

SAF

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Jose David Lopez

Focus on Documentary

“Documentary work is an amazing tool to create allies in the non-immigrant community and to inspire farmworkers that they can make a difference. If it is personal and factual, documentary is a beautiful way to involve people, because the passion they get from caring about a human being is more powerful than any of the economic or theoretical arguments we can give them.”

--Stephanie Gans, 2008 fellow

Golpes en el Corazón

by Jose David Lopez & George Lozano

Don Juan is a 65-year-old man from Dolores Hidalgo, a small pueblo in Mexico. Born to a family of four sisters, Don Juan was the only one of five brothers to survive birth, making him the last to carry his family name. He joined the military at 12 and was only 17 when he decided to cross the border to the U.S. in order to support his family. He has spent his life harvesting the fields in six different states. The series of events that have occurred in his life made him who he is today: *a man with scars*.

Life in Dolores Hidalgo was not always easy. Don Juan's father taught him to work the land and care for the animals. Don Juan was the only one in his family to receive an education of three

years, sufficient for him to learn to read and write. Just before turning 12, a visit from his cousin Miguel effectively ended Don Juan's childhood. According to Don Juan, his cousin said, “You know what, here you're not doing anything. You're already grown up enough to go and earn something instead of hanging around here just picking chiles. Out there you could be working and learning, and would have the money to send home to your father.” Don Juan agreed and, either out of necessity or out of ignorance, he joined the Mexican army. He had to face a new reality, a life of rules, learning, and discipline but mostly hard work and determination. It was in the army that he learned the unwavering values that would guide him for the rest of his life.

...continued on p. 2

"Fighting Hard, you can acheive it"

by Stephanie Gans

Brigida is from Santa Cruz Teopetetutla, a small town in Oaxaca Mexico. With well-trained teachers and a good school system, she describes it as a place where you can grow and move forward. The town's attitude toward education is easily discerned from Brigida's photos of her graduations from elementary and secondary school: there is a lot of fanfare, balloons, and dressing up involved.

When she was thirteen years old, Brigida's family immigrated to the United States. Her new hometown, Bridgeton, is like a *pueblo* to Brigida, and she has much in common with the people living there. Her greatest fear of coming to school in the U.S. was that there would be no Spanish speakers, but she was surprised to hear so much Spanish being spoken. Brigida lives in a trilingual household: she occasionally speaks English to her little brother, and they speak Spanish as well as their own language, Chinanteco. This is how she maintains a connection with her culture, and she plans to speak Chinanteco to her own children one day.

...continued on p. 2



courtesy of Brigida

SAF is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization whose mission is to bring students and farmworkers together to learn about each other's lives, share resources and skills, improve conditions for farmworkers, and build diverse coalitions working for social change.

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...Golpes, continued from p. 1

At the age of 17 Don Juan left the military and went back to his pueblo to work in the national police force, but not before telling his superior that he would not be a crooked cop. A few months later he decided to quit after learning of higher pay and job opportunities available in the United States. Once in the U.S. he found a job working in the fields, and met Aurora, a Mexican American woman living in Dallas, Texas, who months later became his wife.

Aurora was his first love, and he took her to Dolores Hidalgo to introduce her to his family and to get married in the church. Sadly, six years later she was diagnosed with cancer. Don Juan did everything in his power to keep her alive, even bringing her back to the U.S. in a desperate search for a cure, but sadly they realized that the end had come. They returned to México where she spent her last days with Don Juan. After the funeral, without telling anyone, he decided to leave in search of a substitute for happiness. No one in his family knew where he was, and he never went back. It would be 22 years before Don Juan would be reunited with what was left of his family.

With the death of Aurora, he dedicated his life to work, traveling from state to state, working from dawn to dusk. He lived to work, and worked to live. He moved to Denver, Colorado, and worked on a farm taking care of the horses and other animals. Time went by and with time came a new spirit to live. He married again, first Carmela and then Glandy, but both relationships ended with their tragic deaths.

Always, he returned to work in the fields. Time passed and he began to lose hope of ever finding a new partner in life. Once again he had to learn to live alone with no family. It was years later that he met Fatima, a woman with Latin American roots who could speak some Spanish. But not even a month after their marriage, Don Juan had an accident at work while cutting trees. His employer refused to take him to a hospital after he fell out of a tree and he was condemned to spend the next three years of his life in a wheelchair.

Little by little Don Juan began to recover and to walk again, and he found a job at a local cantina wiping tables and serving drinks. After caring for him for three years, Fatima left to take care of family problems in Louisiana and never came back. And



Top: Blood Test photo by Jose David Lopez
Bottom: Brigida describes a typical day in Santa Cruz, Mexico photo by Stephanie Gans

then, 22 years after he had last seen his family, one of his nephews found him. Don Juan decided to join his family in North Carolina and began working in the tobacco fields alongside his sister Doña Genoveva and her daughter, Doña Felicita.

Now, fourteen years later, Doña Genoveva has stopped working in the fields due to her age, and Don Juan was himself diagnosed with cancer. While we drove him to his chemotherapy appointments this summer, he told us some of the many stories contained in his long life. ❁

... Fighting Hard, continued from p. 1

Her hard work in ESL classes and in a program for immigrants eventually led Brigida to earn a scholarship to college. Using this scholarship and the money she made doing farm and factory work in the summer, she plans to spend two years at a local community college and two at a university in order to become an elementary school teacher. She loves working with children and she wants to help teach them the values she learned at school and from her family. ❁



Left: Elizabeth's Garden photo by Rebecca Crain.
Right: Daniel and a coworker lean against a truck photo by Leticia Perez

Everything Will Change

by Rebecca Crain

I decided to leave an hour early just in case I ran into a problem. My nerves were calmed as I made the trek and took in the beautiful scenery. I drove until I saw Elizabeth's trailer. I was 30 minutes early, so I decided to turn around and spend the remainder of the time at a small river that I had passed a few miles up the road.... Crossing over the threshold of her door all of the uncomfortable feelings I had experienced earlier left me. I sat down in front of the fan with Elizabeth as all three of her children crammed into one chair, lovingly pushing and poking each other. Elizabeth was shooing her children into order as I watched the beautiful family before me.

Elizabeth is a hardworking, educated mother of three, diligently caring for her children while also finding the time to give back to her community. Yet because of language barriers and the few opportunities for her children here, she and her husband have made the difficult choice to return to Mexico this year.

After receiving a technical degree, she worked as an industrial chemist for 8 years in Mexico. At 27, she decided to terminate her career. When asked why, she smiled and said, "I stopped working because my daughter was born." Upon the birth of her daughter, Elizabeth worked full-time as a mother and counted on the financial support of her husband, who worked as a mechanic. This brief period did not last long, and when her husband lost his job, he was forced to find work in the United States. A new life was about to begin for this young family.

After her husband became settled, Elizabeth and her daughter followed him to the U.S. When asked to describe how she reacted to the relocation, Elizabeth said she had never imagined herself living in the U.S. Her dreams were simply to work in Mexico, to have a good career, to marry and raise a family.

"I'm happy here in the U.S. My children are safe, they have education, they have fun. We're together as a family, we're all together. My husband is here with me and with my children."

While this family has felt the joys of a comfortable life they have also felt the challenges of a system that works against them. She believes that this is not a country where she or her own children have the same advantages as native-born Americans. "Those who were born here have all the opportunity, and those that didn't can only go as far as high school.... it's very difficult to have a career here if you are not U.S.-born."

This reality has deeply affected Elizabeth's family, because her oldest child was born in Mexico while her two sons were born in the U.S. With the current state of affairs in the U.S., immigrants without legal documentation cannot easily pursue an education past high school. For this reason they have decided to move back to Mexico after nearly 10 years here in the U.S.

The move will be hard on the children, but Elizabeth believes that now is an opportune moment for them— they are still young, and they can adapt to a new life. Nevertheless, Elizabeth says that "everything will change. For example, here I don't work. My husband's salary is sufficient. But in Mexico we will both have to work so that they will have a good education and a bright future." ❁

Lifelong Learner

by Taryn Ness, Leticia Perez,
& Reed Weatherill

In 2006, SAF Interns Natashia Vasquez and Sarah Stephens recorded the story of Daniel, then an 18-year-old boy working in the tobacco fields of eastern North Carolina. In school, he was about to transition from his regular ESL classes into the harder "normal" classes. While there existed an atmosphere of hope, growth and advancement to a brighter future, Daniel and his family were wary of the many barriers and conflicting forces that could impede his educational aspirations.

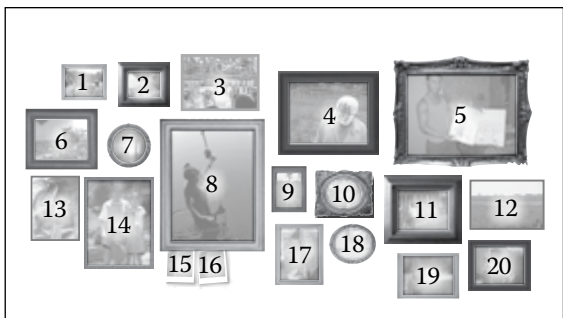
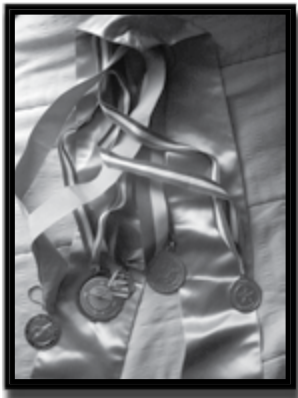
When we first met Daniel two years later, he was just another face in the crowd of farm-workers at his camp. Still, we immediately recognized Daniel's soft face, kind eyes, and well-kempt appearance, as well as his infamous timidity. A brief introduction brought to light changes that had occurred in his life over the past two years. Once eager to make the shift to non-ESL classes, the Daniel we found was a disillusioned high school dropout, working full-time for a landscaping firm. Naturally, the question arose, "What happened?"

Daniel crossed the border with his family twelve years ago.

Lacking the language but armed with a smile, Daniel enrolled in ESL classes at the local elementary school. While ESL classes are usually beneficial, Daniel's 9 years of ESL were excessive and unnecessary. His ESL teacher was incredulous: "Daniel, you speak perfect English, why are you here?" He replied, "they put me in here."

"They told me not to drop out. I'll end up working here, working like the farmers, the pickers. They said I should get an education so that I can have a better life."

...continued on p. 7



-photo by Mariela Cedeño **5.** Victor

and his art *-photo by Amy Petrocy* **6.** Cristina working in tobacco *-photo by Rachel Craft* **7.** Daniel's high school corridor *-photo by Leticia Perez* **8.** Making ripples, a rope to climb *-photo by Leanne Tory Murphy* **9.** Tomato fields *-photo by Amy Petrocy* **10.** Brigida's school in Santa Cruz, Mexico *-photo courtesy of Brigida* **11** Men returning home from the fields *-photo by Amy Petrocy* **12.** Tomato trucks *-photo by Amy Petrocy* **13.** Cristina's high school honors *-photo by Rachel Craft* **14.** Elizabeth and her children *-photo by Rebecca Crain* **15.** Daniel in his bedroom at the labor camp *-photo courtesy of Daniel's family* **16.** Blackberries *-photo by Mariela Cedeño* **17.** Don Juan feeds his cats *-photo by Jose David Lopez* **18.** At the hospital *-photo by Jose David Lopez* **19.** Proud high school graduate *-photo by Rachel Craft* **20.** Gigi and counselors at day camp *-photo by Leanne Tory Murphy*

Captions

1. Paralegal Juan Frias distributes his business card to Haitian farmworkers in Fairfax, SC *-photo by Ivey Taylor* **2.** Gigi works on a mural at a day camp in NY *-photo by Leanne Tory Murphy* **3.** Brigida's elementary school graduation in Santa Cruz, Mexico *-photo courtesy of Brigida* **4.** Facundo's favorite hat

Farmworkers cultivate the food we eat everyday and remain largely invisible. Most of us *do* know about farmworkers, but the image doesn't show the diversity of those who harvest our food: They are hard for low pay and often dangerous conditions in the fields. There is no one farmworker or one story; rather a collection of stories of individual lives.

Documentary and Farmworker Lives

by Joanna Welborn



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In 2008 SAF interns and fellows worked in migrant education programs, rural health clinics, legal services, immigrant assistance organizations, policy and research groups, and with community & labor organizing projects in NC, NY, PA, SC, TN, and VA. Twenty of them participated in a documentary program to gather the stories of farmworkers through photographs and interviews. These stories include a young woman's missed opportunity to attend college due to her undocumented status,

a man's struggle with cancer, a family's decision to move back to Mexico for better opportunities for their children, and the story of a young farmworker who expresses himself by writing poems and drawing in his time away from the fields.

In sharing their stories, farmworkers have used their own voices to put a face on this diverse group that is not always known or seen.

Our students were afforded the rare privilege to glimpse into someone else's life; they were trusted with a story, a life, a collection of memories, of hopes and dreams. This is not insignificant. They took this responsibility seriously and built strong relationships with their subjects, recording their lives today, their recollections from home, and their hopes for the future.



Left: A portrait of Gigi
photo by Leanne Tory-
Murphy

Becoming Herself

by Leanne Tory-Murphy

As they were crossing the desert one night, someone started yelling,

"The police! The police! Run! Run!"

Everyone ran in different directions, and Gigi and one of her sisters got separated from the coyote, who carried their youngest sister on his shoulders. They were lost and the night was pitch black. Despite the danger, Gigi maintained her determination: "I have to find them and I will find them. . . . I was always positive, I think that helped me a lot." Indeed, they eventually regrouped and made it to the U.S.

In 2006, Gigi and her two sisters traveled north in vans, buses, cars, and by foot from El Salvador to the Mexico/U.S. border. Gigi was thirteen years old and her sisters were ages six and three. Her mother had immigrated to the U.S. two years before she sent for Gigi and her sisters. Along the way, her youngest sister became sick twice; each time they had to stop for eight days so she could recover. Gigi often felt unsafe during their journey and was terrified that something would happen to them, but she put on a brave face for her sisters.

Gigi had little interest in moving from the big city of San Salvador to rural upstate New York, where her mother is employed at a chicken processing plant. Her life in El Salvador was good, more or less, and she discovered that her mother had changed in the years since they had been together, becoming more strict and religious.

Indeed, not only were the family situation, the climate, and the geography different, but so was everything else. Gigi enrolled in the 8th grade without speaking a word of English. In her math class she just

held up a sign that said, "I don't understand." But Gigi learned English quickly and now enjoys school. She is a good student and hopes to get a scholarship to college, though without having documents she is unsure of her future. She would like to be a nurse, a doctor, or social worker and doesn't know if she can even safely travel within the U.S., given the presence of immigration authorities on buses and trains.

Gigi has coped well with a lot of the stresses of her new circumstances in the United States. She has really struggled to balance her mother's beliefs with her own, but not without difficulty. This tension has put a major strain on Gigi, who feels like she is living a double life that "is not healthy, it will destroy you."

Her involvement with a local youth group is the only thing that takes her outside of the rigors of church and family life: "it's everything for me. It's my future. . . . when I joined [the youth group] everything was different. I had a space to be myself, to be involved. It helps me forget things...I'm busier, happier. I have something to be a part of." ❁

Cristina

by Pablo Buenrostro, Rachel Craft, & Rachel McGill

Cristina has been living in the U.S. since she was three. Remembering the discrimination she faced in the public schools system as a little girl, she recalls, "Because you're Hispanic sometimes they look at you different. Sometimes the teachers think you're not as smart as the other students." Her situation at home was challenging, as well: "You have to buy your own stuff because your parents are too busy paying the bills, the rent, buying the groceries, paying for gas." But Cristina emphasizes how much her parents have supported her along the way: "My father passed away, but he would always say that I was his little lawyer, or his little doctor. So I've kept that in my mind ever since."

A talented bilingual student, Cristina held a great amount of responsibility in her school. "When I was in the 8th grade I would be called to the front office: 'Could you send Cristina up?' And they would take me out of class for about 10-15 minutes to have to translate." Even so, Cristina says that schools should put more effort into hiring professional interpreters.

Cristina's ability to communicate the realities she experiences has brought her recognition: "I did a project on interpersonal communications between immigrants and their children, since I am an immigrant and I know what it is. We had a convention in Raleigh and I presented it there. I won first place in the State of North Carolina, and I got a gold medal." As the state winner she was able to compete nationally in San Diego California, where she also won first place. She says, "I came home really proud because I didn't see a lot of Hispanics out there."

Beyond personal accomplishment, Cristina reaches out to the people in her community. While living in Florida she initiated an informal ESL class: "It was summer time and I didn't have anything to do. I wasn't working in the oranges because it's so hard. One of the migrant advocates gave me a whole bunch of school supplies and a guideline to teach them how to speak English. And every single day, we would start with the alphabet. They would learn the alphabet, the vowels, the colors, days of the week, the months, all that stuff. We would do a lot in one day— it would be like three or four hours straight."

Despite her outstanding achievements and superior character, Cristina has run into difficulty going to college. She even applied for scholarships, only to be denied those she won because of her immigration status: "They said, 'It doesn't matter if you have paperwork or not. Just complete your essay or do this presentation or do this other thing.' And I would submit my essays, and out of five, I won three of them. It was probably \$20,000 to \$25,000 that was taken away from me just because I didn't have any papers. I felt betrayed. I don't think they should have lied to me like that. It got my hopes up really high. I was looking into school and everything, looking forward to it. And I got those letters, and you know, that's where it ended." She remains determined, though: "Even though that happened, it's not going to bring me down. I will go to school one day. I graduated from school with honors, at the top of my class, and I just want to go to college and see what it's like." ❁

...Lifelong, continued from p. 3

The insecurities caused by being held back weighed on Daniel and proved detrimental to his performance in the few non-ESL classes he took. It is hard to tell which came first, Daniel's poor performance in school or his disillusionment about his education, but it soon became apparent to Daniel that his future at school was bleak. According to his mother, "He didn't want to go to school anymore because he spent several years repeating the same grade... So it just wasn't convenient to go to school anymore because it was a lot of time wasted." Though you won't hear Daniel say it himself, "...he always slept, didn't take his homework with him, and was very lazy in his assignments." This news came as somewhat of a shock to his teacher. "I observed him in a U.S. history classroom and the teacher didn't call on him and once in a while he would volunteer an answer. I am confident that he knew the answers to all of the questions the teacher was asking...I just observed him not doing as much as I knew he was capable of, and the next thing I knew, he had dropped out..."

When he was interviewed in 2006, Daniel was an eighteen year-old sophomore. By the time he dropped out in January of 2008, he was just around the corner from turning twenty, one year shy of the maximum age for enrollment in public high school. Daniel didn't see the point. As an undocumented immigrant he was ineligible for admission in community college, the most affordable form of higher education for a family of immigrant farmworkers. Hampered by this conspiracy of circumstances, Daniel assumed his current vocation, content to be a partial breadwinner for his family and an aid to his mother in the kitchen in the labor camp.

Despite all that has gone awry, Daniel knows that he doesn't want to do manual labor for the rest of his life. He told us that he used to want to be a policeman so that he could face danger and help people at the same time. Since dropping out, he has lost some of the hope he once had to be an officer but remains optimistic. Someday Daniel can pursue a GED and achieve his dream, but perhaps in the meantime he can take comfort in his teacher's wish for him and all of her students to be "life-long learners," regardless of formal education. ❁

My Life is a Prison, My Heart a Song

by Amy Petrocy

It has been nine years since Victor came to the United States in search of work opportunities. Raised in San Potosí, Mexico, Victor was quickly exposed to life's challenges and the sacrifices necessary to overcome hardships.

Victor enjoyed school, especially literature and the sciences, and wanted to be a surgeon or marine biologist. Because Victor had some of the highest grades in his school, his teachers hoped to find a scholarship for him so he could continue his studies after secondary school. But seeing his family's many needs, he decided to come to the United States to work and support his family.

In the U.S. Victor was able to take English and computer classes while working in construction, but now as a farmworker, he says he doesn't learn anything except that whoever has the most endurance and the fastest hands is who will make the most money.

Whenever Victor is given the chance, however, he finds ways to express himself through drawing and writing poems. "I like everything about literature and reading but I also really like to draw. I always have a pen and paper on hand."

Victor says the work of a farmworker never stops, and he no longer has many dreams for himself besides supporting his own family and having his own house. He wants to find a stable job one day so that he can have a family and provide for his children. He wants his children to be able to go to school and have careers. He hopes that his children will be able to have an easier life than he has had.

Victor keeps a positive outlook on life. He says, "Someone that is here shouldn't be sad all the time, instead they should always be happy because they never know when life is going to end. For me, I am always going to enjoy life every day, each minute, each hour, and in everything that I do."

*Este sol que alumbra
Cada gota de lluvia
Cada rocío de la mañana
La suave brisa que acaricia
Hasta el revoloteo de las mariposas
Son el murmullo de esta vida
Que nos muestra que todo
Tiene un Fin.*

*This sun that lights up
Each drop of rain,
Each speck of morning dew;
The soft breeze that caresses
Even the fluttering of the butterflies;
These are the whisper of this life,
Which shows us that everything
Has an ultimate purpose.*

-Victor



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Opening Reception: November 13, 6-9 pm at
the Center for Documentary Studies

Through *Nuestras Historias, Nuestros Sueños/Our Stories, Our Dreams*, the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University and Student Action with Farmworkers collected stories about the experiences of Latino immigrants, focusing on farmworker families in the Carolinas and their dreams for the future; on their traditions, their educational aspirations, and their challenges as they try to pursue higher education.

Thank you to these individuals for supporting our valuable work this summer:

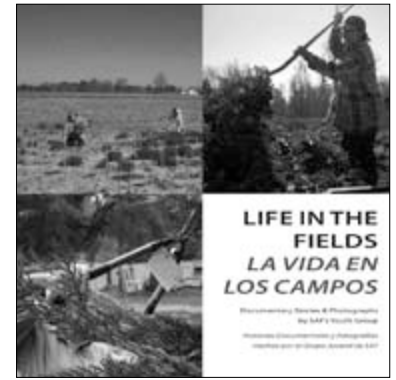
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