



May 18, 2007

The Invisible Mexicans of Deer Canyon Highlights Migrant Struggles in San Diego Hillside

By Nancy Madrid

Imagine a day in which you have spent long hours working in a physically demanding and underpaid job which you must walk miles to get to and then head back only to arrive and find that all of your belongings have vanished, forcing you to move and start anew deeper into the wilderness. So is the story depicted in Juan Carlos Frey's documentary "The Invisible Mexicans of Deer Canyon" which screened on April 4, 2007 as part of UCSD's Cesar Chavez Celebration.

Frey, whose previous productions such as "Gatekeeper" have been recognized and highly acclaimed by organizations such as Amnesty International and The National Council of La Raza, spent a year living in the hillside Migrant camps in order to capture the inhumane living conditions endured by the many undocumented Mexican Migrants who put in their best effort daily to maintain the luxurious homes and sprawling lawns of the wealthy in San Diego.

Many having recently arrived to the United States or simply lacking the income to pay for any type of decent housing, are confined to residing in shacks they strategically construct themselves in the hillsides. They must build their homes amongst snakes and other animals under trees and shrubbery in an effort to keep the complaints of local residents to a minimum.

Even after their homes are built there is no telling when everything the migrants have built will be torn away. A man named Carlos told of how he had been living in his small shack for sometime when neighborhood residents protested and bulldozers were immediately sent in to destroy the home.

"They tear down our houses and we go and rebuild new ones in a different location not knowing when they will be torn down again," Carlos stated.

Moreover, there have also been occasions in which their homes have been ransacked and vandalized by nearby residents, an obvious indication that they are unwanted in the area.

The majority of these Migrants are forced to tolerate unhealthy conditions because the large homes in the area often times offer the only opportunity for employment.

The men interviewed told the common story of how they came to the United States in order to be able to provide for their families, often sending every penny they earn back to their homes in Mexico. Everyday is a struggle to survive; the men must travel long distances at dawn to try to find work and many times they are paid too little or not able to find jobs at all.

Their meals primarily come from the lunch trucks that drive around to the workers and money meant to be sent to their families is spent on food to survive. As one migrant put it, "I can't do anything about it, I have to eat".

Unfortunately, the survival of these men does not only depend on their employment, but also on whether or not their homes are left standing. As the film effectively points out, although these Migrants are highly sought after for their cheap labor and are essential to many businesses and homes, they are unjustly confined to unsafe living conditions where they can quickly grow ill or have everything they have worked for destroyed.

There is no doubt that many sacrifices are made by these Migrants and that they work hard to earn what little salary they are paid, but it is evident that once any indication of their existence appears within view, many wealthy residents wish for them to disappear

and thus, simply bulldoze their homes over.

On a positive note, the UCSD event dedicated to celebrating the achievements of Cesar Chavez also shed light on the many groups in San Diego actively devoted to reaching out to migrant workers. Accompanying Frey's film was a photo display from the UCSD Latino Medical Student Association and a presentation of the organization's Migrant Farm Worker Project. The medical students travel to migrant camps and provide them with medicine, health examinations, and other essentials in order to promote health among these workers who are unfortunately otherwise deprived of access to healthcare.

Also highlighted at the Cesar Chavez Celebration were the efforts of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in Rancho Penasquitos who have developed a Migrant Outreach program through which they provide Sunday mass for the Migrants, weekly meals, English classes, and clothing.

Another non-profit organization actively involved in pursuing justice and preserving life for Migrants is Border Angels founded by Enrique Morones in 1986. After the implementation of Operation Gatekeeper in 1994 which heightened border security, thousands of Mexican Migrants began to find new travel routes to the United States through the scorching, deadly deserts of the U.S.-Mexican Border.

Border Angels seeks to prevent unnecessary deaths by setting up and maintaining nearly 350 water stations along with food and clothing supply containers on a year round basis.

For more information on "The Invisible Mexicans of Deer Canyon" and how you can get more involved, please see the following list of organizations:

www.invisiblemexicans.com

Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish Migrant Outreach. Contact Terri Trujillo at 858-484-1070 or 858-566-3550

Border Angels, border.angels.org- 619-269-7865

justiceformigrants.org

Nancy Madrid is an intern with the UCSD San Diego EXPORT Center and is a Latin American Studies and Sociology student at UC San Diego. The San Diego EXPORT Center is a partnership of organizations focusing on community minority health and health disparities research."



[Return to the Frontpage](#)