

The El Paso Chronicles

Three essays from the Mexican border



A woman with her child meets her spouse on the opposite side of the border wall.

PHOTO BY MONICA LOZANO

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The nonprofit Border Network of Human Rights, dedicated to educating and organizing El Paso, Texas, residents and migrants, holds one of the most emotional events that can be held, each time they are allowed to. It happens on the border of the U.S. and Mexico, and is called “Abrazos no muros” (“Hugs not walls”).

The founder and executive director of the organization, Fernando García, announced that they will try to celebrate this October again. It is an opportunity for some families of migrants separated by U.S. immigration policies to meet again, even for a few moments, and embrace each other.

García explains that even though the Rio Grande, which separates the American city, El Paso, from the Mexican city, Ciudad Juárez, dries up at some times of the year, they still take advantage of the opportunity to “take the border for a few hours” and allow the momentary family reunion.

They have to coordinate with the U.S. Border Patrol, on one side, and the Mexican Federal Police, on the other, “to allow families that have been separated by deportation, mothers who are separated from their children, husbands who have been separated, to get together briefly in the middle of the river, and to embrace each other. That is the central concept.”

The activist explains that they have already done five “Abrazos no muros,” in which families have managed to “reunify briefly, to embrace for three, four, five minutes. It’s not a long time, but for us it’s not just an act of love, of humanity, of trying to bring those families together; it’s an act of protest. It’s bringing attention to this crisis that the U.S. immigration policy has generated. That is a crisis that is bursting and destroying the Latino family by the thousands, if not millions.

“Seriously, I’m not joking: in the last 10 years families have been busted and separated ... Children separated from their parents by 10 years, for five years, for two years, husbands who cannot be seen, boyfriends who are committed, all of them are separated,” García said, regretfully.

He explains that on some occasions they have managed to get some of those couples to marry each other on one side of the wall, “and then they had to return to their sides, to be separated.

“With this we want to present to the country the real image of the separation. We will try to do the next one in October, depending on the conditions, of course. That is a thorn in the system that does not want us to do it, but we will try to continue doing it. They continue separating families; we are going to keep unifying them so that they embrace,” the activist asserts.

The Human Rights Border Network has

been documenting abuses of authority, police abuses and Border Patrol abuses for 20 years.

“We have been trying to change that pattern of abuse and institutional behavior that happen on the border, especially against migrants, but also against residents, who are citizens and who also live in this region but who are Latino and are sometimes racially profiled, because of racism on the part of police and immigration agencies,” he says.

“Our job is to resist abuse, educate our communities, and organize them also, to fight for changes in laws. It is recognized that migrants are the cornerstone of the U.S., that there are millions of migrants living in the United States without documents and that they have to be recognized as part of society,” García says.

Photographer Mónica Lozano has documented several “Abrazos no muros” and explains that one of the things that most attracted her attention at the event was once in December 2017, when the river had water (it is usually dry), so they could not celebrate it at the usual place in the river basin. They had to do it at the border wall.

“The wall is made of metal. It was frozen, very cold, but people did not care, and they stuck their faces there in the metal, just to hug the children with their little faces stuck to the metal. Human warmth and the need

for connection and to embrace in this icy wall that was all rusted,” Lozano says.

The aberration of the border that only the common citizen can overcome

The drama of the U.S.-Mexico border is that of an undeclared war that is not new, although the Trump administration has exacerbated it to unprecedented limits by caging migrant children separated from their parents, an infamy that the politicians will not solve, but the common American will.

This is what one of the people who knows most about the aberration of the border believes, Fernando García, founder and executive director of the Border Network of Human Rights, an organization that has spent the past 20 years working to educate and organize the residents and migrants of the area.

“For 20 years we have been documenting abuses of authority, abuses by the police, abuses by the Border Patrol, and we have been trying to change that pattern of abuse and institutional behavior that happens on the border, especially against migrants, but also against residents, who are citizens and who also live in this region but who are Latino and are sometimes inclined to be

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