

INTERFAITH WELCOME COALITION

BUS STATION MINISTRY

.....the stories continue.

Editor's note: Migrant family separations continue but people all over the U.S. are working to help those families that are fortunate enough to have been cleared to stay in the country until their asylum claims are ruled on. Rarely, are whole families kept together—with some family members sometimes getting stuck indefinitely at detention centers. Children without parents are still being kept at the Tornillo detention center outside of El Paso in the desert. Reports are that more than 2,300 children between the age of 13 and 17 are still housed in the tent city, watched over by staff members who have not undergone proper background checks. If children from the migrant caravans are detained in the U.S., many of them will likely be sent to the Tornillo facility. Word is that the Federal government plans to greatly expand the Tornillo facility. These small acts offer hope for all.

providing medicines or reviewing a bus itinerary.

However, there are times when those small acts make a huge difference in the lives of our families who have endured so much.

One day at the bus station, a mother with two young sons came up to me and asked if I could help her locate her husband. They had been separated shortly after crossing the border and she had no idea where he was. There is a website that allows you to search by data, including an A (short for "alien") number which each refugee has. It is a more complicated process if you don't have the A number which this mother didn't have. The search yielded no information.

I called a phone number listed on the site and was connected with an ICE officer who gave me another phone number and after multiple phone numbers and much time on hold, I managed to locate her husband in a detention center in Georgia. The officer I spoke with said he couldn't give me any information or arrange a phone call. At that point, I decided that pleading was my only recourse. I described the mother and her sons and the stress and sadness that the separation was causing. He said he probably couldn't do anything but to keep my phone nearby.

About an hour later and shortly before the family was due to board their bus, my phone rang and the officer said, I have your husband here. I ran over to the mother and the sons and handed them my phone with the words, "It's your husband".

The mother stood with tears streaming down her face and her sons had their arms wrapped around her and each one took a turn talking to their father.

After the phone call, all three of them came over to me and hugged me all together. It's a moment that I will carry with me forever. I think about that ICE officer and how we can encounter acts of kindness in unlikely places.

They boarded their bus and continued on their very long journey with many obstacles still ahead of them but words of love and comfort exchanged with their loved one gave them hope and strength.

Small Acts...Huge Difference

Story #1

The Backpack Ministry is a series of small acts of kindness: welcoming a family, handing out a backpack or a lunch,



SANTUARIO/SANCTUARY, sections of a completed fresco for San Francisco International Airport by Juana Alicia—1999

Story #2

A few months ago at the bus station, a father and son were dropped off from the Karnes Detention Center. I could tell immediately that the father was very stressed. He shared with us that he and his son had been separated from his wife and baby girl shortly after crossing the border after a long and dangerous journey and he had no idea where she was. I tried to find her through the locator website to no avail. I called a RAICES volunteer who had spent a lot of time in the detention centers and asked if he could help me find this mother. As it turns out, he was at the Dilly Detention Center that day. He said he would try to find her and set up a phone call which usually takes 5 to 7 days. It turned out that

END

FAMILY SEPARATION

she was right there in Dilly. He called me back and said he was going to try and get her on the phone and to stand by.

About two hours later and about 10 minutes prior to the father's boarding time, my phone rang and the RAICES volunteer says, I have her here. I handed my phone to the father and his son and they held each other, tears streaming down their faces.

They thanked me at least a dozen times and that father was smiling and laughing with his son as they boarded their bus.

These are the moments that provide some measure of healing for our families and for us.

—Submitted by Jan Olsen

Calavera migrante/la caravana

La calavera migrante
muy contenta camina con ellos,
En la frontera mexicana
Muchos los esperan con buena gana

Al cruzar en balsas el Suchiate
los centroamericanos migrantes,
con esperanza y alegría caminan todo el día,
pero en Chiapas ya los espera la policía
y con gases lacrimógenos intenta detener la osadía.

La calavera migrante muy indignada
le reclama a la policía esa inhumana fechoría.
“Déjenlos en paz, que continúen su travesía”
Así mañana mis queridos hijos migrantes
Alejados de la represión su meta ya no será tan distante.

Ay mis hijos inmigrantes sus anhelos son muy sanos
Y su caravana si saldrá adelante
Y aquí entre ustedes caminar como hermanos
Pero si algún loco ignorante no los deja salir adelante
Con mi guadaña en mano verán que le echo el guante.

Cuando lleguen al Río Bravo
muchos uniformados estarán del otro lado
más no se preocupen, ya lo tengo todo controlado.
Al nefasto güero copetón ya lo tengo al tanto
Y si con ustedes se porta mal, me lo llevo al camposanto.

—Victor M. Cortés



La Calaca taquera

Por la dieciocho la huesuda andaba
Vendiendo tacos a todo aquel que encontraba,
Tacos al carbón, del perro que maté en el callejón.
Tacos de tripita, que es cola de ratita
Tacos joven, tacos;

La calaca con sus tacos ya prosperó
Y hasta una taquería en la dieciocho abrió

Tacos Los Comales, para que se curen
todos sus males,
Tacos de carne asada, para acabar con
toda la perrada

La calaca vendiendo tacos, millonaria se volvió
Pero a todos mis amigos de Chicago, al panteón se los llevó

—Victor M. Cortés



EDITOR'S NOTE: *At the Esperanza's Dia de los muertos event, I met Victor who had recently moved to San Antonio from Chicago. He had a chapbook of his own Calaveras. Here are two: one reflecting on the immigrant caravan that is accompanied by la calavera through Chiapas and on to the Río Bravo. She assures the immigrants safe passage or else to the graveyard she will take those that obstruct their journey. La calaca taquera has the "bony one" on 18th St. selling street tacos—all kinds—until she opens her own taquería, Tacos Los Comales, that cures all ailments. She becomes a millionaire, but still takes everyone to the grave!*