



PHOTO BY ARKADY BROWN

Margarita Reyes Pacheco, pictured in her Forest Grove home, is a farmworker from Mexico. She is in the U.S. on a special visa for victims of abuse. Her youngest son, José Manuel, recently traveled with her to Mexico to meet his father – Reyes Pacheco's husband – who was deported.

'Hope is what I lean on'

Margarita Reyes Pacheco's story is one of immigration, hard work and a family divided by deportation

BY THACHER SCHMID
STAFF WRITER

If cranberries decorate your Thanksgiving table or a Christmas wreath adorns your home, you might have Margarita Reyes Pacheco to thank.

She's a Mexican immigrant farmworker who spends 10-hour days picking berries and weaving wreaths, which Spanish speakers call *coronas*, until her hands ache so much they wake her at night.

Reyes Pacheco came to the United States without documentation as a 15-year-old, brought by her first husband, whom she eventually left because of domestic violence. She first became a "Dreamer" under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program and now has a "U visa" for domestic abuse survivors. She has three children, all U.S. citizens, and a second husband who was deported.

His name is Alejandro. Even if you don't eat cranberries or buy wreaths but love guacamole, you might have him to thank: He's an avocado farmer in Toluca.

Reyes Pacheco's story offers a look under the surface of our immigration problems, revealing truths more complex than the polemic narratives of political leaders. Hers is a life framed by work and supported by "sanctuary" communities willing to stand up to government tactics one Latino leader compares

to the Gestapo.

Few issues have been more controversial since President Donald Trump took office than immigration. In Portland, the crackdown by Immigration and Customs Enforcement led to a Facebook video viewed a million times that showed ICE agents trespassing while detaining a suspect. In a separate incident that the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon called "Nightmare at PDX," a Spanish college student was sent to the Northern Oregon Regional Correctional Center, a jail in The Dalles that regularly holds ICE detainees, for a minor visa violation.

Ramón Ramírez, president of the largest Latino union in Oregon, Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN), described ICE raids as fascist.

"The psychological fabric of the community is coming apart," Ramírez said. "This is Nazi Germany. We're living in times of Nazi Germany, where they're going after people. ICE is using Gestapo tactics, coming in the middle of the night, separating families."

Since 2015, when he announced his bid for president, Trump has hammered on the theme that Mexican immigrants are criminals.

"When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best," Trump said then. "They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists."

However, according to several studies, immigrants are less likely to commit crimes

than non-immigrants.

The worst crime Margarita has committed, she said, is driving without insurance. Asked about Trump's build-a-wall politics, she sighed.

"I think (Trump) just focuses on criminals and doesn't think about non-criminals," she said. "I know we're not perfect. But when Mexicans do things, it's like the law is very hard for us."

Reyes Pacheco's weekdays start before 6 a.m. in a mobile home in Forest Grove. She feeds Michael, Christopher and José Manuel breakfast, then they have a daily video chat with her husband, Alejandro – father to José Manuel – before she drops them off at school and heads to work.

During the year, she shifts between planting and picking vegetables and berries in Washington County farm fields and working two months making Christmas wreaths by hand for an employer she declined to name. In years past, she's worked an evening job in a restaurant in addition to her full-time day job to make ends meet.

"A woman works in the fields like a man does, and often a man is better paid. We're hard-working people. ... It's not just the men who are working."

REBECA VELAZQUEZ,
MUJERES LUCHADORAS
PROGRESISTAS

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