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# Travel Seminar reflection: No Wall will stop our dreams of justice

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## *Travel Seminar Reflection: No Wall Will Stop Our Dreams of Justice*

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How many stories have you heard about the U.S.-Mexico border? During the border trip, we

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numerous chances to listen to stories from different volunteers and humanitarian activists. There is a particular one which touches my heart deeply. And I want to share this story with you.

There was a family living in the small village of Guatemala. The father was a decent worker and tried hard to keep his two sons safe from becoming victims of gang violence. One day, when his older son (let's call him Miguel), came home from school, he found his father dead in the living room. His mother and brother were nowhere to be found. Later on, with the help of his neighbor, Miguel was able to locate his mother and meet her in secret. His mother told him that because his father would not help the gang, the gang killed him as a threat to the whole village. His mother then gave Miguel \$400, almost all she had, and asked him to go to the United States to seek asylum protection. Eventually, Miguel was able to leave his country and safely arrive at the U.S.-Mexico border.

At this time Miguel was just a high school student, and he could not speak English very well. He did not know that the only way to get asylum status in the U.S. was to enter the country properly. Instead, a man back in Mexico told Miguel that he could help him enter the United States. Miguel did not have any suspicions of this man and gave him all the money he had with him. At the time, Miguel thought this man was an angel sent by God and that he was going to help his family. Unfortunately, the journey turned out to be quite the opposite. The Mexican man did not bring love or grace to Miguel. Rather, he was a brutal drug-dealer who worked for a local gang. He recruited and cheated young men like Miguel to help his gang carry drugs into the U.S. The man told Miguel that if he decided not to carry marijuana, Miguel would be killed immediately. Miguel did not have any other options. He knew that he could not die in Mexico because his family was relying on him. He was the only hope his family had.

Miguel and other young people carried the marijuana and walked across the Sonoran desert. In the summertime, temperatures in the Sonoran desert can rise above 100 °F. Miguel was not given enough water or food and almost collapsed in the desert. The walk was torture. However, Miguel did not die in the desert. They were detected by Border Patrol and were arrested. When Miguel was discovered to have marijuana, he was accused of drug smuggling.

Miguel's story is not a rare case. It happens every day in the U.S.-Mexico borderland. The drug-smugglers prey on the vulnerability of people trying to cross and force them to carry drugs. If migrants are female, they are told to take birth-control before they try to cross, just in case they are sexually assaulted or raped. There is no mercy while crossing the desert. According to the U.S. Border Patrol, 294 migrants dead bodies were found in the fiscal year 2017 (ending September 2017). Certainly, more people died from heat stroke, dehydration, or hyperthermia without record. Their dead bodies masked within the desolate desert.

What is the end of Miguel's story? Did he stay in jail after the accusation? Usually, the migrants in this situation are sentenced to prison for a minimum of five years. After finishing their prison term, the U.S. government will deport them back to their country. However, in the case of Miguel, one Christian lawyer had a chance to speak with him. Fortunately, the lawyer realized that Miguel was forced to break the law and was threatened to death if he did not smuggle drugs. The lawyer then successfully requested the U.S. government to dismiss Miguel's charge. Now, Miguel is in the process of seeking asylum protection. The lawyer and other volunteers are raising money to help Miguel's family come to the U.S.

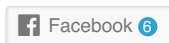
No one wants to risk their life crossing the border. They only do so because they have no other option. Mexicans and Central Americans want to live in the U.S. for various reasons. Perhaps the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) led to job loss, and now they cannot feed their family; perhaps they want to stay with their families who are living in the U.S., or perhaps the threat of gang violence is so brutal that they need to leave their home. There is no doubt that some criminals cross the border to smuggle drugs. However, Bob, one Samaritans volunteer who has been working to

extend humanitarian aid to illegal migrants more than twelve years, has never met a person smuggling drugs into the borderlands. More often, the people are kind and generous. When Bob once shared food with a walker, the person did not take all of it. Instead, the person only took half and told Bob: "I don't need all of it. You can save the rest for other people."

There are many awful tragedies as well as beautiful stories occurring within the borderland. During the border trip, we talked to people who devote their work to migrants, we visited churches who selflessly provide sanctuary, and we spoke with groups who carry water and food supplies into the borderland where migrants usually walk. The trip to the Arizona-Mexico border was not just a visit to see how people of God are being crucified in the desert or to see dehumanization expressed in the the U.S. deportation system, but it was also a pilgrimage to witness how people react to the migrants' humanitarian crisis. I truly encourage you to take a chance to understand the many stories in the borderland and let those stories refresh your spirit.

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