

Some Illegal Immigrants Want Nothing But To Be American

The names have been changed to protect identities of sources in this article.

This is a story of one of the thousands of families who cross the Mexican-American border every year in search of a better life. The Talon recognizes this story in the Human Rights Issue because of the hardship these families go through when feeling forced to cross the border illegally because of the long, grueling process to come here documented. Only 350,000 immigrants are allowed into the U.S. legally per year. Currently, more than 1 million are on the waiting list in Mexico alone, and more than 4 million total. (cis.org)

Bianca Yurdock & Amanda Gonzalez

Thirty-nine years ago...

Maria Cruz was born in a beautiful, small town called Oaxaca, Mexico. Twenty-five years later she found herself crossing into the United States of America -- illegally.

In Mexico, the schools were much smaller. In her grade there were a total of 22 students, nearly the average amount of students in one American classroom. Her family ate beans, corn, tomatoes, and more from their garden. Everything was fresh and organic; chickens and other animals were cooked and served the same day from their farm. She spent most of her days playing basketball or swimming in the river that flowed behind her house.

"When you're a kid living in Mexico, you're free to do whatever you want, but as you grow up you realize life isn't easy," Maria says.

In Mexico, it's hard to get even the basics a family wants and needs -- a house, nice shoes and clothing. She decided that if she wanted to be successful and live a comfortable life with her family, she would have to emigrate elsewhere. When emigrating, foreigners have to follow regulations to be eligible to live in the United States. To live in the United States legally, a foreigner has to have family or employment relationships, or humanitarian protection such as refugee or asylum status. Maria's family had no such connections.

"I would see people crossing in

real life, but I never imagined I would be doing it myself," Maria said.

On Nov. 9, 2003, Maria Cruz, her husband Jorge, and her 1-year-old daughter made it their mission to cross the border successfully--no matter what.

They began collecting supplies: canned food, baby food, two gallons of water and warm clothing for the baby. Maria borrowed cash from her brother and paid the rest to the guide later after arriving. They borrowed \$1,800 for each adult and \$600 for Rosa.

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behind. The responsibility of bringing Rosa terrified her. After hours in the freezing cold desert night, Jorge began to have trouble walking because of the poor quality of his shoes, making him even more exhausted. Their guide warned the group to run and hide to get away from immigration authorities.

While everyone slept, Maria stayed up all night caring for the baby. She didn't rest until they arrived to the United States.

To help Jorge get away in time,

estamos juntos," Cruz said. *If we die tonight, at least we will all be together.*

On the entire journey, the group was only allowed two 5-minute breaks. There were moments when everyone was too tired and wanted to give up. But Maria, kept pushing forward for Rosa's future.

"I wanted Rosa to have more opportunities than I had growing up as an adult," Maria said.

After 14 hours of walking, running, and hiding from immigration authorities, everyone was exhausted. Finally, the fatigued group reached California, where they had a safehouse waiting for them.

"Seeing the house gave us motivation to keep pushing and to ignore the pain in our feet. We knew in a few minutes we'd be able to rest," Maria said.

Shortly after, she experienced one of the most terrifying and heartbreaking moments in her life. Rosa wouldn't wake up.

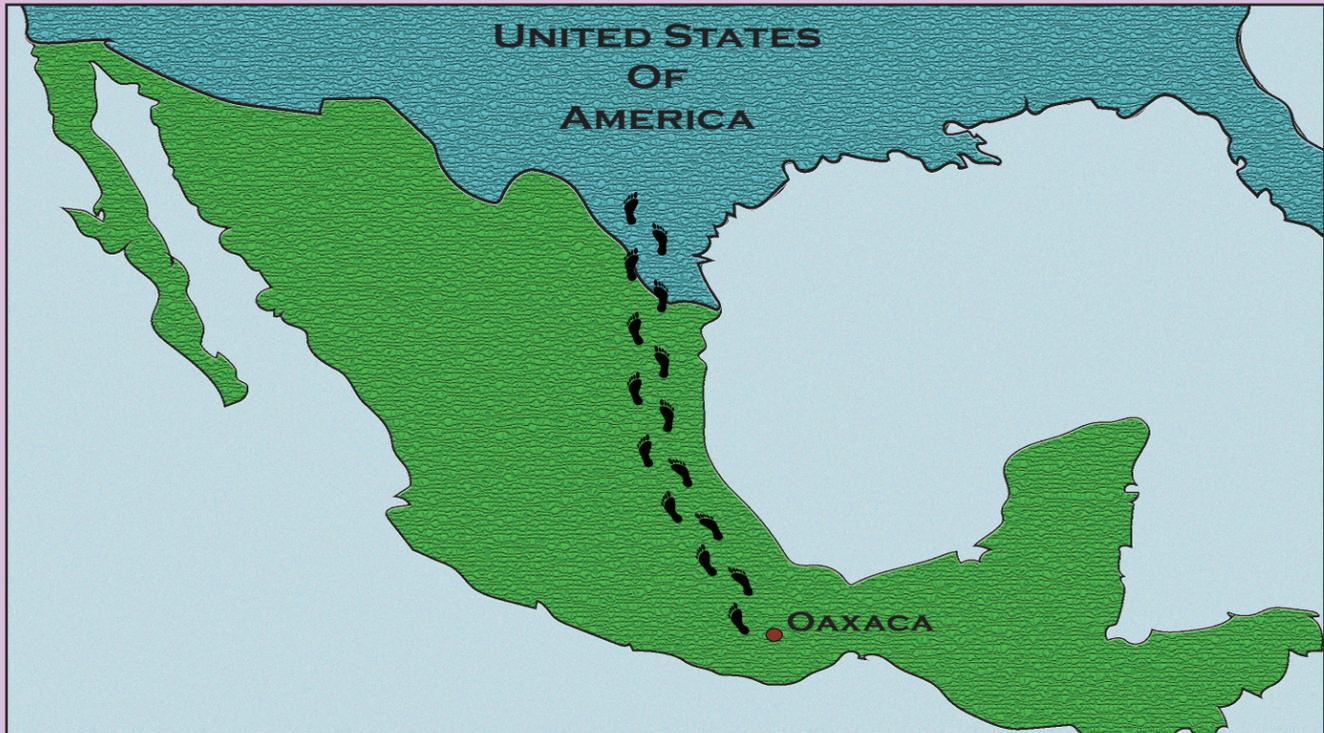
"She wouldn't move," Maria sobbed. "Her hand was freezing cold."

Maria was hit with a rush of emotions. She began screaming, kicking, and sobbing uncontrollably. She thought it was all for nothing.

Jorge grabbed the child from her arms while Maria tried to calm down. Eventually, Rosa woke from a deep sleep -- the baby was exhausted from the long trip.

After resting, they took the nearest flight to Raleigh, NC, where Jorge had family waiting for them.

"It was worth it because I was able to offer my children a better lifestyle," she said.



Because she heard that women were often raped while crossing, Maria cut her hair short to avoid drawing attention to herself.

It was a dark, rainy Sunday afternoon when they began their 14-hour journey to the United States. Maria carried baby Rosa and tried to keep her from crying.

She felt sad for the family she left

Maria supported him on one side and another woman in the group supported him from the other side. At times, they barely escaped the spotlights as Immigration Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) closed in. Every time they heard the 'chop, chop, chop' of a helicopter overhead, they dove to the cold, hard ground, sometimes landing in thorny bushes.

"Si nos morimos hoy, por los menos