



SNIPPETS FROM SAN ANTONIO'S BUS STATION MINISTRY

Editor's Note: The Trump administration took steps on September 6th toward withdrawing from a court agreement limiting the government's ability to hold minors in immigration jails, a move that could lead to the rapid expansion of detention facilities and unlimited detention for children. The proposed changes attempt to change the Flores Settlement Agreement that limits children's detention to 20 days. The Trump administration and the state of Texas are actively attacking legal limits meant to protect migrant children from indefinite detention and substandard conditions. Such a move could impact the work of San Antonio's "bus station ministries".

FROM: PENELOPE (PENNY) BOYER'S FACEBOOK POST, JULY 2, 2018

LA VOZ DE ESPERANZA · OCTOBER 2018 VOL. 31 ISSUE 8

Last Thursday, I joined the Backpack Ministry aka the Bus Station Ministry, a project of the Interfaith Welcome Coalition here in San Antonio which trained me the week before to go to the Greyhound Station to hand out backpacks filled with sundries and essentials for families being released from detention centers in Karnes and Dilley on their way to their sponsors across these allegedly United States of America. I had also been trained to sit with these folks, mostly moms with no English traveling with at least one child from fraught circumstances including who knows how long holed up in who knows what conditions at these detention centers after fleeing who knows what traumatic situation in who knows what country south of the Texas border. I was to sit with these moms and map their journey from here over the next few days. Four of us, from 10am to 5pm, distributed 55 knapsacks representing 55 families consisting of 2+ people. Over 100 individuals' tickets were analyzed and explained, maps were diagramed showing where each ticket went, charts were filled in with arrival and departure times explaining layovers and when to change buses and when not to. We were the first people these



The Interfaith Welcome Coalition visits the families in detention, feeds and clothes them after they are released and puts them up in temporary shelters around San Antonio. Jeremy Photo: Redmon/jredmon@ajc.com

people had met in the U.S. outside the detention centers. Some of us dispensed over the counter meds while others of us distributed toy trucks and flirty finger puppets. Diapers and sanitary pads were readily received. Blankets, water bottles, coloring books and crayons, came in the backpacks which, in addition to the one or two recyclable grocery bags each family already had for all of their earthly belongings, became their only luggage—that and the clothes on their back. Sack lunches were circulated. I stole a small stack of paper bags from the bus station's cafeteria counter to give

to a mom for her listless son's vomit. A mom asked me if I could loosen her ICE-issued "ankle bracelet"—the women called them shackles—she showed me how it was clearly bound too tightly; I could not help her, even though I wanted to cut the damn things off. I got a hug around my legs from a little girl, and saw several women cry then stare distantly as their sobbing stopped. Some would sit there well into the evening before their first bus came. Most had several connections over the next few days; some wouldn't reach their destinations until Sunday night. This was Thursday. Every so often a few families would be mobilized

and moved to the priority area for boarding a bus that had just arrived. This would happen quickly with no time for goodbyes, swiftly off to the next leg of their journey. The ministry's phone was passed around for short calls to sponsors, informing them of

arrival times. These rituals at the San Antonio Greyhound Station happen daily. Fifty to seventy-five families passing through there a day. Seven days a week.

FROM: MICHELLE RUMBOUT

Our group of volunteers is organized under the passionate leadership of Sister Denise and the grassroots umbrella of the Interfaith Welcome Coalition. The outrage over family separations has sparked a backlash from immigrant supporters with hundreds of volunteers stepping up to help. A few, like me, started this work in direct and immediate response to the '16 elections.

The debacle of the separated families and mandated reunifications impacted our corner of the world. During the court mandated acute phase of reunifications, we received urgent emails from the IWC and Catholic Charities that we needed to

rev up our process to accept what was projected to be hundreds of reunified families going through the San Antonio bus and airport systems. The Karnes detention center had been converted into a reunification center, and recently was repurposed again for fathers and sons. Dilley continues to operate as a "regular" detention center with an increasing number of both moms and dads and their kids coming directly from McAllen, Texas, across from Reynosa, Mexico. A night in detention at these for profit Core Civic centers is about \$350 per family. A snippet from a typical shift at the bus station follows:

Today we had 68 families, or about 30 moms mostly with one child each and a few with two. I was one of two volunteers, and the only Spanish speaker until 3pm. I prepared this morning with a LOT of \$10 and \$20 bills, courtesy of many generous donors including several of my brother's colleagues. I started putting those \$10 and \$20 bills to good use distributing to moms without money. I'm always struck by what I believe to be pure and consistent honesty from these moms. I also skimmed through my kids' books that I used to read to my then-young sons, and found a beautiful one of hidden animals in the forest. I was later so glad for both the bills and the book.

One event really stood out for me, though. While we were dealing with the two busloads from Dilley, Catholic Charities called around 1pm to say they would be dropping off a newly reunited mom and her 7-year-old boy so they could catch their 1:50 bus heading to New York City. She stood out among the other moms who were all in Civic Core standard issue solid color t-shirts and dark jeans. She was wearing "civilian clothes" from a selection of clothes recently donated. She appeared to be in her late 20s—pretty, dark haired and very anxious.

I reviewed her six-bus itinerary with her explaining the path and times and that she would be arriving to NYC on Sunday afternoon, where her sister would pick her up. I asked her if she had been separated from her son, and she said yes, for 40 days. She said she did nothing but cry those 40 days. She said she was nervous about this trip before, but that after that trauma she is now terrified. And she mentioned she did not have a dime, and didn't know how she would be able to feed her boy. I had just given my last bill from my purse to a mom I had spoken with, but

I assured her that I had more cash in the car and that I would be right back.



A child sleeps early one morning at the bus station while waiting for a bus to take him to stay with his family while they fight to stay in the U.S. Jeremy Redmon/jredmon@ajc.com

I did come right back, with \$40 dollars folded for her. I didn't typically give more than \$20 at a time since there isn't much opportunity to buy much along the way but I thought she needed extra assurance. No doubt, every woman could easily use \$100 just to get started in their new home, but if I were to do that then the cash wouldn't spread as far. I always second guess myself later and wish I'd given more, but that can be an endless loop.

There was so much commotion going on then at that spot, that I asked her to step about 15 feet away by a column so

it would not be SO obvious that I was giving her cash in front of others. Normally, I slip them the cash while talking about the itinerary, or shake their hand, or other motion. I kick myself now that I didn't do something similar with her, instead of asking her to step away.

Within that 2 minute time-frame, the boy looked up and noticed that mom was gone and fell to pieces. Mom returned immediately, and hugged him tightly, assuring him she would not leave him, but it took a lot to bring him down emotionally. A man at the detention center had told her that she and her son would need psychological care for the rest of their lives.

In the midst of this storm I find the hidden animals book that I had brought and start looking at it with the boy, Brian. He enjoyed it, hunting for animals, maybe even laughing. Then mom bends down and tells him she needs to go to the bathroom. He freaks out again, shaking his head, saying no! So I offer to go to the bathroom with her, and him and the book. While mom uses one of the stalls, Brian and I delve into the forest book by the

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OLLU to mark 50th anniversary of 1968 Civil Rights Hearings

Conference will examine the progress of civil rights for Mexican Americans

Our Lady of the Lake University (OLLU) will host a national conference in November that reviews a landmark 1968 hearing on Civil Rights issues facing Mexican Americans and examines the progress that has been made for the nation's largest minority over the past 50 years.

"*Holding Up The Mirror: The 50th Anniversary of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission Hearing on Mexican Americans in the Southwest*," will be held Nov. 15-17, 2018, in Chapel Auditorium. Speakers include former U.S. Housing Secretaries Julián Castro, Henry Cisneros and Congressman Joaquín Castro.

The conference will include a retrospective look at the six-day, 1968 hearing — held at Our Lady of the Lake University on Dec. 9-14, 1968 — as well as a contemporary review of the civil rights challenges facing Latinos in education, employment, economics and the administration of justice. The chair of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Catherine E. Lhamon, and the staff director, Mauro Morales, will attend the conference.

"The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights was the first federal agency to spend resources in an attempt to examine the rights of Mexican Americans in the Southwest," said J. Richard Avena, retired Southwest Regional Director of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. "Fifty years later, a group of former employees of the commission, as well as academicians, legal experts and community leaders, will come together to see what changes have been made and what still needs to be done."



Left to Right: Maria Antonietta Berriozábal, Mario Compean, Congressman Joaquín Castro, Ignacio Pérez, Irma Mireles, Rosie Castro and Richard Avena —Photo taken at Castro's office in San Antonio, January 2016.

A native of El Paso, Texas, Avena attended the 1968 hearings on assignment for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. He was supposed to spend six months in San Antonio. He never left.

Avena serves as a co-spokesperson for the "50 Years Later" project, along with Rosie Castro who attended the 1968 hearings as a student at Our Lady of the Lake College. She is the mother of Julián and Joaquín Castro.

The 2018 conference will feature civil-rights leaders, higher-education leaders and historians discussing current issues, such as changing civil rights, demographics, immigration, political participation and voting rights, as well as the critical issues of 1968.

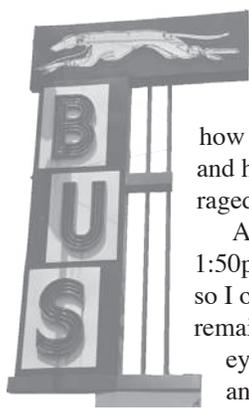
At that time, for example, Bexar County had nine school districts. All of them, except one, were led by Anglo male superintendents. Today, Latinos and other minorities serve as superintendents in the San Antonio ISD, Edgewood ISD, Judson ISD, East Central ISD and other area school districts.

The 1968 hearings drew severe criticism from the established leadership in San Antonio. But the Rev. Theodore Hesburgh, president of Notre Dame University and vice chairman of the commission, offered this response: "All we do is hold up a mirror to the community and let them tell us if there are any problems. And that's what we're doing here."

For more information visit: www.50yearslater.org.

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sinks. It works, he's ok. I gift the book to him, knowing it will keep him occupied during the next 48 hours. The three of us hug several times and I tell her how ashamed I am of how they were treated, and how many people across the US are outraged and sad and are supportive of them.

After a big group of moms leave on the 1:50pm bus, the next bus out isn't until 4:30pm so I offer the River Walk tour. Almost all of the remaining moms take me up on it. The kids' eyes light up at the waterfalls and fountains and ducks and tall buildings. The moms look relaxed and this provides a bit of time for

chatting. One mom told me that had she known what the journey would be like before she left home, she would not have done it. It has been horrible. Like waiting in Reynosa for three days and nights with no food or water, as the Mexican police took every-

thing she owned. And that once, the border patrol found her and put her in the Hielera (icebox), where the best that was provided to them was frozen sandwiches literally thrown at them as though they were dogs.

None of the moms I met yesterday had been separated from their child to another location. Those that I asked replied, *I would die if that would have happened*. Some of the most vulnerable are those who don't even speak Spanish, who speak an Indian dialect from deep rural Honduran or Guatemalan villages, who often cannot read and rarely have a dime. Imagine how they feel.

So glad for this opportunity to help these brave women, though I have no plausible solution for how to fix this broken immigration system surrounded by so many broken countries. On the way home from the bus station, NPR was running stories about how credible fear interviews are increasingly difficult to pass, and that immigrants are being deported at the border itself in increasing numbers within the past few weeks. I guess the moms I am seeing are the lucky ones. For now.