

EL PASO, from page 5

flag on his head sitting near me sips his beer and belches.

"The frog spoke," says Mariana, this time in English, and everyone sitting at the bar laughs. I just arrived and I already feel like just another local enjoying himself.

A Swedish player falls in a match throw. "Shut up, man, do not cry, do not be a mama," a young girl exclaims. The favorite of the Mexicans is Javier Hernández Balcázar, number 14, Chicharito.

When Chicharito touches the ball, Mariana pulls out the maracas.

"I would like to be a chicharita to enter through your window, Chicharito," a lady sings at the end of the bar.

I get a message. It is a letter that an immigrant woman detained at the T. Don Hutto Detention Center in Taylor, near Austin, Texas, sent anonymously to the human rights organization Grassroots Leadership last weekend. In the letter, the woman narrates the horror of how she was detained by ICE and separated from her children after passing the U.S. border to seek asylum. The letter describes how she and other women were put in "the kennel" without being able to talk to their children and threatening to give them up for adoption.

"I spent eight days in the kennel," wrote the woman about those first days in custody in which, she said, they did not let her bathe and "punished them and did not give us water or food. We slept on the floor and they gave us aluminum foil to cover us. My son says he was beaten where they had him for three days." She wrote, "My daughter was pulled by her hair just because she did not get up." The woman explained in the letter that it took her 21 days before she could speak with her children.

The letter also describes how in the detention center there are women with "three-month-old babies who cry because of hunger and cold," pregnant women who faint and "there are mothers who cannot bear the pain of not knowing about their children".

California Federal Judge Dana M. Sabraw of the San Diego federal district court

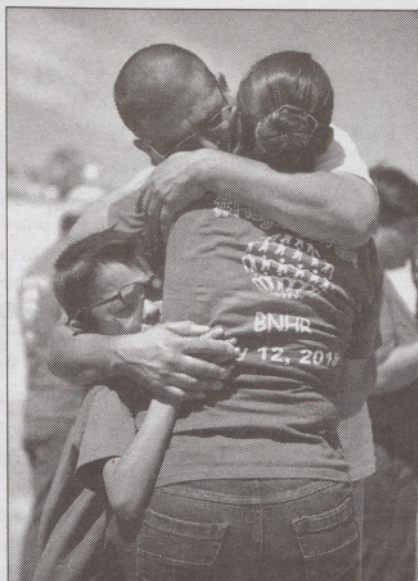


PHOTO BY MONICA LOZANO
People hug at the dried up Rio Grande at the "Abrazos no muros" celebrated in May.

issued a nationwide order on Tuesday, June 26, ordering all families of immigrants separated at the border to be reunited within 30 days. The order states that children under 5 years of age must be delivered to their parents in 14 days and that all minors must be able to speak with their parents in 10 days. "The unfortunate reality is that under the current system, migrant children are not counted with the same efficiency and accuracy as property," the Judge wrote in his order.

The deadline for that court-mandated order came and went on July 26.

During today's game, the beer at The Tap costs only one dollar and they give away tacos and shots of tequila. But the second half started badly, and the locals yelled that the Mexicans were playing like little ones. When the Swedes score the second goal, a man in the corner jokes: "I'm going to work." But another beer is requested.

From far away, the World Cup held in Russia is felt on the border of Texas.

At a recent protest march in El Paso over "zero tolerance" practices and the

constantly-changing immigration policy of the Trump administration, there were plenty of green shirts of the Mexican World Cup team among the protesters.

On Monday, June 25, the authorities allowed the press to enter the Tornillo Detention Center, 39 miles from El Paso, where 326 children remain in custody, according to reports.

Maria is sitting next to me proudly wearing the colors of her country. She has not seen her three children, who live a stone's throw away in the adjoining Ciudad Juárez, in the past five years. They are older now. They are 31, 28 and 19 years old. She raised them here in the U.S., working with a visa in El Paso for 20 years, but then she lost the work visa 5 years ago. They took the visa away because she could not handle the paperwork, she told me. When her visa was taken, she owed \$12,000 on the house she had bought in Ciudad Juárez, and, in order not to lose it, she returned to El Paso to continue working, this time undocumented. "They charged me only \$500 to cross" the border.

Maria wanted to pay off the house in a year, but things got complicated. She now has two grandchildren she does not know in person. She cried as she told me that she has recorded their voices on the cell phone to listen to. She works Monday through Saturday cleaning houses for \$50 a day. She arrives home at night and tries to maintain a routine. "I exercise, I bathe, but one comes home and the loneliness is horrible ... I take refuge in this," she said looking around the bar.

"I came here to take my children forward. I do not want a man for the papers. I've never prostituted myself," she says proudly.

She then told the story of two friends who married citizens for papers. One ended up in a shelter for abused women and the

other in a small room in the back of the husband's house.

Maria's eldest daughter is a criminologist and the youngest has just entered the University. The other son decided not to go to college, works hard, and has already paid for his house. "But that's material stuff," Maria said. "Emotionally, nothing will make up for everything I've gone through. I could tell you and tell you."

Sweden scores the third goal. "Will you give me a gallon of beer to go, please, to go and cry?" exclaimed a patron.

"My husband thinks I'm washing and cooking," said another Mexican woman laughing. The bar patrons sing "Cielito Lindo."

I meet Aurora. Years ago, Aurora was undocumented. Now, she is a U.S. citizen and teacher. She tells me that she was able to improve her status during the Clinton administration. She confesses that she feels she could have been one of those thousands of

children who today remain locked up in dubious, variable circumstances, depending on the centers they are in, always horrible. "It is inhuman to separate children from their parents and it is unjustified because the children have not done anything."

Many of those children who are going through these traumatic experiences are already traumatized from experiences in their countries. Among Aurora's students are immigrant children who have seen their fathers killed or a brother or another family member. "Many do not speak for fear of being deported."

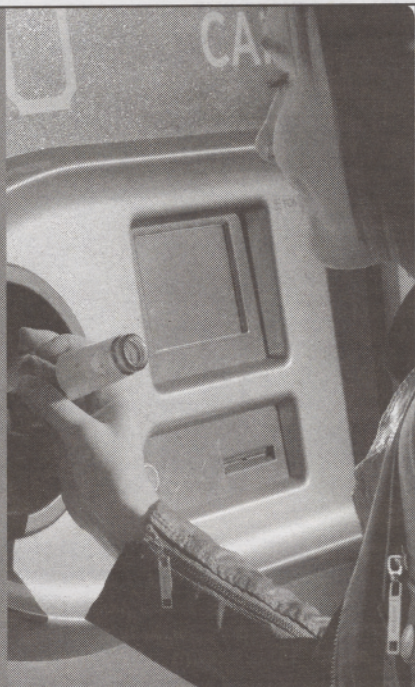
In the end, Sweden wins. But Mexico will go on to play another day.

Inaki Estivaliz is a journalist from Panama. Translated from Spanish by Adrienne Evans. Courtesy of Street Roots' sister paper Spare Change News / INSP.ngo

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