

MI_AUGUST_DIARY_2009

Tuesday August 25th

Met Zama Coursen-Neff of Human Rights Watch in Lansing, MI at Melissa Arreguin's office at Telamon, Melissa is the Regional Coordinator for Michigan and Ohio under the new Association of Farmworkers Opportunity Program's Children in the Fields program (courtesy of a Kellogg Foundation grant).

After lunch Melissa and I drove to Omer (East Coast of Northern Michigan) to meet with Dan Ratajczak, a farmer who had spoken out at the hearings Melissa had put together. Dan said that his hand picked pickle season was ending that day but that he would speak to me off the record at a later date. From there Melissa and I drove back to Bear Lake (West Coast of Northern Michigan) to meet up with Zama and Alex Contreras who would do swing work for the shoot.

Wednesday August 26th

Pay visits to the Gomez/Lopez families and then go with Zama, Melissa and Alex to Lutz Farm pickle fields to begin shooting and later sent Alex to pick up Julia Perez in Grand Rapids and return Melissa to Lansing. That night Julia and I spent time with the families. Part of the strategy was to get the Gomez/Lopez families comfortable with Julia. We all arranged to shoot the next day.

Thursday August 27th

Shoot footage of Zama and Zulema and Families in pickle fields

Take Zama to meet Mark Coe, manager of Lutz Farms.

Julia and Zama visit Olga, Jessica and Zulema and arrange to shoot the following morning.

Friday August 28th

Zama departs.

Arrived early at camp but the Gomez/Lopez family doesn't work due to pesticides that were sprayed the day prior and the peaches were not ready.

Arrange to shoot interview w/ Olga Gomez. Olga gave a wonderful and very revealing and lengthy (2 hour) interview about the history of the family and the three generations we have been following this summer –Olga-Jessica-Emily-Zulema.

Olga shared that she was the first to migrate to Michigan. Her family had arrived in Texas from Mexico a few years prior. She was pregnant at 19 and someone told her about the work upstate. The next year she brought her mother and family. She

loves the life and wouldn't change a thing. She is only 50 but is having another knee surgery. The migrant life is taking a toll on her physically. She can't work in some crops and some days not at all.

Olga had all her six children working in the fields at the age of 5 or 6. They even worked weekends while school was in session. She also revealed that her children, like her grandchildren, face discrimination in the Michigan schools and some refuse to attend.

She further shared her beliefs that Zulema is expected to work to essentially support herself. If she wants something she should ask for more work. She expressed some concerns regarding Jessica's parenting skills and the relationship between her daughter and granddaughter, providing sensitive, personal examples. Olga is concerned for Zulema's future and doesn't know if Florida is the answer but they are trying to save Zulema from her rebellious self and the environment.

Shot some additional footage of Alexis and Jose (Zulema's younger sister and brother) at play.

Afterwards we headed to Rosa's camp to keep the relationship with the families 'in balance'. Melissa returned from Lansing and met us there.

We set up to interview Julia Perez, but it begins to rain.

Saturday August 29th

Gomez/Lopez family doesn't work

It continued to rain.

Julia and Melissa headed over to Zulema's camp to do her nails and warm her up for the next day's interview.

Alex and I decided to go back to the pickle fields where we shot the pickles being loaded onto a truck and being shipped off.

Sunday August 30th

Gomez/Lopez family doesn't work again

Shot a good and revealing interview with Zulema, who is open and very talkative.

Zulema provided very visual details of what working feels like. An example includes the time she fell from a ladder and how everyone seemed more concerned about the apples than her. She also shared she doesn't feel like she has a home because they move so often.

Zulema gave us more details about why she doesn't like school in Michigan which was similar to her mother's and aunt's experiences. She further explained that the teachers weren't helpful in stopping this negative environment.

During the interview, she discusses the strong obligation she feels to help her mother financially because she is alone. She also revealed that the pay is not in her name, no social security is drawn at all and in at least one case it was put in the name of a person outside the family.

Zulema seemed hopeful about Florida. She believes she will do normal activities with her Father, not be migrating and that her Grandmother will guide her as well. She wasn't as confident about starting school in Florida, expecting to be treated as the new kid but hopefully if she can stop migrating she'll have friends and do well. She still doesn't have a dream but she does want to finish high school and move forward.

We then set up and shoot another interview with Jessica. She did the interview in Spanish because she really wanted to express herself.

Jessica wanted to make it clear she wants a better life for her children. She doesn't want them living in the current environment, feeling lesser. She is considering returning for her GED as a way to get out of the fields.

She is very concerned about Zulema's rebellious nature and the environment in Texas. The fact that Zulema was in a fight scared her. She is bothered that Zulema doesn't have dreams and wants her to study. She is making a sacrifice in sending her to Florida. She wants all her children with her but is hoping that this move will be better for her. If she sees that Zulema is doing well then she will leave her there and if not then Zulema will return.

Afterwards we scouted Mud Lake Rd. Farm where Jessica told us she and Zulema would be picking peaches the next morning. We arranged with family to arrive early. I shot another interview with Kimberly Gomez so as not to cause tensions within the family. Return to Zulema's camp. Melissa departs for Traverse City.

Monday August 31st

Arrived early at Zulema's camp and waited for someone to wake up. Eventually Jessica emerged (hung over) and said that the farmer at Mud Lake Rd. Farm won't let children work there. Zulema won't work, even in pickles. She is being Zulema.

I headed to the pickle fields and environs to get more b-roll, then returned to Zulema's camp and shot some additional footage of the family and the family's interaction with

Julia. I also got a scene of Jessica and Alexis doing laundry and more b-roll of the kids looking after Jocelyn America (Jessica's youngest daughter).

Tuesday September 1st

I left for the pickle fields before dawn to get some pre-dawn and dawn establishing shots and sent Alex and Julia to Zulema's camp to ensure that she got up. I then headed to Zulema's camp and got her waking and followed her and Olga and Emily to the pickle fields. Got great footage of Zulema working in the field.

Alex took Julia to Grand Rapids for her return to AZ. I headed to Lutz Farms to shoot an interview with Mark Coe, manager of Lutz Farms.

He is one of the good farmers and made the point that even though he worked as a child and his son's work, children should not be forced to work and their hours should be limited. He also states that migrants are skilled labor force and that they should be respected and compensated fairly for their hard work. His father was owned a general store and was one of the first to extend credit to the migrant families.

During the magic hour I shot some 'amber waves of grain' footage.

That evening Alex and I went with the Gomez/Lopez family to the Onekama County Fair. Alex shot some b-roll of this with the Canon camera as I used the time to just have fun with the families-and I did win a giant panda for Zulema and huge stuffed 'thing' for Olga. We also rode bumper cars and laughed ourselves silly. Olga and Jessica left early because Jocelyn America was getting cold, so Alex and I stayed with Zulema, Emily, Alexis and Jose and eventually drove them home. Everyone had fun.

Wednesday September 2nd

Went to say goodbye to the families and headed to Ohio to catch news of the Sanchez family. Perla has not worked at all this summer and the rest of the family continues to work at the factory.

Thursday September 3rd

Began the drive back to NY from Ohio. Along the way, shoot some more 'America the Beautiful/Amber Waves of Grain Footage'.

A note of interest: When I first arrived at Zulema's camp, Zulema came up to me and told me she thought I had given up on her. I told her that I don't give up on people I care about and this elicited a smile and big hug from her. My not letting her push me away (as Veronica has said she does to everyone she meets) has led to a renewed trust in me and we even did a 'glamour' shoot of Zulema when I was there. I just sent her the photo CD.

Also, Zulema was very happy that I brought Julia; the two of them became very close over the time Julia was there. I look forward now to even more open shoots with Zulema and her family.

A further note of interest is that no equipment was damaged during the making of this segment ;-)