

ANABAPTIST BORDER MINISTRIES

SAN JUAN, TEXAS

April-May 2025

Deportees -Brian Brandenberger

Imagine living with your family and having a good paying job, you have your own plot of land and your own house. You've been living comfortably in the United States for many years.

One weekend you decide to enjoy some of the fruits of your labors and live it up. You indulge in drinking and having a good time with friends at a bar. Maybe you find yourself going further than you wished in becoming intoxicated and on your way home from the bar you run off the road and get caught by the police. They take you through the proper procedures and realize you aren't a legal citizen or a resident of the USA and don't have the correct papers. Upon finding this out, they inform you that you're going to be deported. One weekend of reckless fun led you into being deported and separated from your family. This is what you've called home and have lived here almost your entire life. Suddenly it's being uprooted and you're heading back to Mexico. Imagine being flown from the jail cell where you're being held and are brought to Brownsville, Texas. You deplane and are put on a bus and driven across the border to a camp known as Casa Migrante. You get checked into the camp and in the midst of the grief of having had to leave your home and family, you wallow in sadness and despair. The future looks entirely bleak. What kind of feelings would you have? What would be going through your mind? Would God enter the picture at any time, or would you simply say, "Oops I messed up, I'll try to do better next time." Or do you think you'd spend a lot of time thinking over your life and wishing you had made better choices? In those circumstances most people do think about God. They don't always know who He is, but they start thinking about their life a little more seriously.

One Wednesday morning at 10:00, I walk a group of Americans. They look different, act different and speak differently than the Americans you knew. You wonder who they are and what they're doing here. "Will I get a chance to talk to them? What do they believe?" You see hope in their eyes, and joy in their steps.



This is an experience many people are facing and finding themselves in this situation as they are being deported from the USA, one by one. We've been working with a lot of migrants wishing to cross into the states, but we've also been running into people who are now being deported back into Mexico.

With our family having arrived back in October, we've been pouring a lot of time and effort into learning Spanish. With learning Spanish, it takes time to be able to communicate effectively, and so up to this point I have had to use a translator to speak to most of the migrants. This has had its share of challenges with trying to share what's on my heart. In the case of a deportee, many of them speak good English so communicating effectively is much easier.

Here is the story of Alex, a young man I met in Casa Migrante. Alex lived most of his life in South Carolina, he grew up with loving parents, in a so called "Christian" home, went to school

and lived a normal life, however he never had his legal papers. As he got older, he got introduced to drinking and drugs and enjoyed partying. His family tried to put a stop to it but he didn't heed their warnings.

One day while Alex was driving to Florida, he was living it up, high on drugs. He ran off the road and when he came to his senses, he found himself in a jail cell. After being in jail for a while, he was flown to Brownsville, South Texas, put on a bus and deported back across the border into Mexico. He was taken to Casa Migrante, where I had the privilege of meeting him and hearing his story. After realizing he's at a low point in his life, and seeing how God had spared him from dying, and now had allowed our paths to cross, I counted it a privilege to be able to share the gospel with Alex. I shared with him the power of God and God's longing to transform his life into a new person and to be born again. Knowing the power of God in my life and how he spared me by giving me new life through His Son, I know that God can do the same in Alex's life. As I shared what the Lord gave me, I could see the words moving in Alex's heart, and conviction on his face. With shock in his face, Alex shared with me that the words I was saying spoke right into the situation he found himself in. He realized these words were God speaking to him and recognized and saw his need for God. I soon realized God had orchestrated this encounter, so I tried to convince and plead with Alex to change his life and put his trust in God and leave his life of sin behind him. I knew he wasn't planning to stay in the camp for very long, so I tried to encourage him to change his life and forsake sin after seeing how far sin has brought him. I knew that if he left Casa Migrante without changing his heart, he would eventually find himself back in South Carolina, miserable and right where he was at before with no change in his heart. Alex wanted time to think about it but never surrendered his heart while at Casa Migrante. After some time he left, and I was able to stay in touch with him some, but eventually he crossed back into the states illegally and I never heard from him again. I pray that Alex finds the Lord.

As we all know sin is not something to be played with. You may enjoy it but it will only be for a season and the reaping

will come. As we examine our lives, let's not put off for tomorrow what needs to be done today. Maybe you're not at the same place Alex was, or maybe you're ensnared with a secret sin or you're simply wanting to go deeper with God, take the opportunity you have at this very moment and ask God to help you. Or take the time to find a secret place alone with God and your Bible and stay there till you hear God's voice speaking to you through His word or in your thoughts. The only breath we're promised is the one we have, and so many times we have good intentions but the distractions around us so often steal our time. We live day after day this way and so easily we only think about the should haves and could haves and that leaves us wishing we'd have a better relationship with God. Let's not let the distractions and the love of sin keep us from intimate communion with a Holy God. Today is an opportunity that God has granted us, let us use it wisely. Let's pray for each other that God can work within us so He can use us for His kingdom and be able to reach souls that are in need of His help.



A Day in the Life an ABM Mom -Angie Monterrosa

Is the height of my joy dependent on the depths of my thanks? From the book One Thousand Gifts. This saying stood out to me as I was reading the book One Thousand Gifts. If you want a challenge to be more thankful, I'd recommend reading that book!

Sunday. Another beautiful Sunday! We've had so many lovely days this year! So far, it's not been like last year when May was dreary and stifling hot.

Our group of 16 gathered for church in the dining room as usual. Brian had a devotional; PH led a Bible study then Merlin Caceres preached a short message. Marcs provided most of our lunch for us by bringing pulled pork. They had also gotten potatoes ready yesterday before they left so all that was needed was to season them and stick them in the oven. Martha made her scrumptious lettuce, strawberry, pecan salad and chocolate fruit pizza, another of her specialties, for dessert. A few of us worked a long time on the puzzle in the afternoon and we slapped the pieces in like we haven't before! It's starting to be addicting now that we're getting closer done.



Cactuses in bloom at Walmart Garden Center

I took a short nap before supper. We ate leftover fajitas out at the Pueblo. After supper the men set up the speaker system and then we practiced singing some Spanish songs for when we cross on Thursday. PH's girls, Martha and I enjoy singing together a lot so once we were done practicing, we ladies kept on singing for a while. Then the children wanted a turn, so they belted out 4 songs for us. Brian and Lyndon did a skit type thing with Brian pretending to be this preacher gone to Africa and using all kinds of American idioms like "once in a blue moon, bend over backwards," etc. Lyndon was the translator and tried to come up with ways of translating these sayings into African "English". We had some good laughs over them! Frances made us some Middle Eastern tea, and we sat around and drank tea before heading into bed. Can you tell why we love Sundays?

Monday. Dominick - "Mom is it morning?" Me- "yes, it is" Dominick- "NIIICE" (Learning what morning is, is an accomplishment for this little boy for who, for a long time, everything has been "last night")

Also, this morning Dominick came to me and showed me his red fingers from smashing roses. He informed me it's flower blood.

Dominick is an inspiration to me to love mornings. He jumps out of bed and is all noise and joy right away. He's often the first one of the children to wake up and will usually run outside soon after he's up.

I got up early this morning and started doing the wash. Then I mixed a batch of bread dough. Ariel wanted me to bake bread for him to take along to Senda. The recipe made 4 loaves, so he took 3 and we kept the last one here to eat. We don't eat that much bread because I don't keep it on hand much. But when there is bread, it gets devoured! Ariel also took some of his deer meat to Senda and they grilled it there. He has a knack for fixing up meat to grill and Brian was commenting on it later. He said Ariel's deer meat is amazing, that if he could fix deer like that, he'd shoot a bunch of deer! Anyways the Senda people think it's pretty great that they get to eat deer meat, to them it's a specialty!

I was able to finish painting the bathroom trim. I'm so glad that's a job that's done. I found out later that they'll probably just rip the trim out and put in new stuff because this trim is stained and after 3 coats of paint the



Ariel and Dominick washing the van.

stains still seep through. Too bad I didn't know that before I painted it! It would've saved me a lot of work! I felt good that I got the wash all brought in, folded and put it away plus folded another batch of wash that had been sitting there over the weekend. That doesn't happen every wash day, but I love it if it does!

Tuesday. Last night Ariel asked if I'd make donuts this morning, so I mixed up half batch first thing this morning. There were a few moments when I wasn't sure if this was a good idea or not but in the end it all worked out and the donuts were edible. We ate them for break along with coffee. I thought the men were going to put the flooring in our bathroom, but they had other things that they did today. Since they will be doing more work than just the floor, I think they decided to wait until a work team comes. They will be changing the sink and putting the new one in a different place, replacing the trim and putting new flooring in.

We had leftovers for lunch. I cooked beans and made rice for our supper. I was able to have the children all down for naps when team meeting time rolled around. At the end of team meeting PH wondered when we wanted to go out to eat and most of us wanted to go this evening. We adjourned the meeting at 5 and had 45 minutes to get ready. We ate at the Chinese buffet. After we came back, we worked on the puzzle for a while.

Wednesday. I woke up this morning and was attacked with a stomachache. It was bad sometimes and then would go away or be just a dull ache. I took it easy all day and didn't do much of anything. I had ordered groceries online so close to noon the children and I went to pick them up. We also stopped and put gas in the van then for a treat we got McDonald's for lunch. The children got their naps early and slept a long time which enabled me to take a good long nap after which I felt a lot better, though not quite 100% yet. This evening, we got together to sing our songs for tomorrow again. And then worked on the puzzle. :) Brian and Martha went to the airport to pick up Katrina Miller from OH, but she came in late enough that we hadn't seen her tonight yet.

Thursday. It was different to get everyone ready this morning to cross all together again! We (our family) haven't all crossed since Thanksgiving when we went to Senda 1.

Thankfully we were all well and able to cross. We loaded up into Betsy and Eeyore and stopped at Walmart before we crossed. Yesterday was Children's Day in Mexico so soon after we got to the Senda, there was a church group that came in and gave out gifts, cupcakes, juice and candy bags to the children and to some of the adults too. PH, Brian, and Ariel went to the supermarket to get sandwich fixings and some sweets to eat with coffee. We made a bunch of sandwiches, and they all got eaten. There was another group that came in and brought lunch for the folks, so we got to eat some of their food. Otherwise, we would've been without lunch for a while. After lunch and cleaning things, up we sang for a little while. We sang 5 Spanish songs, 2 Creole songs and 1 ladies' song in Spanish. {Note: There were 3 Haitian ladies who came up and helped us sing the Creole songs. They seemed to be overjoyed to be singing, and PH said later that they were crying after they sang. Poor ladies probably miss their country and language! Our van got home a lot earlier than Betsy. A day at Senda is fun but very tiring, especially with the whole family along.

I didn't feel very energetic but after a cup of coffee that Frances gave us, I felt better so I put the laundry in to wash. I must make staff supper tomorrow, so I'd rather have my wash done today.



Friday. I was busy today making food for supper. I decided to try to make a meal where I don't have to run to Walmart for anything. Marcs brought us some freshly butchered chickens when they came, so I made roasted chicken, rice, beans, pico de gallo, and tortillas. I had fruit on hand, so I made fruit slush out of piñas and mangoes and some tangerines. There were so many cupcakes in the freezer for lunches that weren't getting used very fast, so I fixed them up with frosting and had those for something baked. The only thing I used that I didn't have enough of was a tomato for the pico, from Martha.

Renae came over around 4:30 and helped with getting the children dressed and then babysat them. She also helped in the kitchen before supper with getting plates and cups and other things set out.

Most of the men helped with cleaning up and washing dishes. Brian, Martha, and I worked a while on the puzzle, but I was so tired and didn't have much luck in getting pieces in, so we ended up out at the Pueblo after a while with the others. Some of us played a few rounds of scum.

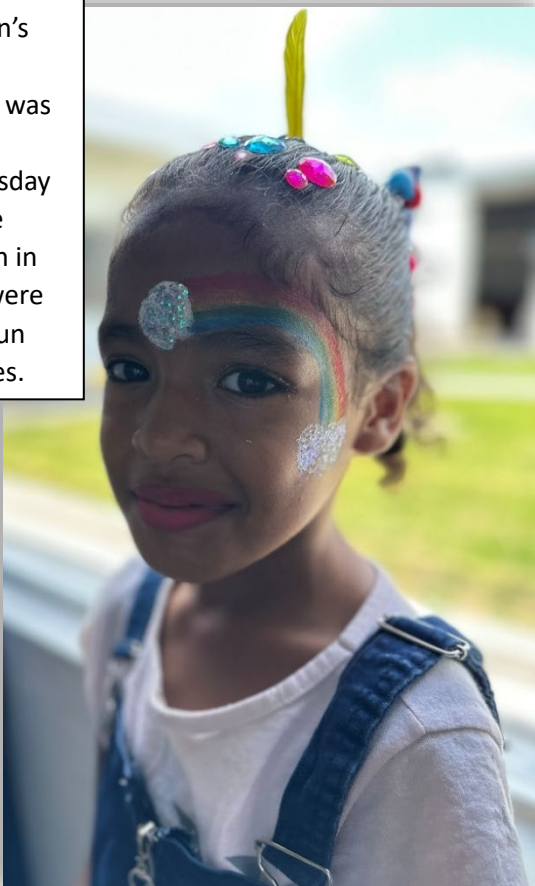
Saturday. I woke up and slipped outside with some coffee and my Bible and devotional book to enjoy the morning in the pavilion. It was a beautiful morning: cloudy, breezy and even a bit chilly! After a while my family joined me out there. We ate a late brunch of gallo pinto and the fixings. Katrina was in the pavilion when I went out to tell the children to come in so I invited her for breakfast too. We fixed our plates and ate outside. After I washed the dishes and cleaned up the kitchen I swept and mopped the floors. Kirsten helped me by dusting some yesterday, but I still hadn't gotten the floors mopped. I need to clean the bathroom too yet today sometime.

Ariel and I got the children ready and came to town for a bit. We need a few things at the market, and I need to get lettuce for lunch tomorrow.

Later- We got home from town around 4 and after the children ate something I put them to bed for a late nap. I took a little nap myself to try and revive me. I made chicken pizza for supper and Ariel had some meat out, so he made some beef steak too. PHs have company from their church, Paul Troyer's, so in honor of the company there was volleyball at 7. It sounds like Martha and Jenna are sick today! I thought we were all over getting sick, but I guess not. I hope nobody else gets it now!

I feel like my day has ended and there were still too many things I should've done like folding the wash that patiently waited to be brought in for 2 days!! But we are alive and well and very blessed! I think I will sign off now and send this on its way. Blessings to each one in the coming week!

Children's Day in Mexico was on Wednesday and the children in camp were doing fun activities.



Audrey and Katrina playing with the children on Friday.

Willian's Journey -Lyndon Yoder

This is Willian. Willian is a 17-year-old from Honduras, traveling with his parents and two younger sisters. This is a small part of his testimony, written as I recall. In Honduras, he was not a good person. God was not someone important to him. However, when his family decided to come to the United States, various events caused him to begin to search for God in a new way. In southern Mexico, they were kidnapped and had to pay a ransom to be freed. Through the stress of the move, and the emotional trauma of being kidnapped, their family life was going to pieces. His parents were constantly fighting and threatening to break up. His younger sister has leukemia and would deteriorate rapidly if she did not receive chemo treatments. Willian prayed that God would somehow help them to get from southern Mexico up to the American border. Soon afterward, they were able to leave the Mexican state of Chiapas, get to the border town of



Tijuana. There, they snuck across the border into California, finally inside the United States. They set out walking, heading north. Four hours north of the border, they were walking through an area where people did not usually walk. Suspicious, immigration stopped them to check them out and of course arrested them upon discovering they were illegal. They were taken to a detention center near San Diego, where their case was reviewed. His sister was taken to a hospital to determine what could be done for her, but since she was illegal, not much help could be given. At first, Willian and his family thought they might be allowed to go free. Willian prayed this might be the case, and asked God to please allow them to stay in the United States. He promised to serve God if He allowed them to stay. But then, so that God would know He was more important than fame or any country, Willian promised he would still serve God even if they got deported, on the condition that God would lead them to a place where there would be a church. The family was held for approximately four days, and then for some odd reason was transferred from CA to Texas. By this point they knew they were going to be deported. Here in Texas, they were held an additional three days, before being taken across the border in Reynosa, and arrived at Senda de Vida 1 refugee camp. God brought them clear from California, and placed them in a Christian camp, where church services are available almost every day, as well as Bible Studies. Willian is one of the faithful attendees to the Bible study, where he learns many new things about God. Another amazing part of God's work is that his sister Neomi has not needed chemo treatments this whole time. Sadly enough, she is not a Christian, but Willian tells me he prays for her salvation. This whole experience has been a good one for them, although difficult, and the tough journey is not over for them. But while observing their family, God has done some amazing work there. Please pray for Willian and his family. They soon plan to leave camp since they are no longer able to get to the USA. Pray that God would continue to work in their lives, and that the spark lit in Willian's heart would keep growing, into a man on fire for God.

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