Caleb Walker Wilson

Week 5 & 6 Report

Week 5:

On Monday, July 16 Robyn and Danko went to Eloy Detention Center to visit migrants currently held in the facility as they await their asylum hearings. Although I did not go with them, Danko gave me a detailed account of his conversation with one of the migrants. The Salvadoran migrant fled his native country about a year ago because of threats from gangs. He has been in the U.S. nearly 10 months, yet has never stepped foot outside of government custody. The Immigration judge recently ruled that he did not have enough evidence to be granted asylum. Instead of appeal this decision, he decided to sign the deportation order even though he still faces death threats. This migrant also told Danko that he has not received appropriate medical care in Eloy Detention Center even after an accident that has left him with a head injury. This man’s story is not uncommon but it is a story that must be heard. Thank you to Hermana Maribel for organizing visits to Eloy Detention Center.

While Danko and Robyn visiting migrants in Eloy, Patrick, Ana, and I attended at Green Valley Samaritans meeting with Diane. We were able to share a report on the Water Drop that Ricardo took Patrick and I on, as well as listen to all the important things the volunteer group does, like provide medical aid at el comedor, help rebuild La Roca migrant shelter, and search for migrants in the desert in need of medical care.

On Tuesday Patrick, Robyn, and I went on a tour at the Border Patrol headquarters with agent James St. Louis. Unfortunately, Danko and Ana were not cleared to enter to CBP headquarters… Agent St. Louis gave us a presentation detailing the different jobs within Border Patrol, the statistics on how many migrants enter the U.S. without presenting themselves at the port of entry, and the statistics on drugs smuggled into the U.S. Sonora’s proximity to Sinaloa the main region for Marijuana and Poppy production in Mexico a high number of drugs are smuggled into the U.S. through Sonora. Agent St. Louis took showed us around the headquarters to the intelligence office, the holding areas for migrants detained in the desert, and the stables where patrol horses are kept.

Throughout our visit with Agent St. Louis he stressed that crossing into the U.S. was simply a choice that the migrants make. I worry that if Border Patrol sees migrants crossing as a choice they misunderstand the root causes of why they are leaving their home countries. In fact, leaving is a word that connotes that they have a choice, fleeing describes most migrant’s situation more accurately. It is not a choice to flee from extreme poverty, domestic violence, or gang violence it is simple the only way to survive in many cases. I hope that Border Patrol will someday understand that immigration is not simply a choice.

Wednesday we listened to a presentation from Javid executives about maquilas in Nogales, Sonora. Javid is a shelter company for other smaller companies that set up factories in Mexico. Javid handles the accounting, customs, and human resources for the companies that hire them to establish a viable operation in Mexcio. The Javid execs taught us that the minimum wage in Mexico is about 4.5 dollars a day, although most maquila workers make around $7.5 a day. They also emphasized that working conditions in the factories has improved significantly in recent years.

We took a tour of a an MTD maquila where they make lawnmowers, weed whackers, and more lawn care accessories. The conditions were indeed more than acceptable. They have a medical clinic on site, a subsidized cafeteria for all employees, and free transportation for employees. It was fascinating to learn more about maquilas in Nogales, Sonora especially since more than 40,000 of the city’s residents work for maquilas.

Week 6:

During the first part of our last week in Nogales, AZ Peg and Julie took us to Douglas, AZ. On Monday evening we took part in the honoring of migrants who have died in the desert near Douglas. One community member has made small crosses for every person who has died in that region since the early 2000s, in total there are more than three hundred crosses. Every Tuesday for over a decade people from around the community gather to remember migrants who perished. One by one we took a cross read the person’s name aloud and the others would say “Presente” as a way to remember the person. We placed the crosses leaning up against the sidewalk for more than two blocks. That simple act of remembrance was one of the most meaningful experiences of my life.

On Tuesday we crossed the border into Agua Prieta where we toured a migrant shelter and spent the afternoon at a women’s cooperative that focuses on gardening, sewing, and fostering community.

Our last day in Douglas we took part in a cross-planting. About 20 community members including, the nuns, priests, shamans, and residents focused on remembering the lives lost in the desert. Gabriel, the shaman led the service by explaining the importance of the cross facing East, and wafting smoke from herbs to cleanse us and the cross. Danko and Ana read poems they had written for the occasion, Patrick and Robyn played conch shells, and I was the caretaker of the cross. The unidentified women we honored had died about 100 meters from where we planted the cross on a private ranch. That ceremony will stick with me forever. Even though planting a cross for the women who died going North does not bring her back to life or bring her justice, it was an act of justice to simply ensure that she will be remembered.

On Friday we gave presentations about various themes related to our summer experiences. Ana read a poem she had written about the pride and hardship that comes with being Latin-American, Robyn presented her blog, Danko spoke about the importance of social investment in border communities, Patrick explained the war on people that is being waged against migrants, and I set out various unique forms of justice that I witnessed this summer. There was a large crowd of community members eager to learn and support BCA.

Thank you to all for an engaging, exciting, and inspiring summer!!