavalas spend most of their time in Arizona. The weekends are spent in Mexico.

Saul is a junior at Kofa High School in Yuma. Efrain takes classes at Northern Arizona University's Yuma campus. Damian takes classes at the same campus and also works as a delivery driver for Coca-Cola.

Their father, also named Efrain, services farm equipment for Amigo Farms in southwestern Arizona and southeastern California. The family lives in a company-owned trailer at the farm's Somerton, Ariz., location.

They have been in the U.S. for about five years, settling there after a long trek from Obregon, a city in the southern part of the Mexican state of Sonora, more than 250 miles south of the border.

"There was work," the elder Efrain said in Spanish. "But little money."

So Efrain found work in Arizona, and soon afterward his family moved to San Luis Río Colorado to make it easier for him to visit on weekends. The family submitted paperwork and waited for almost a decade before being allowed to move to the U.S. in 2001.

They are happy to be in the U.S., but in many ways Isabel and the children feel more at home here, where the children grew up and where everyone speaks Spanish.

"My mom (only) speaks Spanish," the younger Efrain said in Spanish. "It's more complicated (in Arizona) because of the language."

So every Friday after Saul gets out of school, Isabel and the children drive the 10 miles back across the border to their second home in Zavala — and to church.

Damian looks forward to seeing one fellow church member in particular — his wife, Daniela Burruel, 22.

Damian said he and Daniela were in the same church group for young people. "The first time that I saw her, it was here in the church," he said in Spanish. "But we didn't talk."

It was only when Daniela was injured in a car accident and Damian went to visit her in the hospital that he really got to know her.

The couple was married in the summer of 2006, and since then they've spent much of their marriage living on opposite sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.

"Of the seven days of the week, we have four or five together," Damian said. "It isn't easy."

Damian said he spends more time in Mexico than the rest of his family, but he limits his trips because he is a permanent resident, not a citizen, of the U.S. and doesn't want to endanger the status of his green card by spending too much time in Mexico.

Sometimes Damien makes the trip to see his wife for

Right: Damian Zavala, 21, waits in traffic to cross into the U.S. at the San Luis, Ariz., port of entry at 2 a.m. on a December morning. Damian crosses the border several times a week to visit his wife in San Luis Rio Colorado, Mexico. Below: Efrain Zavala inspects his maintenance truck before heading to work early in the morning. Efrain maintains farm equipment for Amigo Farms in Somerton, Ariz.



a single night, crossing into Mexico after work and picking up Daniela for a trip to the grocery store and an evening together. He sets his alarm for 1 a.m. so he can reach the border before the lines — sometimes five hours long — begin forming. When he gets to Somerton, there's time for a few more hours of sleep before getting up again at 5 a.m. and heading for work.

Daniela can't visit Damian in Arizona because she isn't eligible for Mexican travel documents. "My wife, she doesn't work, she's not going to school right now, and we don't have any property here," Damian said. "We don't want it to be like this, going and coming all the time."

Daniela used to work in a pharmacy, but she now spends her days sewing, reading and watching television. "I spend a lot of time alone," she said in Spanish.

Their first child is on the way, as is a church wedding. The couple married in a small civil ceremony, but they're planning a full ceremony with family and friends at Templo Mikedash.

Meanwhile, they have this: Sunday afternoons and evenings as a family.

The elder Efrain often drives to meet the rest of the family on Sunday afternoons when he's done with work. He leaves his car on the U.S. side of the border to avoid the long lines and walks across, joining up with the rest of the family for a movie, to go out to eat or to just sit and talk in their San Luis Río Colorado home. But by the early hours of Monday morning, the family again finds itself straddling two cities, two states, two countries.

Damian said he looks forward to a time when he won't have to spend days with an international border between him and his wife.

"We'll move to New York, L.A. — who knows, be movie stars," he joked. "But right now we're stuck here."

He thinks back to the years it took for his family to be accepted as legal residents of the U.S., and it gives him patience. He's confident he'll pass the citizenship exam and that Daniela will soon be able to live with him in Arizona.

"I don't want it to be more than two years," he said, "but I have to wait. We have to wait."





Isabel Zavala (below) and her family live in Arizona, but they cross the Mexican border every weekend to go to church and visit relatives. Isabel's daughter-in-law, Daniela Burruel (top and bottom left), stays behind in Mexico because she doesn't have the papers she needs to come to the U.S. She and her husband know that getting legal residency could take years, but they're willing to wait.







# Woman Reunites Family in Death

*Teana Wagner, reporter • Ashley Lowery, photographer*

DURANGO, Mexico — Hector Valdez walks daughters Sandra and Nancy to school, holding their backpacks until he kisses them goodbye and watches them march away wearing their uniforms and smiles.

“The hardest time of the day is when they leave for school,” Valdez said. “I come home and I miss them.”

Being a single father is a new experience for Valdez, as is discovering his daughters’ personalities. He’s found Sandra, who is 12, to be quiet and shy. Nancy, 11, is a budding writer who enjoys working on stories.



Slowly, Valdez is learning the little things about being a father to Sandra, whom he hadn't seen in nine years, and Nancy, an adopted daughter he had never known.

As he learns about these two young girls and gets reacquainted with an adult daughter in Mexico, Valdez also is adjusting to life in a community and a country that he hasn't lived in for nearly a decade. He was a welder in Phoenix when he received the call that brought him back, bringing along a 21-year-old son.

Almost a month after setting out from this colonial city in north-central Mexico, Valdez's wife, Maria Graciela Hernandez Escobedo, has accomplished what she wanted so dearly: to reunite her family. But instead of starting a new life in the U.S., she, too, is back in Durango.

Later on this fall day, Valdez, Sandra and Nancy, along with relatives and friends, will gather to pray for Maria's soul.

In the U.S., if Maria is remembered at all, it will be as a statistic, one of the many who perish trying to enter the country illegally by crossing the unforgiving Arizona desert. Some might recall a newspaper article about a mother who died as her two young daughters huddled around her, the three of them abandoned by smugglers.

But in Durango, Maria is remembered as a wife, mother, daughter, sister and friend. Her death forever altered the lives of those around her and in many ways created a new family starting again in Durango.

### Leaving Home

Valdez, 42, left Durango in 1998, crossing the border illegally and finding work as a welder in Phoenix. He left behind Maria and their children: then 1½-year-old Nancy, 13-year-old Elsa and 12-year-old Hector Jr.

Life is hard in Durango — a skilled worker here makes about 50,000 pesos a year, or about \$4,500. Valdez said he felt that it would be best for his family if he was working in Phoenix and sending money home.

Hector Jr. joined his father in 2003 and worked with him as a welder. The other children stayed behind with their mother.

Maria, who was 39 when she died, was alone in Durango with her two children when she made the decision two years ago to adopt Sandra from her sister, who was suffering from alcoholism. Valdez agreed.

The long-distance relationship was hard on both Valdez and Maria, who married when Maria was 16.

"It feels really uncomfortable when we are living knowing that half of our family is in Mexico," Valdez said.

Valdez said that he made about \$480 per week and would send home about half of that to his wife and daughters. Maria was paying rent for a house with the money, he said.

### The Cost of Separation

Valdez and Maria's long separation is rare, according to Emilia Banuelos, an immigration lawyer in Phoenix. Men usually return to Mexico after four or five years, he said.

The separation is especially difficult for children, Banuelos said.

"They have this attitude toward mom and dad that, 'They left me,'" he said. "They are very resentful."

One medical case study found that men who are separated from their children suffer feelings of powerlessness, jealousy, inadequacy and more, according to the National Information Center on Fatherhood.

And a study done by the Pew Hispanic Center found that negative effects of such

separations include feelings of abandonment and resentment.

### "Sad and Alone"

Nine years passed, and Maria began to feel abandoned.

"When Hector left, she thought he was going to return soon," said Ramona Escobedo, Maria's mother. "But time went by, and he never did."

"We talked a lot," said Maria Luisa Hernandez Escobedo, Maria's sister. "She was sad and alone."

Maria was half-blind and would walk the streets supported by Nancy and Sandra. Her sisters worried about her.

Maria Luisa knew that her sister was desperate to go to Phoenix to be with Valdez and her son.

"But at the end when she left, nobody told us she was leaving," Maria Luisa said. "She just left, and we didn't know that she was there. She didn't tell us."

Valdez, her mother and her sister-in-law were the only people Maria told before leaving Durango for Phoenix in September.

"I wanted to see my little skinny boy," Maria told her mother before leaving.

Valdez said he discussed the trip with his wife before she left for Phoenix.

"We thought that at the most, the trip would be two hours," said Valdez, who set up the trip through a smuggler.

Maria's motivation to leave is common. Latina women who are separated from their children due to immigration to the U.S. may experience psychological consequences, such as an increased risk of depression due to the separation, according to a study by the American Psychiatric Association.



Above: Hector Valdez and his daughter, Nancy, 11, attend a church service in Durango, Mexico, held in memory of his wife, who died while trying to cross the Arizona desert.

Opposite page: The Valdez family attends a memorial service for Maria Graciela Hernandez Escobedo at their church in Durango, Mexico.



Top left: Maria Luisa Hernandez Escobedo (left) mourns her sister during a gathering at the family home in Durango, Mexico.  
Top right: Hector Valdez says goodbye to his daughters after walking them to school. "The hardest time of the day is when they leave for school," he said. "I come home and I miss them."  
Bottom : Valdez walks with his daughters and other family members to a church service in memory of his wife.

### Death in the Desert

The anticipated two-hour trip turned into three days as the party that included Maria and her daughters crossed the high desert southeast of Bisbee, Ariz. It was mid-September, but the temperature still reached above 100 degrees.

Nancy and Sandra told the Mexican consulate that their water ran out as smugglers led the group among the canyons and cliffs of the Mule Mountains. Maria became dizzy, then delusional.

The smugglers placed Maria under a bush and gave her some of the remaining water, but she didn't improve. After a few hours, the smugglers decided to move on.

"Please don't leave us here," the girls cried.

"We'll go get help nearby; the nearest highway is close by," the smugglers told them. "Help will arrive in 30 minutes."

The smugglers and others in the party walked away from Maria, lying under the bush with Nancy and Sandra at her side.

Hours later, there still was no help, and Maria was getting worse. She was unresponsive and could not get up. The girls finally decided that one would stay and the other would go find help.

Nancy made it to Highway 80 at dusk. She flagged down a Border Patrol vehicle and led agents to her mother and Sandra.

When medics from Bisbee reached Maria, they pronounced her dead at the scene. The girls didn't learn Maria's fate until later, after she was taken away in an ambulance.

Maria died of dehydration, according to the autopsy report.

From Oct. 1, 2006, to Sept. 30, 2007, approximately 243 undocumented immigrants were found dead in the Arizona desert bordering Mexico.

### "La Novena"

"Hail Mary, full of grace. Our Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and



blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.”

Friends and family are gathered at Maria’s home for “la novena,” a Roman Catholic tradition in which God receives Maria’s spirit.

Among those chanting is her mother, Ramona, who learned of Maria’s death from her daughter Maria Luisa.

“I wanted to die,” Ramona said. “You can’t even imagine.”

Maria Luisa was given permission from the Mexican consulate to pick up her nieces from Agua Prieta, Mexico, after Valdez was not able to show the proper paperwork. She, her husband, Valdez’s brother and Valdez’s mother all traveled 16 hours to pick up the girls from the border city.

“I have so much sadness,” Maria Luisa said.

The Mexican consulate paid to return Maria’s body to Durango, something the Mexican government does for each person who dies crossing the border.

Their heads held high, the mourners fill Maria’s living room with echoing prayer.

“Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and in the hour of our death. Amen.”

La novena continued for nine evenings before Maria’s funeral Mass, which was held in an open-air space filled with metal folding chairs.

The small community of Colonia Asimientos Homanos participated in the Mass. Fathers, mothers and children mourned Maria and supported her family.

“What’s better, to be happy here or there?” the priest asked, pointing to the sky.

### **Returning Home**

Valdez is looking for work in Durango, where he plans to stay, even though life is harder here than it was in Arizona.

“My plans now are to do the best I can for my daughters,” he said. “It is my obligation to be here.”

The girls also have the support of their grandmother and their aunt, who live close by. “We are going to lend a hand to the girls,” Maria Luisa said.

As Valdez adjusts to life here and as the girls adjust to life without their mother, Hector Jr. is planning to head north. He has a girlfriend in Phoenix and misses his life in the U.S..

And Valdez will wish him well when he goes.

“I support him because life here is hard, and he will most likely try to go,” Valdez said. “If he doesn’t want to be here anymore, you can’t make a person stay because then they will leave without telling anyone.”



Right: Nancy Valdez looks at her father as he holds a picture of her with her mother and sister, taken before her mother died while trying to cross the Arizona desert.

# Men Search for Missing Brother

Aja Viafora, reporter • Branden Eastwood, photographer

MESA, Ariz. — After spending three weeks trying to cross the border from Mexico into Arizona, 31-year-old Porfirio Montufar had finally made it.

It was a trip that Porfirio, a Mexican national, had made several times before. For the past 13 years, Porfirio had lived and worked in Mesa, Ariz., but he would return periodically to his hometown in Hidalgo, Mexico, to visit his wife, toddler and his mother. After each visit, he would sneak back across the border, dodging the U.S. Border Patrol, and make the 1,500-mile journey back to Mesa.

On this latest trip, Porfirio, who had crossed alone and on foot, had made it to a gas station in Yuma where he called one of his brothers who live in the U.S.. He asked him to wire money so that he could pay two drivers for transportation to Mesa.

The call came at 3 p.m., July 17, 2004. Porfirio has not been heard from since.

Porfirio is one of the hundreds of immigrants who die or go missing during desert crossings each year.

There were 214 recorded migrant deaths along the Arizona border in 2004, the year that Porfirio disappeared, and his family fears he may be among them.

Still, they have never stopped trying to find him. They have talked to Mexican officials, the U.S. Border Patrol and the Mesa and Yuma police departments. They have checked jails and sought the help of immigrant advocacy organizations such as No Más Muertes and Inmigrantes Sin Fronteras.



Ken Montufar holds a flier that he made in an effort to locate his missing brother Porfirio.



Armando Montufar remembers that when he last saw his brother, before he left for Mexico, he had a sixth sense that something was going to go wrong.

"I felt a strong sensation, and I started to cry," Armando said. "I felt that I wasn't going to see him again."

Armando and brother Ken Montufar have tried to reconstruct what happened, but they have only small pieces of the puzzle to work with.

Ken was the one who got the phone call from his brother that day nearly four years ago.

Porfirio said he had met two Mexican-Americans who had agreed to give him a ride to Mesa in exchange for \$250. It was a good price, Ken said, since the charge is normally about \$1,000.

Before wiring his brother the money, Ken said he talked to the driver on his cell phone. The man said he was going to drive ahead to see if any checkpoints had been set up along the roads to catch undocumented immigrants, then he would return for Porfirio. Satisfied, Ken drove to the Western Union.

Some time later, Porfirio called Ken to check the arrangements: The driver, he said, had not yet returned. That was the last time anyone would hear from Porfirio.

Ken said that for the next three to four weeks he kept thinking his brother would turn up, but he never did. The cell phone number that the driver had given him was disconnected, and no one at the gas station could tell him what had happened.

### Missing Immigrants

Anne Goodenberger, program coordinator for the organization Humane Borders in Arizona, said she receives one to two phone calls a week from families searching for missing immigrants.

"We tell them to pray and get as much information as possible," Goodenberger said.

Goodenberger said she knows of 246 missing immigrant cases this year. Many will never be resolved. Even when bodies are found, they often are not identified or the families are not notified, she said.

"It's a stress," Goodenberger said. "If the families know (what happened to their loved ones), they can start to grieve; if not, they can't start to grieve."

Medical examiners' offices in Arizona have handled 1,100 bodies of unidentified border crossers in the last seven years, said Bruce Anderson, forensic anthropologist for Pima County. While there is a 99 percent success rate in identifying the bodies of American citizens, 25 percent of the undocumented immigrant bodies are never identified, he said.

Bodies that cannot be identified are held for one year and then buried in the county cemetery, Anderson said. For Pima County, that numbers 40 to 50 over the past six or seven years, he said. Anderson said that he thinks other southern counties' medical examiners have similar numbers.

He said sometimes the search for missing loved ones goes on for generations. "Children in the next generation grow up and want to know, 'Where's my dad?'"

"I'm afraid this is going to carry on for a long time," Anderson said. "Some families don't want to face the reality that something terrible has happened to their loved one."

### Little Hope

It has been four years since Porfirio disappeared.

The Yuma Police Department conducted an investigation but found nothing substantive, said Clint Norred, the department's public information officer.

The brothers hired a private investigator, but it was too expensive to keep him on for long.



Ken Montufar refuses to give up looking for his brother, who has been missing since crossing from Mexico into the U.S. four years ago.

They didn't want to worry their mother, Fabiana Montufar, so for a long time, they told her Porfirio was busy with work and couldn't talk to her. They sent money to her and to Porfirio's wife, Gricelda, and told them it came from Porfirio.

Meanwhile, Porfirio's wife had given birth to their second child. She eventually concluded that Porfirio had found another woman, Ken said.

Fabiana, Porfirio's mother, says only, "Pedirse a dios de pronto lo encontré," "I ask God to find him soon."

Ken and Armando have reached their own conclusions. Ken thinks the two men who picked up Porfirio in Yuma may have killed him. Armando believes that Porfirio may have tried crossing the desert on his own, became dehydrated and disoriented and lost his mind. Or he may have been captured by authorities and given them a false name.

Neither holds out much hope that their brother will be found, but they refuse to forget him. Ken has hung Porfirio's cowboy hats above his bed; he says it keeps his brother's spirit close to him. Once, when Ken had gone a week without work, one of the hats fell down onto his head, and the next week he got work. Ken said he thinks this was a sign of his brother's love.

Armando said he misses the days when he shared an apartment with Porfirio, when the two used to go out together to eat and dance. They liked to watch soccer, and Porfirio was a big Diamondbacks fan.

He said he sometimes has dreams of Porfirio; in the dreams, he and his brothers are together in México again.

The brothers offer a detailed description of Porfirio, just in case someone has seen him: 5-foot-2-inches tall, about 130 pounds, dark brown eyes and hair. He has two scars on the back of his head from when he fell from a palm tree.

"He was a good person," Armando said. "I hope that I can find a conclusion for my mind. I want to know what happened."



# Immigration Overhaul Could Remove Family Advantage

Brian Indrelunas, reporter • Deanna Dent and Courtney Sargent, photographers

For years, immigration law in the U.S. has given an edge to families.

Those who can show that they have family members in this country have a better shot at getting a student visa, a work permit and even the ultimate prize — citizenship.

That's still true, but if immigration laws ever get a serious overhaul — something that Congress has been putting off for years — any advantage for families divided by borders could be diminished, experts say.

In recent months, policymakers and public officials have talked seriously about scrapping the long-standing system that gives green cards, or permanent legal status, first to immigrants who show they have close relatives in the U.S. or employers who want to sponsor them. They suggest a new system that would award points to foreigners who speak English, are educated and have certain job skills.

A bill that would have ushered in just such a system stalled in the U.S. Senate last summer, in part because of opposition from employers who prefer the existing method under which they can directly sponsor immigrants who meet specific labor needs.

Still, those on both sides of the immigration issue say the debate is far from over.

"I don't think it's a dead concept," said Bryan Griffith, a spokesman for the Center for Immigration Studies, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank that advocates for less immigration. "Many other countries have switched over recently, Australia being the best example."

Griffith said most people recognize the need for some family-based immigration, but the current emphasis on family ties can lead to illegal immigration. Family members who are accepted into the country often send for relatives back home, who come — often illegally, he said.

"It's a very emotional issue, so it may be very difficult to (change the system)," Griffith said. "But I certainly don't think (the idea) is dead."

Michael Wilson, the Canadian ambassador to the U.S., said he has received numerous calls from U.S. legislators interested in how the Canadian system works. Canada was the first country to go to a point or merit system, adopting it in 1967. Prospective immigrants are awarded points in such areas as language, education, occupation and work experience, and those with the most points are accepted. Family ties are not considered.


At first Canada's system limited immigration to an "elite" subset of applicants, Wilson said, but the criteria were revised to allow a wider variety of workers, and the system has "worked in Canada pretty darn well," he said.

Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez, chair of ASU's Transborder Chicana/o and Latina/o Studies Department, said that the U.S. already has a de facto point system because employers can sponsor people with certain skills, such as engineers or computer programmers. But he said more innovative ways are needed to deal with immigration than simply a point system.

"We should have a rationalized way for people to cross the border to see family and work occasionally," he said.

A wall marks the border near Agua Prieta, Mexico, and Douglas, Ariz.  
Photo by Courtney Sargent





Vélez-Ibáñez pointed to a Canadian agricultural-worker program as an example. Immigrants “spend three months in Canada and then they leave,” he said. “They go back to Mexico and till their own farms.”

While in Canada, the workers are given housing and medical care and are protected under Canadian law. “It has worked beautifully,” he said. “Why? Because the Canadians took a highly rationalized approach. I think this country can learn a hell of a lot from Canada’s experience.”

President Bush and some Arizona legislators are supporting guest worker programs that would essentially do the same thing – bring in temporary workers to fill gaps in the labor force. The Arizona proposal would allow Arizona employers to recruit temporary workers from Mexico only after demonstrating that there is a shortage of local labor to fill jobs.

Any immigration policy has to take into account the economic realities of two countries that share such close proximity, Mexican President Felipe Calderón said in a speech last September.

“Migration is a natural phenomenon socially, economically inevitable and, I would say, also economically convenient for the economy of North America as a region,” Calderón told the 25th Border Governors Conference, held in Puerto Peñasco, Sonora. “There probably aren’t in the world two neighboring economies that are so clearly complementary as the United States’ and the Mexican economies.”

Vélez-Ibáñez agreed that the two economies function as one. “It’s not an American economy. It’s not a Mexican economy,” he said. “It’s a transborder economy.”

He said Mexican citizens have labored throughout the southwestern region of North America for hundreds of years and without Mexican labor, “most of the infrastructure of what we see in southern Arizona and in New Mexico and in Southern California from the 19th century on couldn’t have happened — period.

“Prior to this whole stuff on immigration, people were going back and forth,” he added. “What needed to be done an awful long time ago was border passes to work if jobs are available. The European Union has been doing this for 40 years.”

Immigration reform will only be successful if it takes into account the far-reaching economic implications of immigrant labor, Vélez-Ibáñez added.

“You cannot have an immigration system unless you fundamentally understand the political economy,” he said. “If you’re not willing to take that on, the rest falls apart. They’re all bandages.”

In his September speech, Calderon reminded officials that immigration policy also has a profound effect on families. “We are not gladdened by immigration because we know that our families are divided, that our towns are divided, that our communities are divided,” he said.

Ribbons on a cross on the Agua Prieta side of the Arizona-Mexico border represent people who have died crossing the desert. Photo by Deanna Dent



# LEAVING ARIZONA

## Employee Sanctions Prompt Some Immigrants to go Elsewhere

Leah Duran, reporter • Ashley Lowery, photographer

AVONDALE, Ariz. — In the corner of a living room in a small house that he rents here, Juan Carlos has piled six black garbage bags stuffed with clothes and housewares along with an old vacuum cleaner.

Juan Carlos, 50, said he will donate some of his possessions to a local church and send others to family in Mexico.

Unable to afford a moving truck and unsure of his future in Arizona, Juan Carlos is preparing to leave behind his wife and daughter, both undocumented immigrants, for a new state and a new life. Juan Carlos, who has a worker visa, declined to give his last name to protect the identity of his wife and daughter, who are in Arizona illegally.

“My plan is to go to Utah because I see a lot of problems here,” said Juan Carlos, who has put his house on the market.

When he moved to Arizona with his family more than two years ago, it seemed like the perfect place to live. He found work as a golf course irrigator, and his wife landed a job at the local supermarket. His daughter formed close friendships at a local church. Yet, increasing hostility towards undocumented immigrants and the fear of repercussions from Arizona’s new employer-sanctions law has motivated Juan Carlos to seek a livelihood elsewhere.


“Our friends are leaving because they don’t want to go to jail or wait for the new law” to be implemented, he said.

The law, which went into effect Jan. 1, requires employers to verify personal information of new hires against an online federal database of Social Security numbers and immigration records. Businesses that knowingly employ undocumented workers can have their business licenses suspended for 10 days for a first offense and permanently revoked for a second offense. States such as Georgia and Colorado have adopted similar laws.

Immigrants and immigration advocates describe a growing anxiety about the new law and increased immigration enforcement. As a result, undocumented immigrants — in numbers that aren’t clear yet — are returning to Mexico or moving to Utah, Minnesota or other states where they hope the atmosphere is friendlier.

Juan Carlos has traveled to Utah twice in search of housing, jobs for himself and his wife, Lidia, and schooling for his daughter Monica, 20, who wants to be a photographer. He plans to move first and get settled. He hopes that his wife and daughter will follow later.

The move will pull him farther away from his son Carlos, 25, and other daughter, Carla, 26. Both attend the Sonora Institute of Technology Public University in Sonora, Mexico, and could not be persuaded to come to the U.S. But with six of his friends already in jail for



Family and friends sing happy birthday to Juan Carlos, 50. Juan Carlos is looking for work in another state because of Arizona’s tougher illegal immigration laws.



immigration-related offenses, Juan Carlos feels like he is running out of options.

"We tried to stay together near Mexico and come to visit them two or three times a year," Juan Carlos said. "You know, Utah is far away."

Juan Carlos said he and his family made a decent living as owners of a restaurant in the Mexican state of Sonora. But they left their home more than six years ago after being robbed at gunpoint several times, he said. They came to the U.S. hoping to find a peaceful life.

"A lot of people came just for a job, to make money and go back," he said. "But people like us, we try to find a good life, work and peace."

Juan Carlos eventually hopes to become a U.S. citizen.

"We can lose anything — the job, money — but we want peace, and we want

a unified family," said daughter Monica, who has moved with her family 14 times within the U.S. and Mexico in search of that ideal. "The division of families is too hard. We miss our friends and our family in Mexico, but we're trying to get a better life for us to live the American dream."

Lately, that dream has turned sour amid increasing hostility toward undocumented immigrants. Juan Carlos and his family said they feel unwelcome.

"We feel like we're in a persecution," Lidia said in Spanish. "Not every Latin person is a criminal. We work hard; we pay taxes; we are good employees. We feel bad because we don't know when the police will come to the door and say, 'Who are you?'"

The number of undocumented immigrants who are thinking about moving away or who have already left is hard to pinpoint, said Luis Sosa, president of the Avondale committee of Immigrants Without Borders. Sosa also owns an automotive repair shop in Avondale.

"This is a big issue because if there's no work, there's no reason to be here," said Sosa, who knows 20 people who have left Arizona. "A lot of people left already, but most of them are waiting to see what's going to happen, how they're going to implement (the new law), how it's going to work."

Lisa Magana, an Arizona State University associate professor who specializes in trans-border Chicano and Latino studies, said the law is symbolic. E-Verify, formerly known as the Basic Pilot Program, cannot detect if an undocumented worker is using someone else's valid personal information. Employers are required to submit I-9 forms on new hires but can accept documents that appear to be genuine without confirming their validity. Also, the law forbids employers to use the system to check the citizenship status of current employees.

"The law is currently ineffective, mostly because you can show a fake ID," Magana said. "We don't have tamper-proof IDs in the U.S., so it is easy to circumvent."

While people are waiting to see how the law is enforced, it is already fulfilling its purpose of curbing the number of undocumented immigrants in Arizona, said Ira Mehlman, spokesman for the Federation for American Immigration Reform. He said the advent of the employer-sanctions law, along with other restrictive policies such as recent state initiatives cracking down on immigration, have made it less appealing for immigrants to migrate illegally to Arizona or for those already in the state to continue to live here. And workers choosing to leave generally are followed by their families.

"One of the things I hear people complaining about is that families want to stay together," Mehlman said. "We can assume that if they want to stay together, the rest of the family will leave with the principal breadwinner."

Undocumented immigrants fear the division of families not only due to the employer-sanctions law but local police enforcement of federal immigration policies, said Sosa, who has already closed an automotive business he co-owned in Phoenix after police apprehended several undocumented workers.

"It's a combination that is going to be working together because the state is basically closing its doors to undocumented immigrants," Sosa said. "These things working together next year is going to be devastating — a state of chaos."

Before the full effects of the law are felt, Juan Carlos hopes to be settled in Utah.

"Someplace with security and where we won't have a problem with immigration — that's what we're looking for," he said.



Top: Juan Carlos' wife, Lidia, hands a slice of cake to her husband as the family gathers for a birthday celebration. The family isn't sure how much longer they will be together. Bottom: Juan Carlos' daughter, Monica, 20, (standing) celebrates with friends at her father's birthday party.



A woman with dark hair, wearing a black t-shirt and grey pants, is sitting on the floor of a workshop. She is holding a young child in her lap. She is focused on shaping a large, round clay pot with her hands. The workshop is filled with many other clay pots of various sizes and shapes, some stacked on the floor and others on a table covered with a red floral patterned cloth. The lighting is warm and focused on the woman and her work.

# Remittances Change Lives

*Kristi Eaton, reporter • Deanna Dent, photographer*

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story was reported from Tempe, Ariz., and Veracruz and Jalisco, Mexico.

As he has done most every week for eight years, Pedro Cordova Martinez steps into El Paisano Mercado, a convenience store near his home in Tempe, and makes his way to the back. There he encounters two cashiers standing behind a glass panel, waiting for the end-of-the-week rush.

His hands are caked with grime. Dirt has permanently darkened fingernails that reach into his pocket and pull out \$100 in cash, which Martinez hands to one of the women working the counter.

Juana Murillo Escoto, 18, holds her son as she makes clay pots to supplement money sent by her brothers in the U.S.



The cash is just about all of the paycheck he earns working at his job in the plumbing industry.

Martinez, 21, instructs the woman to send the money to San Isidro, Veracruz, Mexico, to the mother and father he has not seen since he entered the U.S. illegally in 1999.

Every week, it is the same routine.

"I'm trying to make a more better life," he said in broken English.

His parents are grateful for the money, he said. "It's \$100 here but 1,000 pesos there. It's a lot of money."

Martinez is one of 6.6 million Mexican citizens living and working in the U.S. who send money, known as remittances, back to their families.

More than \$23 billion flowed from the U.S. to Mexico in 2006, and a little more than that was expected to be transferred in 2007, according to the InterAmerican Development Bank.

### Scraping By

For many Mexicans, the money means the difference between living on a few dollars a day and living on nothing at all.

Maria de los Angeles Escoto, 48, lives with her daughter, Juana Murillo, 18, in a hut in Jesus Maria, Jalisco, about two hours northeast of Guadalajara.

Her three sons, ages 23 to 27, live and work illegally in Arlington, Texas. They send her \$60 to \$100 every two to four weeks. The money helps pay for food, electricity and other basic necessities. But to get by, Escoto and her daughter still must make clay pots by hand and sell them out of their home for three pesos each.

"Here you have to work to eat," Escoto said.

She said she is ashamed her sons must send money back for her to live, but "it's a necessity," she said in Spanish. "Here we didn't have anything when they left. Everything here is from what they send."

Escoto has not seen her sons since they left for the U.S. more than 10 years ago. It has gotten to the point that she would rather see them than have things.

"I just want to see my sons," she said.

### The Start of a Trend?

Remittances play a powerful role in Mexico's economy.

Money sent from other countries is second only to cash from oil exports as a source of income, according to Banco de Mexico.

The amount of money sent back, however, is not rising as fast as it once did. During the first half of 2007, the growth rate was just 0.6 percent, compared to an average annual growth of 19.1 percent between 2003 and 2006, according to Banco de Mexico.

"It's difficult to tell at this point if it's even a trend," said Aaron Terrazas, a research assistant for the Migration Policy Institute, a nonprofit organization that studies migration patterns worldwide.

But it's not hard to guess at the cause for the stagnation: The recent downturn in the U.S. housing industry has affected a large percentage of the more than 2 million Mexicans who work in the construction industry, Terrazas said.

Remittances also could be affected by a crackdown in some states, including Arizona, on those who employ illegal immigrants.

A 2007 InterAmerican Development Bank study found that 82 percent of Mexican citizens living legally or illegally in the U.S. think it is now more difficult for a Latin American immigrant to get a good-paying job in the U.S. than it used to be. Of those who said it was



Older ranchers socialize outside the town square of Jesus Maria, Jalisco, Mexico. Many towns, especially in southern Mexico, have experienced a loss of younger, working-aged men.

more difficult, 45 percent attributed the change to immigration laws that require workers to show employers documents proving they are in the country legally.

### Going Back

Alondra Cuevas Carrera, 20, returned to her native Zongolica, Veracruz, from Montgomery, Ala., in 2006 when she could no longer get work using forged documents.

If she couldn't work, there was no reason to stay.

She and her father, Aurello Cuevas Carrera, entered the country illegally in 2005 in search of jobs that would allow them to send money back to her mother and young daughter in Veracruz.

Carrera spent \$2,500 to cross the Mexican border and travel through the Arizona desert. As soon as she could, she caught a bus to Alabama, arriving in Montgomery on a Tuesday. By the following Monday, using a fake Social Security card and work visa she bought from other Mexicans living in Alabama, she had a job in a factory making fiberglass molds.

During her 16 months in the U.S., Alondra also worked as a bread baker and as a babysitter, typically making about \$6 per hour. Her father worked in a Honda factory, earning \$8.50 an hour.

The two of them lived frugally in order to save as much money as possible.

They lived with five other people in a one-bedroom trailer. Rent totaled \$300 for seven of them. Each month the Carreras spent about \$50 on food and another \$50 on phone calls and personal items. They didn't buy new clothes until the ones they owned were so old they couldn't be worn any longer.

The scrimping and saving helped. Every week father and daughter wired \$100 back to Zongolica, a town of about 39,000 people.

But three months into the job, Aurello Carrera was dismissed because the company



Maria Guadalupe Melendes Alvarez sews together a shoe in front of her home in Jesus Maria, Mexico. She receives 7.5 pesos an hour, the U.S. equivalent of 75 cents, for every pair she sews. Although she has brothers in the U.S., the money they send back is not enough to support the family.

couldn't verify his residency status. He tried to get a job at a chicken-packing factory, but his forged documents wouldn't pass muster there either.

Tougher enforcement of immigration laws was having its effect.

With Alondra unable to support both herself and her father, the two decided to head back to Zongolica. They had sent about \$10,000 to family in Mexico.

### **Stopping the Flow**

Jack Martin couldn't be happier that the new laws are working.

He is director of special projects for the Federation for America Immigration Reform, a national nonprofit organization that hopes to put a stop to illegal immigration and slow the pace of legal immigration to match the flow of people leaving the U.S.— about 300,000 a year.

Ultimately, FAIR would like to see national immigration reform, Martin said. But until then, the organization is hoping more states will adopt laws like Arizona's Legal Arizona Workers Act that went into effect Jan. 1. The act punishes employers who knowingly hire illegal immigrants.

"Given the lack of agreement in Washington, it is not only appropriate but responsible for local officials to take measures into their own hands," Martin said.

He sees the slowdown in remittances as a good thing – and a sign that laws are starting to be enforced.

"Remittances are a drag on the U.S. economy because it removes money that would otherwise be invested locally," he said.

### **A Long History**

Remittances have played a part in both the U.S. and Mexican economies for decades, said Paul Espinoza, a professor in Transborder Chicana/o and Latina/o studies at Arizona State University.

Mexican citizens living and working in the U.S. began sending money home in large numbers after World War II, Espinoza said. The trend kept growing into the 1960s and 1970s.

"Certainly by the '80s it was a very substantial number," he said.

But since the mid-1990s, things have begun to change. Until then, seasonal migration was the norm, Espinoza said. Migrants would come to the U.S. for a few months at a time to work, and they would take their money with them when they left.

"Pre-1994 there was a much more significant back and forth seasonal migration," he said. "But starting in the mid-'90s, people essentially started to stay much longer. They didn't want to have to face going back into the U.S."

Espinoza believes that increased border enforcement has actually kept legal and illegal Mexican citizens in the U.S. – thus driving up remittances.

For example, after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, when it became harder to cross U.S. borders, "the assumption was there would be a drop, but it was contradictory ... The amounts increased," said Peter Bate, a spokesman for the InterAmerican Development Bank.

In fact, from 2001 to 2002, not only did the number of transactions and volume of remittances increase, but the average amount sent in each transaction grew from \$321 to \$328.

Around the same time, Bank of America began a program making it easier for Hispanics living in the U.S. to send money back to families in Mexico.

SafeSend, which started in 2002, allowed users to set up checking and savings accounts to transfer funds via ATM, phone or online for a flat fee to more than 4,500 locations through-





out Mexico, said Diane Wagner, a spokeswoman for Bank of America.

The program was revamped in September 2005 to allow money to be paid in cash, Wagner said. Transfer fees also were eliminated.

Wagner said Bank of America decided to make the changes after hearing from members of the Hispanic community “that they wanted to put more money in the hands of family members in Mexico with less fees.”

In 2005 the Banco de Mexico and the Federal Reserve banks teamed up to create Directo a Mexico, a program aimed at helping U.S. financial institutions assist customers in remitting funds to Mexico. The program provides institutions with Spanish-language marketing materials for customers.

#### “Don’t Come Home”

It took Martinez 10 tries before he successfully crossed the border from Mexico into Naco, Ariz.

He was just 14, and he was intent on joining his brother, who had made the trip two years before and was doing well and sending money home.

Even after several years here, Martinez thought of his stay as temporary — until his father was shot in the lower back. Martinez desperately wanted to return to San Isidro as his father hovered between life and death.

But a return visit meant no money to pay his father’s medical bills, and there was no guarantee he would be able to get back into the U.S.

‘No, don’t come home,’ his mother told him. “Send more money.”

Martinez reconsidered. “I’d like to go home, but what am I going to do once I get there?” he said.

Staying and working in the U.S. is best for everyone.

“We’re better here,” he said. “We’re doing better here. My family’s doing better there.”



Top left: Many of the nicest homes in Jesus Maria, Mexico, were built with remittance money, or money sent back to Mexico from family members working in the U.S.

Top right: A Campo Azul employee hacks a heart of agave to prepare it for fermentation. Agave and ranching are the traditional sources of livelihood for residents of Jalisco, Mexico, but they don’t bring in enough money to make remittances unnecessary.

Bottom: A group of young boys traverse the blue agave fields outside of the Campo Azul tequila factory in Jesus Maria, Mexico.



A photograph of a man with dark hair, wearing a white t-shirt and a necklace, holding a baby in his arms. The man is looking down at the baby, who is wearing a striped shirt and denim overalls. The man is holding a clear plastic bottle with a blue cap, and the baby is holding the bottle. The background is a warm, orange-toned wall. The overall mood is intimate and tender.

# Divided Family Struggles to Stay Connected

*Deanna Dent, reporter/photographer*

TUXTLAN, Mexico — Van Bui Rios holds her sleeping son in her lap as the small airplane carries them across the U.S.-Mexico border.

Bui is headed to Guadalajara to see her husband, David Rios, who was deported from the U.S. to Mexico in the fall of 2007. The trip is only three hours by plane from the Dallas-Fort Worth area, where Bui lives, but the trip itself was three months in the making.

"I charged this trip on my credit card," said Bui, 24. "I know I shouldn't, but at least this way I can see David again."

As the plane begins its descent, Bui turns to her son. "We're going to see daddy," she tells the 1-year-old as she adjusts his sweater vest and puts on his new shoes.

Bui has never been to Mexico before. She's both excited and nervous as she follows the long line of fellow Americans through customs and into the baggage area. As she pushes through the frosted glass doors of the waiting area, she scans the crowd for her husband.

In a moment they are holding each other tightly, their son still in Bui's arms. David Jr. has fallen asleep, and he wakes with a start when his father picks him up.

David Rios Sr., 24, tries to get reacquainted with his son, David Jr., 1, whom he has not seen in three months.



For a long moment, the son examines the father, then David Jr. turns away. He wants his mother.

Rios, 24, knows that his son can't possibly remember him very well, but still it's hard. "It's been three months, and he is so little," he explains.

The rest of Rios' family surrounds the pair, curious to meet the American wife and son. After everyone is introduced and has had a chance to exclaim over the baby, the group sets off through the airport and heads for home — a barrio on the outskirts of Guadalajara called Ixtapan. This is where Rios has lived with his godmother since being escorted across the border into Juarez, Mexico, last fall.

Rios recounts the story as he plays with his son, gently trying to win his trust.

"I came to the United States when I was 3 years old," he said. "We lived in California and then we moved to Texas."

He and Bui met when they were in high school and working at a restaurant in Dallas, Bui as a server, he as a cook. They were just 18 years old. Prior to Rios' deportation, the longest the couple had been apart was a month-long trip Bui took to Vietnam.

Moving easily between Spanish and English, Rios explained that one day last year, he got a ticket for an expired dog tag and ended up going to court to pay the violation. The judge told him that because he couldn't prove that he was in the country legally he would be deported. If he left voluntarily, he could apply to return to the U.S. If not, he faced forced deportation without the option of returning legally.

Rios chose voluntary deportation, but he was still surprised when authorities came to his house one morning to pick him up. He had just gotten out of the shower. Barefoot and wearing only shorts, he was transferred to a detention center in Dallas where he spent three days and two nights. From there, he and a large group of other illegal immigrants were taken by bus to Austin and then to El Paso on the border.

"There was one young kid who was wearing no shoes," Rios said. No one was allowed to make a phone call until the group reached Juarez, just a few miles into Mexico. Once in Juarez, Rios immediately boarded another bus, this one to Guadalajara, where he had family.

Bui said the couple hired a lawyer who told them that, "David could be back home in a year if everything goes as planned. Seeing as he has an American son and he is married to me, (we thought) it should be fine."

They now realize the wait could be much, much longer. Bui applied for a green card for Rios as soon as he found out he would be deported in August of 2007, but by December the only thing they had was a notification that the application had been received.

Many immigrants think that if they are married to a U.S. citizen gaining legal status will be easy. But to apply, illegal immigrants must leave the country first and may not return for a specified period of time, depending on their circumstances. If the illegal immigrant was in the U.S. for as little as 181 or as many as 364 days, he or she is barred from returning for three years. If the illegal immigrant was in the U.S. for 365 days or longer, he or she is barred from returning for 10 years. Immigrants can apply for a waiver, but they must prove that the wait will cause an extreme hardship for their U.S. spouses.

While he waits, Rios is trying hard to adjust to life in a new country. He found work with a cousin, transporting goods between shops and markets. It requires 12 hour a day of strenuous labor, and it pays in a week what he earned in one day in Texas.

If it hadn't been for his godmother and relatives, "I don't know how I would've made it here," he said. But "I miss my family, my wife."

With her husband gone, Bui moved back in with her parents, who came to this country from Vietnam and are now U.S. citizens. Her full-time job as a hair stylist did not pay enough

for her to keep the house where she and Rios had been living.

She and David Jr. share a small, olive-colored bedroom with diapers and toys and clothes scattered about. Every few minutes, a cousin or sibling sneaks in the room to play with the baby.

Each night at about 10:30, Bui clears the room and sits in front of her computer. She logs onto instant messenger and waits. "I log on and hope he is on, too," she said. Rios has to go to an internet café to access a computer.

Tonight Rios' face appears on the screen. Bui holds the baby on her lap and points at the image of his father. "Look, it's daddy," she says. David Jr. watches intently as his father makes faces and pops up moving icons of aliens and happy faces.

As his parents talk about work and relatives, David Jr. begins to fall asleep. Soon, too soon, the internet café is closing, and Rios says he has to go. They say goodbye, and Bui puts the baby to bed.



Van Bui embraces her husband, David Rios Sr., at the International Airport in Guadalajara, Mexico. David Jr. is asleep in her arms.



Top: David Rios Sr., 24, teases David Jr. as he tries to reconnect with his son after three months apart. Bottom left: Van Bui Rios holds with her son while talking with her husband, who is in Ixtapan, Mexico. Bottom right: David Sr. talks on the phone with his wife, who is in the U.S.





Above: David Rios Sr. attends a posada, or Christmas gathering, with his family in Guadalajara. This posada was the first Rios had ever attended. Top: Van Bui Rios plays with her son, David Jr., in the room they share at her parents' Houston home.



# Child Detainees

## Undocumented Teens Sent Home

*Ryan A. Ruiz, photographer • Kristi Eaton, reporter*

NOGALES, Mexico — Every month, thousands of undocumented teenagers are caught trying to cross into the U.S. The teens travel by plane, bus and sometimes foot for thousands of miles — often on their own — to try to reach the U.S. After they are caught, many are sent to Mexican-run shelters along the border, where they stay until they can be sent back to their families, many of them in southern Mexico. From January through August of 2007, Mexican officials repatriated more than 20,000 teenagers, according to the National Institute of Migration. The majority of them were seeking jobs in the U.S.





David Juarez, 15, set out from his home in the mountains near Veracruz, Mexico, headed for a place called Mississippi. He had no clear idea where Mississippi is, but he had heard he could find a job there. He traveled by himself nearly 1,000 miles, making it just over the Mexico-Arizona border when he was picked up by the U.S. Border Patrol and sent to La Casa YMCA, a halfway house for minors in Agua Prieta, Mexico. David spent a few days in the facility before a family friend came to pick him up and took him to the bus station, where he would catch a bus home.





TUCSON  
THREE  
On almost any day at La Casa YMCA in Agua Prieta, Mexico, a dozen or more teenagers wait for relatives to pick them up or arrange for them to get home. The teens, who come from all over Mexico, have all been caught trying to cross illegally into the U.S. Many have tried and been detained more than once. Raymond Islas, 14, (right) of Puebla in southern Mexico, was trying to make his way to South Carolina with a cousin when they were stopped. He and other teens get three meals a day at the center. They are responsible for setting the table for meals and cleaning up. Afterward, there is little to do except watch TV — and wait.









# David's Story

## A Boy Returns Home

*Kristi Eaton, reporter • Ryan A. Ruiz, photographer*

ZAMAJAPA, Mexico — When David Tetzoyolt Juarez was caught trying to cross illegally into Arizona from Mexico, he had no money, no ability to speak the language and no idea that his planned destination — Mississippi — was actually a state more than 1,000 miles from where he stood.

The 15-year-old boy only knew that he wanted to make a better life for his family, and he believed he would find it on the other side of the Mexican border.

But just a few minutes after crossing the border, David was stopped by the U.S. Border Patrol. And a week later, he was back living with his mother and two brothers in Zamajapa in the Mexican state of Veracruz. Back in the dirt-floor house, sharing one bedroom with his mother and two brothers. Back to watching the rogue chickens and dogs roam in and out of the house with no doors.

David is one of thousands of undocumented teenagers caught every month trying to cross into the U.S. and who are sent back to their homelands. From January through August 2008, Mexican officials repatriated more than 20,000 teenagers, according to the National Institute of Migration. The majority of them were seeking work in the U.S.

It was David's idea to make the trip, his idea to buy a bus ticket and travel two days to the border. His mother paid a man from her village to serve as his guide. David would cross the border with the guide and three dozen other people, then make his way to Mississippi, where he has cousins who work on a chicken farm.

Instead, he ended up at Casa YMCA, a nondescript house in the Mexican border town of Agua Prieta that takes in youngsters stopped by immigration officials. The house is a

temporary shelter until the teens figure out how they'll get back home.

Most leave within five days, but there's no limit to how long the minors can stay, said Ernesto Peraza Amparan, the director of Casa YMCA. "It's home until they get enough money to go back," he said.

Amparan said between 120 and 150 teenagers stay in the shelter each month. Most have parents who are working in the U.S., and they want to re-join them and find jobs themselves.

As part of Mexico's Desarrollo Integral de Familia, Casa YMCA provides kids three meals a day and a place to shower, sleep and recuperate from an oftentimes harsh ordeal. There are DIF shelters all across the border housing teenagers who have unsuccessfully attempted to cross into the U.S.

Some teenagers arrive after having walked through the desert for three or four days with no food or water, Amparan said.

"Sometimes guides say, 'Bring food for two days,' but will walk them for five days," he said.

Aida Gomez Islas, 16, said she had had only a handful of peanuts to eat in five days when she was caught near Nogales, Ariz., and sent to the Nogales DIF shelter.

She was making her way to the border from Puebla in southern Mexico, traveling with her cousin Raymondo, 14. They were headed to South Carolina to join Aida's mother, whom she hasn't seen in five years, ever since her mother left to work on a ranch.

The cousins traveled for five days, first flying from Puebla to Hermosillo, Mexico, then taking a bus to Nogales, before trying to cross the border by foot.

Amparan said many of the teenagers caught trying to cross are from states in southern Mexico or Guatemala.

"The economic system is really poor there," he said.

Victoria Juarez said it is poverty that drove her son to leave home.

"I told him not to go, but he wanted to go to help the family," she said.

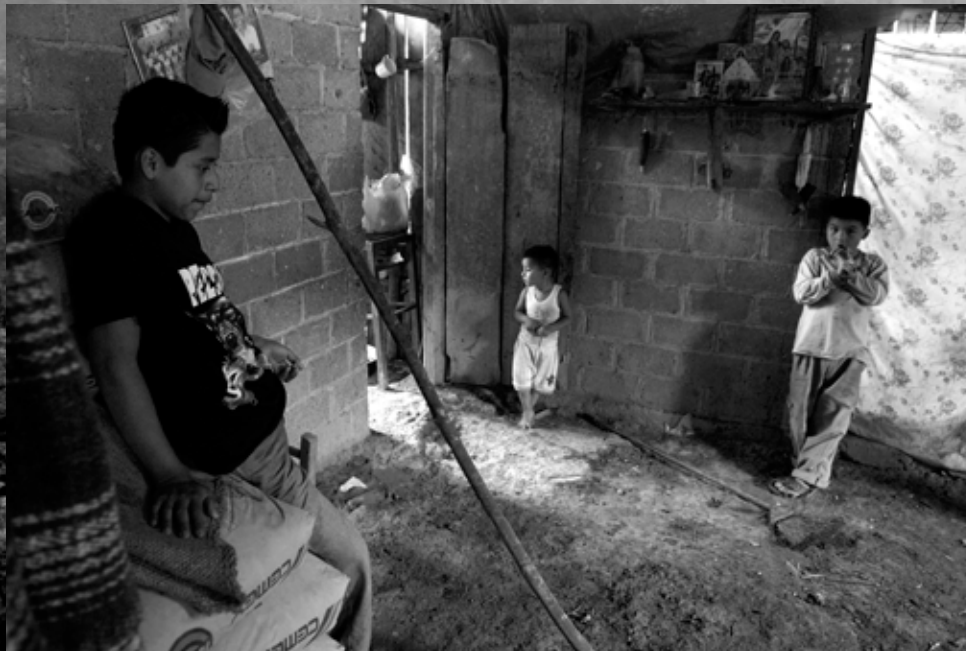
When she got the call that he had been caught and would be returning home, she had mixed feelings.

"I was sad when I heard he didn't make it, but happy he was OK," she said.

David doesn't know if — or when — he will try again. First, he and his mother must repay a staggering \$1,000 loan from family members who financed his trip.

So they will stay in their village, in the house with the dirt floor and stark mountain views. They will work for a neighboring farmer, picking corn for \$3 a day.

And they will wait for another day.



Left: David Juarez, 15, his mother and his two younger brothers share a one-room house in Veracruz, Mexico. Background: The countryside around David's home is densely vegetated and the population is generally poor.





Top left: David Juarez, 15, listens to the radio at home.  
Bottom left: David was sent back to live with his mother, Victoria Juarez, and two brothers in a small house with a dirt floor in the mountains of Veracruz, Mexico.  
Right: David (right) talks with his mother at their home.





## Man Barks at Dog, Faces Deportation

*Angela Le, reporter • Branden Eastwood, photographer*

TUCSON, Ariz. — Victor Napoles, a 21-year-old Mexican national who grew up in Tucson, is facing deportation after losing a case that began with him barking at another man's dog.

That man turned out to be a U.S. Border Patrol agent.

Now Napoles, the oldest of five children and “the man of the family,” is facing the consequences of the impulsive late-night joke that occurred more than a year ago in Tucson. The case shows how, for an undocumented immigrant, even a seemingly insignificant joke can have dire effects.

Napoles' mother, Angelica Martinez, is terrified that her son will be deported. At 43, Martinez is the mother of five children — four of them born in the U.S. and Napoles, who was born in Hermosillo, Mexico. She and Napoles are in this country illegally.

Losing Napoles would be very hard for his younger siblings, Martinez said. “(He's) their father, their mentor ... he's their everything,” she said.

Her 10-year-old son, Cesar, looks up to Napoles the most. “He's my superhero,” Cesar said. “I love Victor very much. If he leaves, I'll miss him.”

On Nov. 8, 2007, Martinez was the only family member present for her eldest son's deportation hearing. Border Patrol agent James Spiering testified that his reason for pulling Napoles over was “the way he was shouting over my lane at my K-9 dog made me think he wasn't in the right state of mind.”

Victor Napoles (center) jokes around with his sister Victoria, brother David and mother, Angelica Martinez.



"I thought he could have been mentally ill and forgot to take his medicine or was driving under the influence," Spiering said.

Martinez doesn't believe the agent's explanation. And she says the agent was out of line when he said to the judge that he also thought Napoles might have a connection to a drive-by shooting six months previously at the same intersection.

Napoles said he had no idea that a simple bark could land him in such trouble.

"I was taking my friend home and was at a stoplight when an unmarked Durango drove up next to me," Napoles said. "The dog in the car started barking at me and I thought, 'Why not?' and barked back. I had no idea it was a Border Patrol's dog."

Shortly after the light turned green and Napoles drove away, he noticed flashing police lights and pulled over. "The first thing the officer said was, 'Why were you barking at my dog?'" Napoles said. "I was dumbfounded."

Napoles was arrested for being in the country illegally and sent to a detention facility in Florence, where he stayed for several days until being released pending his detention hearing.

### The Dream Act

Napoles' lawyer, Maurice Goldman, initially tried to hold off the deportation hearing in hopes that Congress would approve the DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Act.

The DREAM Act would have provided amnesty to those under the age of 30 who came to the U.S. illegally before the age of 16 because of their parents' actions. The child would have had to prove he or she had been in the country for at least five years, had graduated from high school or received a GED or had attended at least two years of college and had good character. Napoles met all of those qualifications, but in the end it didn't matter. The act failed to pass the U.S. Senate, getting 52 of the 60 votes needed.

"We've been waiting for the DREAM Act since Victor turned 18," Martinez said. "He was in high school when the bill came out, and nothing happened with it. It's been year after year, just waiting."

"I was hoping for the DREAM Act," Goldman said. "Now we have to try a motion to suppress. It's more like a Band-Aid."

Napoles lost his deportation hearing and was ordered to leave the country. But he remains while Goldman appeals. Goldman is arguing that the evidence about Victor's immigration status was unlawfully obtained.

"We'll try to get the case terminated," Goldman said. "But if we win, Victor will still walk the streets with no legal status. Without the DREAM Act, we have to find some other form of relief."

For some, the DREAM Act's defeat was a victory against undocumented immigrants. "We oppose all forms of amnesty because they send the message abroad that we are prepared to overlook illegal entry or disregard the terms of legal entry," said Jack Martin, director of special projects for the Federation for American Immigration Reform. "This act is an incentive to ignore our laws. The illegal immigration situation has become out of control because of our past failure to firmly enforce our immigration law."

Goldman said he'll keep on appealing Napoles' case as long as possible "so we can prolong the deportation."



Victor Napoles and his sister, Victoria (right) spend a Sunday afternoon playing Jenga and other games with their brothers.

### Relying on Miracles

Throughout the fight to keep her son in this country, Martinez has shown a determined confidence. She says she has learned to believe in miracles.

After coming to the U.S. when Napoles was just a small child, she remarried and had four children, Victoria, 14, David, 12, Christian, 11, and Cesar, 10. The youngest ones all survived severe health issues, she said.

At age 3, David was diagnosed with Kawasaki disease, an illness that caused his heart to swell to three times its normal size and can cause serious heart damage. After three days in the hospital, the crisis passed, and David has had no symptoms since, Martinez said.

Christian was 7 when he went into a coma due to severe allergies, she said. He regained consciousness in three days, with no apparent long-lasting effects.

The last miracle involved her youngest child. When Cesar was 4 weeks old, she found him not breathing and unresponsive in his crib. He was rushed to the emergency room, where he was revived. Doctors estimated he had been clinically dead for several minutes and would be mentally challenged, but he has suffered no long-term consequences, Martinez said.

Her husband was with her through those difficult times, but after a disagreement a year ago Martinez said she kicked him out. She alleges that her husband retaliated by reporting her illegal status to authorities.

"He thought if he can take the kids it would be a way of hurting me," she said.

As a result, Martinez faces a deportation hearing of her own.

"If I lose my case, then the kids will come with me to Mexico," she said. "We'll figure something out."

"We have a very strong faith. We have so many miracles in (our) home."



Juan Villa must decide whether to leave his children behind if he is deported to Mexico.

# Deportation Means Decision of a Lifetime

*Angela Le, reporter • Branden Eastwood, photographer*

TUCSON, Ariz. — Juan Villa, a lifelong Tucson resident, is on the brink of being deported. If he loses his legal fight to remain in this country, his wife and U.S.-born children face what amounts to an impossible choice: stay in the U.S., where their friends and life are, or go to Mexico and start over in a new country.

Villa says he wants his family to remain behind in Tucson if he loses. Life in Mexico is not the life he wants for his family.

It's not the life that Fatima Ruiz, Juan's wife, wants either. In Mexico "everything is different," she said. "The air, the view, my radio stations. We're from here. We say we're from Tucson, not ... Mexico."

But neither does she want a life without her husband.

## Out of Sight

Ruiz and her husband both were born in Hermosillo, Mexico, but came to Tucson with their families when they were the age of kindergartners. Ruiz obtained legal status along with her mother, but Villa never did.

The couple has been together for seven years and married for three. A month into the relationship, Villa, 23, told Ruiz he wasn't a legal citizen.

"I said, 'Who cares?'" Ruiz said. "But as you start to live together (and) have kids, you start seeing the problem."

For years, the couple rarely left their home in Tucson, fearing that they would be asked for identification. They avoided going on vacation or even to the movies.

Mostly, they stayed at home with their four U.S.-born children – Ruiz getting work as a notary and Villa making money selling the cars he fixed up in his backyard.

However, the two worried constantly that Villa would be discovered.

"It's hard to explain to the children why we pray that INS won't catch us right before we cross the street," Ruiz said.

Ultimately, it was a cracked windshield that exposed them.

Villa was driving with a friend one day in August 2005 when he was pulled over for having a crack in his windshield. He showed his Mexican driver's license, and the officer called the Immigration and Naturalization Service, which detained Villa and his friend at the Central Arizona Detention Center in Florence.

Villa was given the option of agreeing to voluntary departure rather than face trial. He signed the form and was deported to Nogales, Mexico. That caused him to miss his court date for the cracked windshield, triggering a warrant for his arrest.

He said he made the decision to cross back through the desert with a friend because he couldn't stand to be away from his family. It took him a week walking across the desert from Nogales to Tucson.

"I remember getting a call from Juan to come pick him up from the next town over, not knowing the risk of picking up my husband," Ruiz said. "He was gone for a whole week. I was going crazy."



The risk soon became clear.

### Problems Mount

Ruiz said she went to pick up her husband and a friend of his, only to find that INS was now after her.

"They were going to charge me with smuggling and give me 10 years, five years for each person," she said.

Ruiz was handcuffed, fingerprinted and locked up, but the only thing she remembers running through her head at the time was, "My kids are at my house with my brother!"

Ruiz was released the same day, but Villa and his friend had to go back to the detention center, where they signed the voluntary departure forms and were deported again.

They simply turned around and crossed the desert once more.

### Fighting to Stay

For two years, things were quiet. Then one day in August 2007, Villa was stopped for speeding while driving his son to school.

When the officer ran his name, he discovered the 2005 warrant.

"The officer said normally he wouldn't care if I didn't have any paperwork," Villa said. "But since the warrant popped up, he had to bring me in."

This time Villa hired a lawyer, Maurice Goldman, to help him try to get a much-coveted green card so he can stay in the U.S.

Goldman is seeking something known as a "Cancellation of Removal," a form of amnesty that grants legal status to those who have lived in the U.S. for 10 years, who can demonstrate good character and who can show that they have some U.S.-born family members who would endure unusual hardships if they are deported.

Goldman said Villa's four U.S.-born children may help Villa win his case.

However, the decision is up to the judge who hears the case, Goldman said, and there's no guarantee the judge will be sympathetic to the family argument. His firm had a similar case in which an undocumented mother had 14 U.S. children and was denied Cancellation of Removal.

"We don't want to think what would happen," Ruiz said. "This is our last option."

### Breaking the Law

Jack Martin, director of special projects for the Federation for American Immigration Reform, has little sympathy for Villa's and Ruiz's plight. The U.S. is built upon laws, Martin said, and those laws must be upheld.

"Disregard of those laws is an affront to our national identification as a nation of laws," he said. "... A tough policy and practice of law enforcement is necessary against those who disrespect our laws and others who aid and abet illegal immigration."

Ruiz said she understands the argument that the law is the law, but she resents the way she was treated.

"Even if you are a U.S. citizen," she said. "If you have anything to do with anyone without papers, you'll be treated like them."

She also wishes the law would take into account the wrenching human toll it can take on families.

She is trying to prepare her children, Jaqueline, 8, Anthony, 7, Juan, 4, and Paola, 3, for a possible move to Mexico.

They don't know how to read or write in Spanish, so she's enrolled them in Spanish classes.



Top: Juan Villa and his wife, Fatima Ruiz, with their children (from left), Juan, Paola and Jaqueline.  
Bottom: Villa, who faces deportation, spends time with his children in Tucson.

She keeps thinking about the lives her children will have here, where she says they can pursue their dreams, compared to the life they are likely to have in Mexico.

But always, she comes back to the same question: "You can have lots of dreams, but what is it without (your) family?"



# FIGHTING the System

## “Onion King” Takes on Government

*Jordan LaPier, reporter/photographer*

SAN LUIS RIO COLORADO, Mexico — He’s called the “Onion King.”

Jesús Bustamante owns the company that farms 4,000 acres of dates, pomegranates, radishes and green onions here, just across the border from Yuma, Ariz.

Bustamante grew up here in a poor family, attended college to become an engineer and has served as mayor of the city. He and his wife and children own several cars and live in a beautiful home that is taken care of by servants.

Bustamante says he’s just an honest farmer who has had good luck in business.

But members of the U.S. government have a different view. Back in 2002, when Bustamante applied for permanent resident status in the U.S., Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents said they had reason to believe he was a drug trafficker.

That suspicion was the beginning of a nearly six-year legal battle that Bustamante has waged against members of the American government, from the officials who handled his residency application all the way to the U.S. attorney general.

Bustamante and his lawyers argue in court documents that his visa application was denied and his border-crossing privileges were revoked because he refused to cooperate with the U.S. government in a drug investigation. The problem, Bustamante said, is that he doesn’t know anything about drug smuggling, and he couldn’t help if he wanted to.

When Bustamante refused to cooperate, Drug Enforcement Agency officials denied his visa application and revoked his privilege to cross the border “which he had possessed for many years without incident,” according to the legal complaint.

He was unable to visit his wife or children, who are American citizens, in Yuma, where they lived, so his family moved to San Luis Rio Colorado near the U.S.-Mexico border to be together. His children still attend school on the American side of the border.

“They have to get up at 5 a.m., and they return at 5 p.m.,” Bustamante said in an interview in the living room of his San Luis Rio Colorado home.



Jesús Bustamante has waged a six-year battle against the U.S. government for denying him a visa and revoking his border crossing privileges. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents said they have reason to believe he was a drug trafficker.

Bustamante’s wife said her husband’s legal battles have been particularly difficult on their 8-year-old and 12-year-old children.

“There are Christmas programs, there are First Communion, there are family events,” Lupita Bustamante said. “Their father can’t go, and they say, ‘Why Mom? When is Dad going to get his papers?’”

Bustamante denies being involved in the drug trade in any way. The DEA claims to have evidence to the contrary; however, the agency has yet to produce that evidence either to Bustamante or to a court. Bustamante said his predicament uncovers a truth about Mexican society. He believes that any evidence the U.S. government might have comes from rumors around town. Those rumors, he said, are the result of how many people in Mexico view success – with skepticism.

The Bustamantes hired James Metcalf, a Yuma lawyer, to handle their case. They say they’re not asking the U.S. government to change how it handles these kinds of applications — although they do feel that American immigration policy is in need of serious reform. They said they just want a fair hearing.

Lupita Bustamante said Metcalf was surprised they wanted to pursue the case because most people don’t fight the U.S. government’s decisions on residency applications. She and her husband know they have an unusual case and that they are taking an unusual step in fighting it. But they say they want things set straight, if not for themselves, then for others who might face a similar situation.

“Eventually, I hope this’ll get straightened out. I really hope (someone) will look at it and at least make somebody do something,” Lupita Bustamante said.

“What they did was an indecency,” her husband said. “They’re injustices that these people are committing, thinking they have power under the law.”

Their complaint was dismissed in Phoenix federal court after Cynthia Parsons, the assistant



Bustamante talks to his workers in a field near San Luis Rio Colorado, Mexico, where he owns a company that farms 4,000 acres.



U.S. attorney in the Phoenix district who is representing the government in the case, filed a motion to dismiss, citing, among other things, the court's lack of jurisdiction.

The couple wasted no time in appealing to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco. Metcalf brought a team of experienced California lawyers on board to help in the litigation.

The Ninth Circuit is currently considering granting Bustamante a hearing, and the couple expects a decision in the next few months. If they are turned down, the Bustamantes say they won't quit.

"Where does it go from here? The Supreme Court of Justice?" Lupita Bustamante said. "I guess that's what we'll have to do."

He will fight, Bustamante said, "all my life if I have to."

### **The Application**

Bustamante applied for permanent resident status at the U.S. consular office in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, in 2002. But rather than receiving a decision on the application, court documents filed by Metcalf allege that Eric Cruz, an officer of the U.S. consulate, informed the Bustamantes in a meeting that the government had reason to believe that Bustamante was involved in the drug trade.

The complaint argues that Cruz refused to share any evidence to back up that claim.

Lupita said Cruz called the DEA while the Bustamantes were in the office.

"I have a big fish for you. I'm talking megabucks," she said Cruz told the person on the phone. "And when he said that, I looked at him and I said, 'Why are you saying that?'"

She also claims Cruz told them he believed their 16-year marriage had been "fixed" with the purpose of gaining citizenship for Bustamante.

Lupita Bustamante said she was shocked that her husband's attempt to gain permanent resident status fell apart so quickly.

"When you don't have anything to hide, you can't imagine this happening to you," she said. "I would have never imagined this could happen to us. Never."

### **The "Deal"**

After the meeting with Cruz in which the government's suspicions were revealed, Bustamante said he was contacted by DEA agents, who presented him with an ultimatum.

"We know who you are in San Luis. You can help us there," Bustamante said the agents told him. "Tell us the names of all the people involved in the cartel you work for, beginning

with your contact in Colombia, in Mexico and in the U.S."

"I haven't had any contact with anyone or any organization," he said he told them. "I know who the drug traffickers are because I've read about them in the paper, but I've never been in contact with them."

Asked more directly about any connection to Colombia, Bustamante replied, "I've never been there. I've never done business with anyone there. My life has been built here 100 percent. I'm a very well-known person here. "Why would I give the name of somebody in Colombia I don't even know?" he asked. "I'd be lying if I said, 'Yes, yes, I know him. I was doing business with him somewhere.' It's not true."

Bustamante said he told the agents, "I don't know how I can help you."

Metcalf, the couple's lawyer, said he's never heard of anyone being offered a deal like the one Bustamante alleges that the DEA agents tried to make.

"Really, the heart of our case is that a decision was not legally made in this case," he said.

Sandy Raynor, public affairs officer for the U.S. Attorney's Office in Phoenix, said her office could not comment on Bustamante's claim that if he gave U.S. agents drug-smuggling contacts, it would help him gain residency. "Anything said by another agency we could not discuss," she said.

Officials at DEA headquarters in Washington, D.C., failed to return calls asking for an explanation of the meeting with Bustamante.

### **The Case**

In their complaint to the Phoenix federal court, the Bustamantes outlined their story about the offer and asked for a writ of mandamus, a legal term essentially meaning to compel someone to act.

The government's response to the complaint refutes, without elaboration, Bustamante's story about the deal. In response to the three sections of the complaint dealing with the offer, the government's statement reads only, "Deny. Deny. Deny."

Raynor said the government's case was clearly laid out in briefs submitted to the appellate court. "The case is under review by the 9th Circuit. We're just awaiting their decision," she said. She declined to expand on the government's claims in the briefs. She said U.S. Department of Justice policy bars her office from discussing information not in the public record in an ongoing case.

The government also argued in its papers that the Phoenix court lacked proper jurisdiction to hear the case at

all. It was on that basis that the case was dismissed without a hearing.

Lupita Bustamante said that now that the case is in the 9th Circuit, the government still has not presented any evidence of her husband's involvement in the drug trade.

"They have nothing. We know they have nothing," she said.

She also said that the government's lawyers have urged the 9th Circuit not to hear the case because it might set a precedent that could require future visa applications to be reconsidered if the people filing the applications feel they have been treated unfairly.

### **The Wait**

It could be several more months before the 9th Circuit decides if the case will be heard and a long time after that before the case is decided, if it is appealed.

In the meantime, Bustamante continues to run his business as usual. On a trip in his Lincoln Navigator to some of his onion fields, he stops for a few moments to chat with employees. He says he has thousands of employees, especially during the harvest season.

He shows off a stable of portable bathrooms, sinks and stovetops set up for the workers. He points out the buildings where the fruits and vegetables are cleaned and packed and where the trucks that carry them to American markets are loaded.

He is upbeat, even when talking about the U.S. He is a victim, he said, not of a broken system or a bad country but of one prejudiced person.

"I think I'm the victim of the bad moment of one official that had a personal issue with me," he said. "I just had bad luck."

His wife also holds onto her faith in American justice. She doesn't want to explain to her children what has happened because she doesn't want them to have a bad impression of the U.S.

"I was brought up and educated in the states," she said, and her children still go to school here. The family's oldest daughter recently finished dental school in the U.S. and will begin practicing soon.

At the least, Bustamante wants to be able to enter the U.S. to visit her and to attend events at his other children's school.

"I'm interested in getting a document that would allow me to cross with my family," he said. "I'm still interested."



# ‘When are you coming home?’

*Leah Duran, reporter • Adrian Barrera and Michael Struening, photographers*

LOS ANGELES — Feliciano left his home in Guatemala late one night while his son and daughter were sleeping.

He kissed them both, held his wife one last time and wiped the tears from her face. She watched him disappear around the corner, bound for a bus that would take him north across Mexico toward the U.S.

It was a dangerous journey — and an illegal one.

Three times, he tried to swim across the Rio Grande, and three times, he was caught and sent back to a Mexican border town. On his fourth attempt to cross the border, Feliciano joined a group of 15 other men, some of them from his hometown. A coyote took their money and squeezed them into the back of a pickup truck that was so cramped Feliciano could barely move.

His leg was caught under another man’s body, and when the men were finally allowed out of the truck, Feliciano stumbled and fell. The pain extended from his ribs to his left leg, and he could barely walk. But he did it anyway. Hopping on one leg and supported by others in

A video reunion is emotional for Feliciano’s family, including his mother-in-law, who hadn’t seen him in three years.

the group, he traveled for nine hours through the desert.

At one point, he fainted. “I woke up and started crying because I thought I was going to die,” Feliciano said in Spanish. “I was thinking about how to say goodbye to my kids, my wife, my parents and the rest of my family if I didn’t make it, and I prayed to God not to let me die.”

Feliciano didn’t die. He eventually made it to Houston and then to Los Angeles, where his brother lives. He took the first job he could find — as a seamstress in a large clothing factory.

Finally, he thought, America would give him everything he had always wanted: money for the basics, education for his children, a future.

What it did not give him was his family.

For three long years, Feliciano would not see them. And when he finally did, it was on a widescreen 55-inch TV in the offices of Amigo Latino, a teleconferencing service that connects families in Latin America and the U.S. through broadband television.

The first time Feliciano used the service was Feb. 24, 2007, on his wife’s 33rd birthday. That hour cost him \$80, but it was well worth it, he said. He determined to save for another



# \$40 to See a Loved One

Adrian Barrera, reporter

GUATEMALA CITY — Gabriel Biguria started Amigo Latino videoconferencing company five years ago with one office here and another in San Francisco.

“It’s basically a business quality service, but what we’re doing is democratizing access for families, so we’re using technology for something good,” he said in Spanish.

Families can go to nearly 40 offices in Latin America, including Guatemala, Mexico, Honduras and Ecuador, and connect with their relatives in more than 10 major U.S. cities, including Chicago, New York and Los Angeles, Biguria said.

He hopes to open an office in Arizona next, he said, because tougher restrictions are making it harder for family members to cross the border to see one another.

“We have more people that are calling us who are really looking for our services over there,” Biguria said. “We are right now working on identifying the right spots and the right partnerships to set up shop in Arizona.”

Amigo Latino offers a half-hour session for \$40 and an hour session for \$80. Printouts of digital pictures and a DVD of the teleconference cost extra.

Business in Guatemala is booming, said Eduardo Calderon Lopez, 19, who administers Amigo Latino’s central office in Guatemala City.

“Guatemalans have become very grateful for our services because they have had family members leave to the states not knowing how they’re doing over there and worrying about them,” he said.

People are usually nervous when they come to Amigo Latino, Calderon Lopez said; they just don’t know what to expect. But by the time they leave, they “cry of happiness,” he said.

The reunions are sometimes comical and always joyous, he said. “They’ll make comments saying, ‘Look how fat you are, look how skinny you are.’ And, they’re overcome with joy.”

He said he has witnessed teleconferences during which people have met relatives for the first time — grandparents who are introduced to their U.S.-born grandchildren and men who left their pregnant spouses behind when they went to the U.S. and are seeing their child for the first time.

Occasionally, people who have met online will use the service in order to get to know — and see — each other better, Calderon Lopez said. But “mainly people who haven’t seen their family members in many years, like 10 years, are the ones who constantly use our service,” he said.



Above: More than a dozen members of Feliciano’s family gather for the video conference in the office of Amigo Latino in Guatemala City.

Left: Pricila shows family photos that she sends to her husband. She says it’s one way they try to stay connected.

teleconference on his own 33rd birthday in October.

So, on Oct. 20, a hot, cloudless day, Feliciano left the factory where he works and drove half an hour to the company’s small office in downtown L.A. He was led into a room, where he took one of three empty chairs that faced the television. A few moments later, the screen flickered to life.

“¡Feliz cumpleaños!” his wife and children called, waving a large handmade “happy birthday” sign. Behind them were a dozen relatives who had made the 20-minute trip from their homes in Guatemala City for this special video meeting. Every one of them was smiling.

Feliciano beamed back. He marveled out loud that his son, Jeffrey, 9 years old and getting ready to enter the fourth grade, had grown nearly as tall as his mother.

Daughter Merilin, who was only 2 when her father left, walked toward the screen, curling her fingers around her eyes and peered shyly through them at her father.

“When are you coming home?” she asked. “I love you a lot.”

A niece showed off her new eyeglasses, and Feliciano

caught up on the family news: His sister-in-law is to be married, but she wants to wait for Feliciano to come home so he can attend the wedding.

The wait could be two or three years. Before Feliciano returns, he wants to be sure his family will be comfortable. Each month, he sends them \$500 — a fourth of his wages from working two jobs. His wife, Pricila, uses all but \$50 for house payments in the hope that the house will be paid off by next year.

Although being apart from his family is difficult, Feliciano said he won’t risk visiting in person. “The suffering I went through to cross the border was difficult,” he said. “It’s the thought of suffering again.”

So he buys phone cards, 40 minutes at a time, and he saves up for this — an hour of family television time on a special occasion.

The minutes pass so quickly that Feliciano can hardly believe when his time is up. He shouts his goodbyes as the images fade, then walks out of the room. He’s smiling and carrying a picture of his family, captured just as they appeared on the screen moments before.

He holds it up, pointing to each person and reciting the name, as if hoping one of them will answer.



# Technology Reconnects Family

Adrian Barrera, reporter/photographer

GUATEMALA CITY — Pricila kept trying to explain to her two young children where their father had gone.

He went to the U.S. to work, she would tell them. No, he wouldn't be home today, and not tomorrow, either. But he would come home someday.

"I had to be strong in front of them ... I had to swallow my own tears so the kids wouldn't cry," said Pricila, who didn't want to give her last name because her husband is in the U.S. illegally.

The first 15 days were the worst — 15 days during which she didn't hear a word from Feliciano. And then the news wasn't good. Feliciano had been caught trying to swim across the Rio Grande and was sent back across the border into Mexico.

It was a month before he finally made it into the U.S., first finding his way to Houston, then to Los Angeles and a job.

For the next three years, Pricila and Feliciano would communicate only by telephone. Feliciano promised he would visit, but the trip was too dangerous, and both grew tired of waiting.

A few weeks before Pricila's 33rd birthday last year, Feliciano told her that he had found a way for them to see each other again. She should go to a place called Amigo Latino and bring the children and the rest of the family, he told her. They would be able to talk and see each other over a large-screen TV.

Pricila said she didn't really understand how this high-tech meeting would work, but she was willing to give it a try.

It turned out to be more than she could have hoped for. Seeing her husband again was a relief for her but a revelation for Jeffrey, 9, and Merilin, 5, who was too young when he left to remember her father.

For them, the teleconference brought their father to life.

A few months later, when Feliciano arranged for a second video conference at Latino Amigo, this time on his 33rd birthday, Pricila eagerly agreed.

So on the morning of Oct. 20, Pricila, her children, and nine other relatives — Feliciano's mother-in-law and father-in-law, two sisters-in-law, four nieces and a nephew — piled into a van and drove 20 minutes from their home here to the agency.

At Amigo Latino, they were ushered into a sparse meeting room and sat quietly before a 55-inch television screen, staring at their own reflections in the dark screen.



Suddenly, Feliciano's face flashed before them, and the family burst out with 'feliz cumpleaños' (happy birthday) in Spanish. They waved a happy birthday banner at him and grinned.

For an hour it was like that — smiles and hurried explanations, awkward pauses and tears quickly wiped away.

"Daddy, hurry back home soon!" Jeffrey told his father near the end of the session.

"Even though I couldn't actually hug him, I felt like I did," Jeffrey said afterward. "I am very happy that I was able to see him. I don't know when we're going to see him again. He said maybe Christmas or New Year."

As Pricila followed her family out of the room, her face was composed and she clutched a DVD in one hand.

She pronounced the experience, "muy bueno"— very good.

"I feel happy and tranquil because I saw that he was OK," Pricila said. "He was able to see his son and to see how big he's gotten — his daughter, too."

She said that she and her husband together made the decision that he should illegally enter the U.S. For years, the two of them earned a living making jeans out of their home in Guatemala. The business was doing well until 2001, Pricila said, when an earthquake in El Salvador, where they export their jeans, caused buyers to cancel many of their orders.

There was no other option, she said: If they wanted to take care of their children, he would have to leave.

The years of separation have taught Pricila perspective



Top left: Merilin, 5, (left), her brother, Jeffrey, and a cousin make a birthday card for Feliciano before the video reunion.

Top right: Feliciano waves to his family.

Bottom right: Jeffrey holds up a birthday card for his father as his sister and mother wait for the video conference to begin.

and a certain amount of patience.

"He's over there, and we're over here," she said. "It's sad that he's over there. With God's help, we've been able to pass these years."

And the years to come.



# Empty Towns

## Mexican Men Drawn to U.S. for Jobs

*Adrian Barrera, reporter • Deanna Dent and Branden Eastwood, photographers*

ZACATECAS, Mexico — Not long ago, Francisco Javier Balderas Medina, 18, was getting ready to try to cross illegally into the U.S. along with most of the rest of his friends from the small town of El Cargadero.

But he knew his father disapproved, and he was scared. At the last minute he changed his mind and stayed behind.

Now “I am one of the only men here,” Medina said in Spanish.

Medina says he misses his friends, but he admits to one big advantage for a young man: plenty of unattached young women.

Nearly half of the population of this state in north-central Mexico has left for the U.S. over the past couple of decades. Most are young men. Many never return.

As a result, Medina and other young men like him live in towns populated mostly by women, girls, young boys and old men.

### Staying Behind

Abel Rodarde migrated illegally to the U.S. twice to work and save money for school. He worked on a farm in Florida picking fruits and vegetables but returned home to Jerez as soon as he could. He used his savings to help pay for his tuition at the University of Zacatecas, where he is studying medicine.

Rodarde said he’s one of just a handful of his schoolmates who still lives in Jerez.

“From middle school, it’s only me,” the 21-year-old said in Spanish. “From grade school, two or three stayed behind. The rest left to the United States because they didn’t have money to study or didn’t want to study.”

Jerez is filled with lush courtyards and towering Spanish colonial churches. It has newly paved roads and sidewalks, reliable electricity and phone service and renovated schools, thanks largely to the migrants, who send money home to their families, Rodarde said.

“The migrants are very important here; the entire economy in Jerez depends on foreign economies,” he said. “The day that it doesn’t, there won’t be anything here. It absolutely depends on the migrants.”


Migration isn’t just a necessity for some — it’s also part of the culture. Many young men migrate because their fathers and grandfathers have migrated before them, Rodarde said.

“If you go to the center of Jerez, you can tell who left, worked and came back,” he said. “They have a new car and money — it’s a cultural thing. More than any necessity, they have to have a new truck here. I don’t know why.”

### Family Ties

Daniel Haro, 21, went to high school in the U.S. but returned to his hometown of Tlaltenango after his visa expired. The town is about 80 miles southwest of Jerez.

The most conspicuous thing about Tlaltenango is the many young women running the local shops. Children chase each other through courtyards or play in the parks, while old



Francisco Javier Balderas Medina stands in the middle of a number of chicken coups at his family’s house and small farm near Jerez, Mexico. He says he stayed behind when many of his friends left to work in the U.S. because his family needs him. Photo by Branden Eastwood





Above: Children laugh together after catechism class in a small village in Jalisco, Mexico. Young women far outnumber young men in this town and many others in this part of Mexico. Photo by Deanna Dent.

Top right: Two small boys and a group of young ladies wait for the beginning of the jaripeo, or rodeo, in Jesus Maria, Mexico. Photo by Deanna Dent

Bottom right: Jonathan Haro (left) helps his brother Daniel (right) open a women's clothing store in Tlaltenango, Mexico. They hope it will earn enough to keep them in their hometown. Photo by Branden Eastwood.



men pass the time on park benches, getting an occasional shoeshine from one of the few young men who still live in town. Inside the churches, elderly women pray.

Haro would like to return to the U.S., but he wants to do it legally. He's waiting for the U.S. government to approve his application for residency. Meanwhile, he runs his own business. A true entrepreneur, he looked around town, calculated the opportunities, and opened a women's clothing store.

"I can sustain myself here," Haro said in Spanish. "My job is better here because I own my own business."


Those most likely to migrate live on ranches outside of town, he said. They work eight hours a day for about 200 pesos. They can make that much in two or three hours in the U.S.

Haro said that practically everyone he knows wants to go to the U.S. They see how well their older brothers or cousins are doing when they come home with their new cars and stylish clothing. "And the younger ones say, 'I want to go, too, to get more money, to help my mother or to get out of being poor.'"

Haro's father, Otilio Haro, estimates that more than 50 percent of the state's population migrates to the U.S. for work.

"Here you'll notice when the young men are gone and most of the town is empty," he said.





Neftali Fuentes enjoys some time off work at a park in Agua Prieta, Mexico, where he lives with an aunt, uncle and two cousins in a one-bedroom house.

# STRANDED ON THE BORDER

*Codie Sanchez, reporter • Courtney Sargent, photographer*

AGUA PRIETA, Mexico — Neftali Fuentes left his home, family and everything he knew in Chiapas last fall to seek out the promise of work and opportunity along the U.S.-Mexico border.

After an exhausting three-day bus ride, 18-year-old Fuentes arrived here tired and homesick.

"I was thinking the whole time about what I could do to send money back to my parents and how they were depending on that," Fuentes said.

He settled in with his uncle, aunt and two cousins in a one-bedroom house. Soon after, he began working at Levolor, one of the largest maquiladoras here.

Fuentes is one of the more than 1 million Mexican immigrants who leave their homes in southern Mexico each year to work at a maquiladora export assembly plant along the U.S.-Mexico border.

For many immigrants, these factories are meant to be a temporary stop to earn money before crossing into the U. S. Even though the wages are much higher than they are in southern Mexico, the high cost of living along the border often cancels out the increase in wages.

## **The Daily Routine**

Working in a maquiladora means long hours, short breaks and little to no vacation time.

Fuentes leaves his house for Levolor each morning at 5 a.m. and comes home at 7 p.m. to help his aunt with daily chores and dinner.

The average worker earns a little over \$1 an hour working on an assembly line constructing blinds that are sold for hundreds of dollars each at large building supply stores in the U.S.

Until six years ago, Levolor was located primarily in the U.S.

"Labor's cheaper here," said Hugo Franco, Levolor's quality coordinator. "You can pay people all day for what would be less than an hour's work in the states."

Fuentes works every day of the week at Levolor and counts on earning overtime on weekends. However, that overtime doesn't always come, since the number of workers needed depends on the number of blinds ordered.

"One day we could do around 4,000 orders and maybe 200 the next," Franco said. "We return people to their houses and stop working on days with less demand."

Although the factory can choose their days off, the workers are fired if they miss more than three days of work a month. The only way to get around that policy is going to the maquiladora doctor and getting a doctor's note.

For Fuentes, all of this means he won't be able to see his family this Christmas.

"I would lose my job ... or just get down to the bus station and have to turn around and



come back," he said.

After one year of working at Levolor, he might be able to get enough time off to visit his family. In the meantime, he will have to watch his cousin, uncle and aunt leave for Chiapas without him and wait for a telephone call.

### **The Border's Reality**

Alejandro Sanchez, 18, also works at a maquiladora and has been trying to cross the border for the three months he's been in Agua Prieta.

"I just don't make enough money to send home to my family in Oaxaca," Sanchez said.

Many immigrants come to the border thinking they can cross easily into the U.S.

"I never knew that sometimes it takes people 10 or 12 times to cross, if they get across at all," Sanchez said.

These unsuccessful attempts can lead people to the maquiladoras, according to Alberto Ramos, coordinator of a migrant resource center at the border.

"Agua Prieta has always been a gateway, but this gateway has bottlenecked, making it harder and harder to get into the U.S.," Ramos said. "So more people stay here and work."

However, housing, food, clothing and daily needs are sometimes more than a person can make in a month. The average pay in a maquiladora is \$75 to \$120 a week, while the cheapest housing is around \$80 a month. There is very little money left over for necessities or to send to family.

Even though it is becoming more difficult to cross, some have no intention of giving up. "I want to go to the U.S. because here money doesn't stretch out," said another maquiladora worker, Mary Lou Hidalgo. "I want to get money for my children back in Chiapas, but right now it isn't enough."

Hidalgo, 21, hasn't seen her two sons Josua, 5, and Isaeas, 3, in eight months, ever since she left them with their father in Chiapas. She has been here for three years, but is considering crossing illegally into the U.S., despite the dangers.

"I want better for my two children," she said. "It's just way too expensive to go to school in Mexico. People can't work in minimum-wage jobs at a maquiladora and educate themselves. If I want to be anything more or want better for my children, I have to find another way."

### **It Must be Better**

Fuentes left his brother and sister Ediel, 22, and Anahi, 25, his mother, father and countless friends and relatives in his hometown of Salvador Urbina in Chiapas. Although his family didn't want Neftali to go, they knew that the money he sent back would be a tremendous help. "They were worried about how young I was,



Neftali Fuentes tickles his 4-year-old cousin Danielito Fuentes at their home in Agua Prieta, Mexico.



especially to go alone. And, of course, they were going to miss me a lot," he said with a smile.

Fuentes said he had no choice but to come north. In small pueblos like his, workers earn less than 50 cents an hour. The towns depend on agriculture, but these are hard times for farmers in southern Mexico.

Salvador Urbina is known for coffee production, and a long and wet rainy season has severely hurt the coffee-drying process. With the loss of crop money, Fuentes's paychecks have become even more crucial to his family. In addition, the farmers in Chiapas have been hurt by trade agreements and middlemen, according to Daniel C. Fuentes, Neftali's uncle and head of Café Justo, a fair trade cooperative based in Chiapas and Agua Prieta. These middlemen, or the direct buyers of the coffee from the farmers, buy the coffee for very little and sell it for much more.

"Farmers don't keep the money from growing crops; the middlemen keep all the profits," Fuentes said.

Thousands of Mexicans from Chiapas and other small agricultural towns have come to the border to cross or work in the maquiladoras. More than 1,000 young people from the area around The Fuentes' hometown have left to find work along the border or in the U.S. About half of the workers at Levolor are from the south, according to Levolor officials.

#### **A New Way of Thinking**

More migrants have decided to stay in Mexico and work in the maquiladoras because of tighter border regulations and hazardous crossing conditions.

"Here we can still have our language, culture and lifestyle," Neftali Fuentes said. "I wish I could tell the people that cross that the Mexican life is good and joyful."

Alejandro Laureno, a teacher and veterinarian from Agua Prieta, understands the conflict between wanting to stay in one's homeland and wanting a better life. His wife is from a small town in Mexico and came to the border to work in a maquiladora. The wages were so low that she illegally crossed into the U.S., where they met.

Laureno worked in a slaughterhouse in Kansas while his wife waited tables. "I guess it says something that working in a slaughterhouse in America was better than working in a factory in Mexico," he said. But Laureno and his wife wanted to return to Mexico.

"Most Mexicans don't want to leave Mexico," Laureno said. "They would much rather stay where the culture, language and values are familiar and their own. But the economic and working structure in Mexico doesn't give them a chance to stay; they can't live with dignity here."

Neftali Fuentes said he has never considered crossing illegally, despite watching many of his friends cross and knowing the difficulties in Mexico firsthand.

"I don't want to risk my life. I would rather do it legally. There are too many dangers that hold me back," he said. "I have a very different way of thinking than many of my friends. I watched the television a lot and saw all of the awful things that were happening along the border. I thought about my family and how I would hurt them if something happened to me."

He hopes to move to the U.S. legally one day and send more money back to his family. To do that, he will need to keep a job, live and pay bills here for a year and maintain a clean record to establish residency.

He worries that although it sounds relatively easy, he won't be able to get a visa.

"There are a lot of hidden loopholes," he said. "I don't know if I can last here a year working in the maquiladora and away from everything I know."

Neftali Fuentes heads home for dinner in Agua Prieta, Mexico, where he lives with his aunt, uncle and two cousins.







Top: Coffee beans grown in the Fuentes' home state of Chiapas are shipped to Agua Prieta, Mexico, and roasted in the family's home before being sold to clients in Mexico and the U.S.

Far right: Neftali Fuentes (center) bows his head in prayer at the Presbyterian church in Agua Prieta.

Right: Fuentes' cousin Hugo pours raw coffee beans into one of two roasters they have in their home. The family runs the fair trade coffee company Cafe Justo to supplement its income.

Bottom: Workers file in and out of the maquiladora Levolor, where Fuentes works.







*Isidra Seneth Zorilla Montoya*  
*82 years old,*  
*three years abandoned*

# Generation Abandoned

## Elderly Left Behind When Relatives Cross Border

*Codie Sanchez, reporter • Courtney Sargent, photographer*

AGUA PRIETA, Mexico — Grandmothers and grandfathers, nanas y tatas, are often left behind when family members illegally cross into the U.S.

The elderly can't make the harsh and dangerous trip across the desert, and with tighter border enforcement, it's hard for families to return for visits.

The result: care homes all along the Mexican border, filled with elderly residents, many of them long forgotten.

"The young people of this country leave their elderly family members here while they try to make it into the U.S.," said La Divina Providencia Coordinator Rosa Tarazon. "Abandoned people are becoming more and more common along the border."

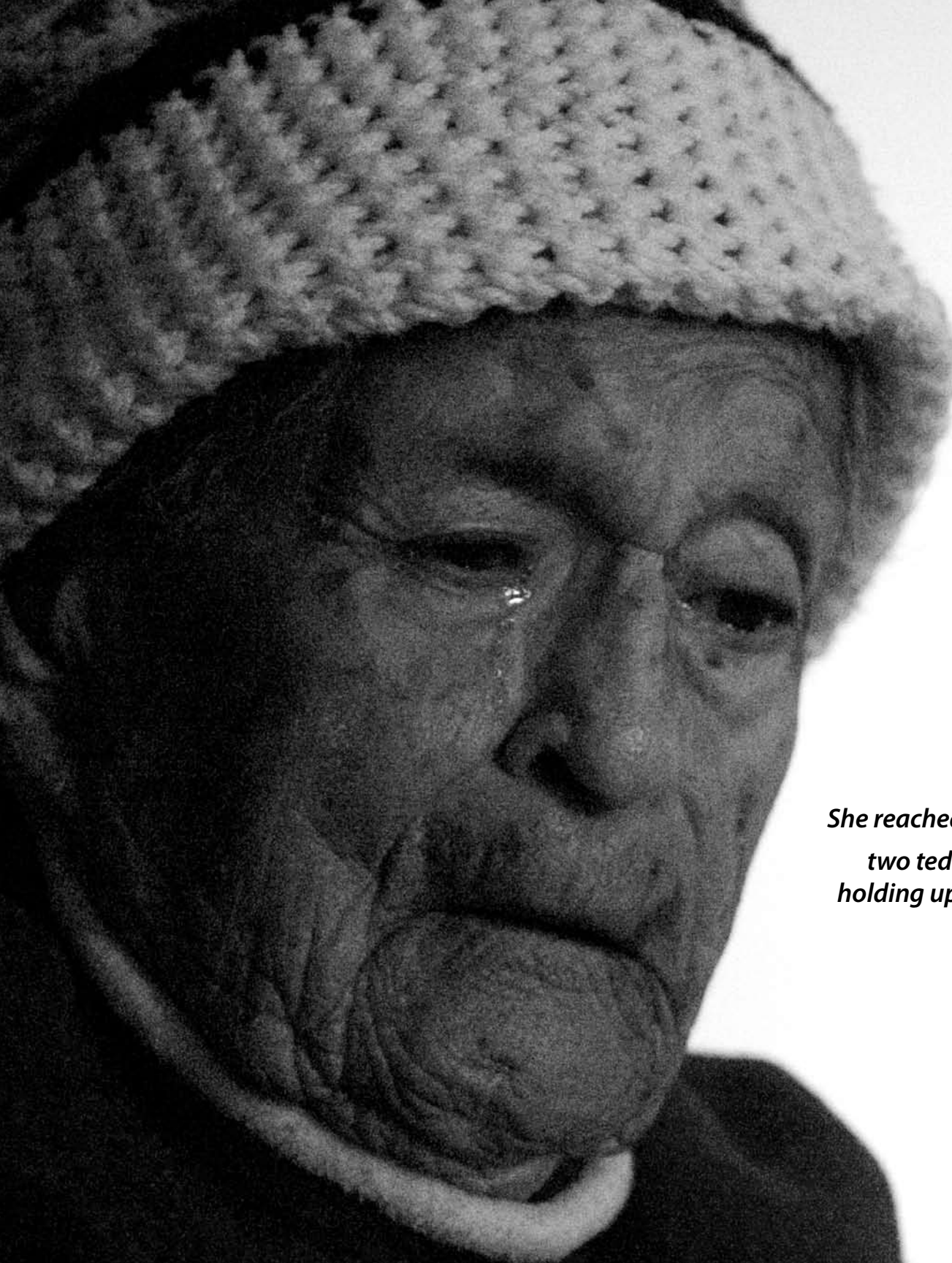
"There are hundreds of people faced with this ugly situation," added Adalberto Ramos, head of the Centro de Recursos Migrantes, a help center for migrants. He said he has talked to dozens of people who have left their elderly family members behind because of increasing border enforcement and dangerous conditions.

They leave them in places like La Divina Providencia, a home for seniors run by the Catholic Church and the Mexican government. The home is minutes from the Arizona border but a world away from those who have crossed.

It is place of sorrow — and sometimes of hope. It is, most of all, a place of waiting.

One elderly resident breaks down sobbing every day. Another prays the rosary until the beads are worn. Another says she is trying to forgive her children and grandchildren who abandoned her. These are the forgotten faces of immigration, a generation abandoned.

Isidra Seneth Zorilla Montoya spends most of her time in bed. She speaks aloud only to say her rosary.



*Carmelita Gutierrez  
92 years old,  
seven years adandoned*

*She reached behind her back and picked up  
two teddy bears. "This is Alberto," she said,  
holding up the bear and squeezing him,  
"and this is Jesus."*





### **Carmelita Gutierrez**

Carmelita Gutierrez is 92 and has spent the last seven years in La Divina without once having a visitor.

She hasn't spoken to anyone in her family since her son Alberto died seven years ago in a car accident. She says she doesn't know how to get in touch with the rest of her family in the U.S.

Communicating across the border is extremely difficult for these poor immigrant families, according to Jose Herrera, a minister in Douglas, Ariz. "You have no idea how many people get separated from each other, lost in limbo," he said.

Gutierrez lives half in this world and half in a world she has created in her mind, one in which her son is still alive. Sometimes she's back in Guadalajara, starting her family.

"Carmelita believes she is going to go away with a soldier, start a new family and have her son Alberto pick her up from here in his truck. She'd rather not remember the truth, just illusions," said Elena Navarro, a caretaker at La Divina.

Gutierrez's life has been filled with family divisions and separation. When she was 9, her mother left her and her brother Jesus with their grandmother to go to the U.S. and work.

Her only memory of her mother is a basket her mother sent her 83 years ago for her First Communion. Tucked inside were a little white dress and shoes.

After her grandmother died, Jesus went to look for their mother, and Gutierrez was left alone to work in the coffee fields. "That was the last time I saw my brother," she said with a tear rolling down her face.

She reached behind her back and picked up two teddy bears. "This is Alberto," she said, holding up the bear, squeezing him, then picking up the other. "And this is Jesus."



Top: Carmelita Gutierrez takes a nap while a nurse visits with other residents at La Divina Providencia in Agua Prieta, Mexico.

Bottom: Gutierrez holds on to the two teddy bears she named after her sons, Alberto and Jesus. One of her sons is dead and the other has never visited.

Opposite page: Even after seven years without a visitor, Gutierrez says she has not given up hope that one day she'll see her loved ones again.

*Emma Ortiz  
70 years old,  
15 years abandoned*

*"My family doesn't write me.  
I don't get any letters,  
and we never talk."*





### Emma Ortiz

Emma Ortiz caresses a picture of a pretty young girl in a white quinceañera dress.

This is her niece Ballida, whom she hasn't seen or heard from in 15 years. Ortiz has not talked to anyone in her family since they drove away from La Divina on Jan. 24, 1992, leaving her behind.

"My family doesn't write me. I don't get any letters, and we never talk," she said. All she knows is that they were planning on moving to Phoenix.

Ortiz is left to imagine the life her loved ones now have — and to imagine the reasons they have remained away so long.

"I'm sure Ballida's never visited because she has a family and a husband in the U.S.," Ortiz said, looking down again at the picture. "I guess there's no reason to talk with them; it must mean everything is good."

She stops often to cough and gasp for air. Sometimes she uses a machine to ease the choking. Ortiz has had problems breathing since she was a young girl, her caretaker Elena Navarro said.

In recent years, problems with her thorax and trachea have worsened, and doctors can't do much to help except give her medicine to ease the pain.

"She's a beautiful person, so caring even though she could be bitter from all her health problems and her family abandoning her," said La Divina Coordinator Rosa Tarazon. "She suffers a lot."

Ortiz smiles as Tarazon says this and spreads several rosaries across her chest. She explains that she is not angry because she talks to God and he listens.

"This rosary is for my family wherever they are," she said. "This one is for myself, and this one...this one is just for God."

She would like her family in Phoenix to know that she hopes they will come. "They would be well received here," she said.

Opposite page: Emma Ortiz treasures her collection of rosaries. She says keeps one rosary for herself, one for her family and one for God.

Top: A nurse checks Ortiz for a fever. La Divina Providencia is privately funded, and staff members say they do not have sufficient funds for proper medical equipment.

Bottom right: Ortiz looks at a photo of her niece, one of many photos that she stores in a box of keepsakes. Ortiz has not seen or heard from anyone in her family for more than 15 years.

Bottom left: Ortiz wheezes throughout her nap. She has had trouble breathing since she was a girl.



*Manuel Espinosa  
84 years old,  
seven years abandoned*

*His legs were amputated,  
he cannot speak, and he is deaf.*





### Manuel Espinosa

Manuel Espinosa has been at La Divina for seven years.

All that staff members know about him is that they really don't know anything at all. No one saw who dropped him off at the senior care center on Oct. 11, 2000, and no one has come to see him since.

His legs were amputated, he cannot speak and he is deaf. "All we know is this piece of paper," said La Divina Coordinator Rosa Tarazon, holding up a sheet with his name, date of birth and medical problems.

Most of the time, he sits in the hallways or the TV room, alone, with a cowboy hat pulled low across his forehead.

Like Espinosa, many of the residents at La Divina are a mystery. They lose their memories, their hearing and their ability to speak.

Without their children and grandchildren, their stories are lost.

Opposite page: Manuel Espinosa sits near the window in the hallway of La Divina Providencia in Agua Prieta, Mexico.

Top: Espinosa wipes away a tear. His legs have been amputated, and staff members say he is deaf and cannot speak.

Bottom right: Espinosa has been at La Divina Providencia for seven years. He has had no visitors. Bottom left: Espinosa (left) and another resident nap in the room they share.



*Raul San  
Age unknown,  
one year abandoned*

*"It's hard to say you miss them  
because it makes it real ... but I do;  
I miss everything about them. Not having  
them near is what I miss the most."*





## Raul San

Raul San rarely leaves his favorite chair that faces a window at La Divina Providencia. He is a father of two, a grandfather of many and a well-known presence in Agua Prieta, Mexico.

He was born and raised in Agua Prieta and spent his life working as a plumber and political volunteer for the National Action Party of Mexico.

"He was a hard worker and very good at his job, said caretaker Javier Morales Ortega. "People knew him here in Mexico."

San smiles as Morales says this. "You can see pictures of me in the newspapers," he said.

Those newspaper clippings have faded since his family left him in Mexico and moved to Los Angeles.

They used to come to visit about once a year, but as it has become more difficult to cross the border, they come less and less frequently. It has been more than a year since he has seen his daughter, and he fumbles with her name.

"I talk to them very little," he said. "I can't believe I am forgetting my own daughter's name."

Finally, he remembers it's Veronica and that she is as beautiful as her mother, who passed away many years ago.

His fondest hope is that Veronica and his son will move to Arizona to be closer to him. "They're going to come and live in Douglas; they can't like Los Angeles. It's better here in Douglas by me," he said.

"It's hard to say you miss them because it makes it real," he added. "But I do; I miss everything about them. Not having them near is what I miss the most."

San knows he is one of the lucky ones: his family still sends money to cover medical bills, but he would rather have them close at hand.

"They want to be with me, but they can't. There they live," he said, pointing in the direction he imagines the border lies. "There they got married, and there they stay."

Opposite page: Raul San sits in his favorite chair in the hallway of La Divina Providencia.

Top: San peers into a courtyard. It has been more than a year since he's seen his daughter.

Bottom right: San passes time in the lounge. His children moved to the U.S. and haven't visited in more than a year; he can barely remember his daughter's name.

Bottom left: San waits as Rosa Tarazon pours warm milk into mugs for the residents.



# Divided Families

A photodocumentary  
project funded by the  
Howard G. Buffett  
Foundation

## The Photographers

### Deanna Dent

Dent, a native of Tempe, Ariz., is a senior in the Cronkite School and the Herberger College of Fine Arts. She has interned at The Arizona Republic, the East Valley Tribune and the Bend (Ore.) Bulletin. She is the photo editor for The State Press, ASU's independent daily student newspaper, and has worked as a photographer for the paper since 2006. In 2007 she was a semifinalist in the national Hearst Journalism Awards program for photojournalism and was named a Chips Quinn minority scholar. In 2008 she received the Roy W. Howard Collegiate Reporting Award.

"Growing up Latina in Arizona has helped me develop the strong interest I have in border and immigration issues. This project not only provided us with funds to pursue stories but allowed us the opportunity to work on our stories in depth and work with other amazing students from all areas of journalism."



### Branden Eastwood

Eastwood grew up in Washington, D.C., crawling over lighting equipment in his parents' photo studio. After graduating from the Brooks Institute of Photography in April 2006, he entered ASU to work on degrees in journalism and political science. He worked as a photographer for The State Press and is traveling this year to Jamaica, India and Southeast Asia to build his portfolio.

"The borderlands project was an incredible opportunity



to live the dream of telling the human story. I think the experience dug into the nerve of why we feel compelled to share the experiences of our fellow man while simultaneously being the single most valuable educational experience of my life."

### Ashley Lowery

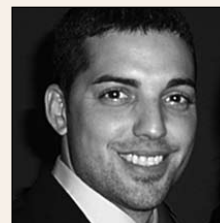
Lowery, from Charleston, S.C., is a recent Cronkite School graduate who returned as a graduate student to work on the borderlands project. She will be interning with the Deseret News in Salt Lake City this summer. She also has interned at the East Valley Tribune, worked as a photographer and photo editor at The State Press, and has freelanced for many newspapers and magazines. She was recently chosen to participate in an ASU media fellowship program that took professional journalists to the border and Mexico.

"The most rewarding experiences I have had as a photojournalist have been the opportunity to work on in-depth projects. The borderlands work provided me with the most amazing assignments!"



### Ryan A. Ruiz

Ruiz is a native Arizonan who graduated from the Cronkite School in 2006 and returned to work on the borderlands project as a graduate student. He was a staff photographer and later photo editor for The State Press and a photo intern for The Arizona Republic. He is currently chief photographer



and videographer for the College Times, a Tempe-based publication. Ruiz's work also has been published in The Jewish News of Greater Phoenix, azcentral.com, Desert Living Magazine and a number of other magazines.

"Being involved with the borderlands project was a real eye-opening experience for me. My Mexican heritage did not play a large role in my upbringing, and I had a largely negative perception of immigrants. Every person I met during this experience, though initially tentative and leery of me, was extremely gracious, candid and kind. I realized that misperceptions run rampant on both sides of the border and that the shared experiences of humanity are what ultimately make us the same."

### Courtney Sargent

Sargent, of Phoenix, graduated from the Cronkite School in December with a bachelor's degree in print journalism and an emphasis in photojournalism. She was honored as an outstanding undergraduate student. Currently, she is interning at The Gazette in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. At ASU Sargent was a photographer and photo editor for The State Press, interned at The Arizona Republic and freelanced for numerous Phoenix publications.

"The Borderlands Project gave me the opportunity to see border issues first hand and share stories about the lives of people directly affected by immigration policies. The importance of covering immigration issues became clearly evident after seeing the dichotomy between the two sides of the border."





## The Reporters

### Adrian Barrera

Barrera, of Phoenix, graduated in December with degrees in journalism and political science. He was an intern at Univision Radio, KAET Channel 8 and Art-talk magazine and participated in the multimedia reporting program at azcentral.com. He served four years in the U.S. Marine Corps, fighting in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan after the Sept. 11 attacks.



"The borderlands project gave me the opportunity to cover real issues concerning U.S. immigration, and it also taught me the struggles and sacrifices people endure in search of the American dream."

### Leah Duran

Duran, from Newington, Conn., is a junior majoring in print journalism with a minor in parks and protected area management. Her internship experience includes Arizona Highways magazine, the East Valley Tribune, The Payson Roundup and SPIN magazine. She also spent a semester working for the Cronkite News Service and served as a stringer for The Associated Press covering Arizona's February primary election.



"The borderlands project brought me face to face with the hardships people face each day. It highlighted the importance of being grateful for the blessings of family and friends."

### Kristi Eaton

Eaton is a journalism senior from Tulsa, Okla. She is currently studying abroad in Italy. She was a reporter and city editor for The State Press and served as editor-in-chief in the fall of 2007. She also interned at The Oklahoman and The Arizona Republic.



"The borderlands project gave me a chance to research in depth about economic, political and cultural issues I previously knew little about. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that I am grateful for."

### Brian Indrelunas

Indrelunas is a journalism senior from Chandler, Ariz. He interned at the Cape Times in Cape Town, South Africa, and has also interned at The Arizona Republic and the East Valley Tribune. At ASU he was on the inaugural staff of the Cronkite News Service and held many posts at The State Press, where he will serve as editor-in-chief this fall.



"The borderlands project gave me a great opportunity to work on long-form pieces and to spend time really getting to know sources and hear their stories in a way that really isn't possible with daily assignments."

### Ryan Kost

Kost is a senior from Phoenix who is double majoring in journalism and French with a minor in Spanish. He was editor of The State Press and has done numerous internships, including at The Oregonian, The Tampa Tribune, the East Valley Tribune, The Arizona Republic and The Payson Roundup. He will intern this summer at The Boston Globe. Last year he was named one of the top 10 journalism students in the country by the Scripps Howard Foundation.



"Through the Cronkite borderlands project, I got to report internationally on the sorts of stories I thought I'd only get to write after having invested several years in this field. It was one of the highlights of my education at the Cronkite School."

### Jordan LaPier

A native of Bloomington, Ill., LaPier is a senior majoring in broadcast journalism and political science. He has interned at KCSG-TV in St. George, Utah, The Arizona Republic and KPNX-Channel 12 in Phoenix. He also worked for The State Press and directed the news department for Sun Devil Television-Channel 2, the university's student-run television station. LaPier is a reporter and anchor for Cronkite NewsWatch, the Cronkite School's award-winning student newscast.

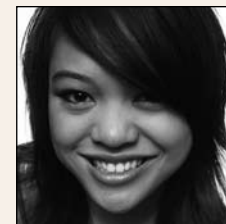


"The borderlands project gave me an opportunity to learn investigative journalism. While I am usually

expected to produce a story each day or at least each week, I had the opportunity to take on something that required a large investment of time and research. I believe having that opportunity has made me a much more well-rounded journalist."

### Angela Hong-Anh Le

Le, a native of Glendale, Ariz., is a senior majoring in print journalism and business marketing. She is also earning a certificate in Southeast Asian Studies. She has interned at 944 magazine and East West magazine as well as at the Phoenix News Times and Barclay Communications.



"Your perspective of immigration would change, too, if you took this class. You just can't get the full picture of what it's like to be an immigrant unless you shadow the lives of people who are living it."

### Codie Sanchez

Sanchez, from Scottsdale, Ariz., is a senior honors student at ASU studying journalism, political science and Spanish. She worked as an arts and entertainment reporter for The State Press and interned for Sports Illustrated as well as the Arizona Students' Association. She was a member of the inaugural multimedia reporting class at azcentral.com and is a mentor for Hispanic high school students with the Sandra Day O'Conner College of Law.



"The borderlands project showed me the gritty reality of the situation along the U.S.-Mexico border. I will never forget my experience there; it is something every student, no, every person, should see first hand."

### Amanda Soares

Soares left her native Brazil in 2003 to enter the Cronkite School. She is a senior in broadcast journalism. She interned for The Arizona Republic and worked at The State Press. She also interned for Univision 33 and CBS 5 in the Valley and hopes to become an on-air foreign correspondent.



"This project was one of the most unique experiences I have had in my two years in the Cronkite School. At the

very least, it was an eye-opener on the immigration issue in the U.S. As a journalist, it was a true luxury to be able to travel abroad and to get to know a culture, seeing so closely the people I was writing about, immersing myself in their daily lives. This was the best learning experience I've had as a reporter, an all-around enriching project."

#### **Michael Struening**

Struening is a journalism senior from New Jersey. He was the general manager of Sun Devil Television-Channel 2, where he has also held a variety of other positions. Michael has worked for The Trentonian in New Jersey and also was a member of the Cronkite School's inaugural multimedia reporting class at azcentral.com.

"The borderlands project changed my outlook on story coverage. Our goal as journalists is to give a voice to those who have none in society. We are here to tell the stories that are often overlooked."

#### **Teana Wagner**

Wagner, of Tempe, Ariz., is a senior majoring in print journalism. She worked as a student reporter for Cox Communications and is currently interning at McMurry Publishing company in Phoenix. She also was a member of the multimedia reporting class at azcentral.com.



"Reporting in Mexico gave me a much more realistic sense of the Mexican people and their values. The experience was both educational and unforgettable."

#### **Aja Viafora**

Viafora grew up in Sedona, Ariz. She is a senior majoring in journalism, minoring in Spanish and studying photography. She has interned for College Affair and 944 magazines and has done freelance work for Arizona Foothills magazine and The Arizona Republic. She is currently interning at Village Voice Media/Phoenix New Times.

"This was the most valuable experience of my two years at ASU. It was truly eye-opening and is just the type of work I'd like to do in the future."



#### **The Instructors**

**Kristin Gilger**, assistant dean, Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication

**Robert Sherwood**, former Arizona Republic reporter and current district director for U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell, D-Tempe

**Steve Elliott**, director, Cronkite News Service

# Thank you

#### **Howard G. Buffett Foundation**

The students' work was supported by a generous grant from the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, the Illinois-based nonprofit organization founded by the international photojournalist, author, environmentalist and philanthropist. It is the second time that Buffett, who has said it's important for journalism students to explore countries beyond their own borders, has supported a Cronkite School student journalism project. In 2006 his foundation underwrote the "Children of the Borderlands" project in which students produced photo documentaries depicting the lives of children along the U.S.-Mexico border.

#### **Canon U.S.A., Inc.**

Canon generously loaned several camera bodies and camera lenses to the Cronkite School for the project. These items included Canon 5D, 30D and Mark II camera bodies, along with a number of high-quality telephoto zoom and macro lenses.

The equipment gave photojournalism students the opportunity to use high-end equipment they wouldn't otherwise have had access to.

"When I was shooting at the orphanage, I encountered many low-light situations," said photojournalist Deanna Dent. "I was really dependent on the Canon equipment in order to produce professional-looking photos."

The Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication sincerely thanks Canon for its support of the photojournalism students.

#### **Thanks also goes to:**

- Cronkite News Service, directed by Steve Elliott, distributed The Divided Families project to newspapers across Arizona.
- NewsWatch and Eight/KAET. The Cronkite School's award-winning student newscast under the direction of Mark Lodato, produced a half-hour program on the Divided Families project, which aired on Channel 8.
- Phoenix magazine will feature an additional story produced as part of the Divided Families project in its July issue. The story details the plight of three U.S. children stuck in a Mexican orphanage.





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# Familias divididas

