

J. MALCOLM GARCIA

## No Overtime

TELL ROSA about a time when I was down on my luck as a freelance journalist. I wasn't getting any work, my bank account all but depleted. Desperate, I took a job as a grounds worker at a Chicago country club.

"I worked with twelve Mexicans. One other guy and me were the only gringos," I say. "I saw how the Mexicans were treated."

Rosa offers a polite smile and looks at her watch. She has to be at a Tucson taco factory in an hour. She has worked there a little more than a year and earns about four hundred dollars a week. Only two months earlier, she had been in sanctuary at the Southside Presbyterian Church, a small religious community of about 160 worshippers, less than a mile from downtown Tucson. The church offers weekly prayers for refugees fleeing violence. Its members routinely search for migrants who have lost their way in the Arizona desert or have been abandoned by the people they paid to bring them to the United States.

Rosa and I are meeting in a cluttered office of the church. We can see our breath; a volunteer flips on a heater. Rosa stayed at the church in a small room with a bunk bed, a miniature refrigerator, and a microwave for fifteen months while she appealed a 2014 deportation order that started with a Tucson traffic stop for an incorrect lane change. Her U.S. worker visa had expired. She'd gone to the church because Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection avoid detaining people in churches, schools, and hospitals under most circumstances. A 2011 ICE memo designated such areas as "sensitive locations."

In November 2015, after Rosa spent 461 days in sanctuary, her attorney worked out what she would describe only as a confidential agreement with the Department of Homeland Security to spare Rosa deportation. ICE maintains that Rosa was never a high priority for removal. Still, Rosa worries.

"Nothing is certain," she says.

Despite her concern, Rosa appears far more relaxed than the photos I'd seen of her while she lived at the church. Her wan face stared into the camera with disbelief. Now she sits before me in blue jeans and a red turtleneck, her brown hair streaked with blond highlights.

We had arranged to get together at four in the afternoon. Then Rosa asked to meet at eleven in the morning, then at nine. She apologized. Her work schedule was always in flux. She found it difficult to get away and not lose hours.

“We were paid minimum wage at the country club,” I tell Rosa. “We’d start at five in the morning. The boss said he would provide “opportunities” for overtime. These opportunities came every day and we worked twelve, fifteen hours a day. No one turned down the overtime because the hourly pay was so poor. Just eight dollars. We put in brick walks, sewer pipes, cut down trees as good as union workers. I don’t know how much the country club saved with us. For six months I did this seven days a week.”

Rosa laughs.

“You were lucky. I get no overtime,” she tells me. “On Monday, I worked twelve hours. I came home and was called back two hours later and worked another eight hours. Twenty hours in one day with just a two-hour break.”

I knew then that there was nothing similar between my spell of bad luck and her life.

AFTER DONALD TRUMP won the 2016 presidential election, I wondered how I should respond. Trump had demonized Mexican immigrants in the campaign. Gary, the other white guy at the country club, voted for Trump. He rarely spoke about politics. He liked NASCAR and chewed tobacco. He had lost all of his teeth and took pills for blood pressure, cholesterol, gout, and his heart. He dyed his gray hair and mustache black and was at least fifty pounds overweight.

“Mexicans are stupid and lazy,” he told me.

He never explained how he reached this conclusion. He just repeated it over and over when I asked him why he felt that way, or he would rattle off a list of complaints. He didn’t like the Mexicans using the microwave during break to warm tacos and Tupperware filled with rice and chicken. He didn’t like them speaking Spanish. He didn’t like how they sat together. He didn’t like what he considered their casual attitude toward work, how they joked and talked as they cut grass, weeded, trimmed trees, and performed any other number of tedious tasks. He didn’t like it that they weren’t citizens.

I don’t think Gary represents all of white America that is suspicious of immigrants. I don’t think they are all as extreme, ignorant, and bigoted.

But he was the white guy in my life running down Hispanics, oblivious of my family's connection to Mexico.

"My cousins are Mexican," I told him.

Gary backed off.

"Well, that's different," he said. "They're your family. They're not like these guys."

He had a point. My cousins are as conservative as Trump and like him have nothing good to say about migrant workers.

With capitalism, I've heard my cousins say, you have winners and losers. The losers cannot be allowed to enter countries illegally no matter their need. Rules must be followed to prevent chaos. My cousins come from wealth. They are financially well off, were educated in the United States, and have dual citizenship. They don't follow rules; they follow their pedigree. They make their judgments of others from the great financial divide that separates them from the people they condemn, a few of whom I had come to know at the country club.

AFTER SOME THOUGHT, I decided to drive from my Kansas City home to Tucson. A friend knew people involved there in the sanctuary movement. They had provided shelter for a Mexican woman, my friend told me, Rosa Robles Loreto. I made some calls and arranged to meet her.

In early January 2016, I packed a duffel bag and headed southwest on Interstate 35 to U.S. 54, then south. I drove through a story of Mexican and Central American immigration north, through blighted towns they helped save from desolation, through towns never fully recovered from whatever calamity struck them down, with a detour in El Paso, where migrant workers fleeing violence and the lack of jobs in their own countries hope for something better here.

I saw small west Kansas towns like Liberal, thriving today in part due to the influx of Mexican families employed by meatpacking plants and on farms, feedlots, and oil fields. Beginning in the early 2000s, these immigrants had reopened shuttered storefronts and filled schools with their children, jump-starting communities in the Midwest that had been close to dead.

About halfway between Dalhart, a north Texas town that barely survived the Dust Bowl, and Tucumcari, New Mexico, I stopped at one abandoned town with no name that I saw on my map. Boarded storefronts with faded Help Wanted signs looked out at a vacant street turned to mud in places. Deserted homes with great blank faces absorbed the silence. Broken windows latticed with cobwebs, the furniture dirt covered, the

dusty imprint of my shoes blowing away with each step.

I've read of small towns in the Midwest where longtime residents have mixed feelings about being spared from oblivion by Hispanic immigrants. They say they feel like they no longer belong to their communities. I don't know how the receptionist at the Econo Lodge in Dalhart felt about this. I do know I surprised him when I asked for a room.

"Garcia?" he said. "How'd that happen?"

"How do you mean?"

"Well," he said handing back my ID and credit card, "we've got a lot of people with your name here now, but you sure could pass as white."

THE NEXT MORNING, I continued south on 54. Murals of Mexican men with thick black mustaches and large sombreros filled the sides of old brick buildings until I got on Interstate 10 south and saw only desert, broken up with high-rises that guided me into El Paso. After a quick nap at a Motel 6, conveniently situated between Mexican and Chinese restaurants and a Denny's, I went to see Carlos Marentes, founder and director of El Centro de los Trabajadores Agrícolas Fronterizos, the Border Farmworkers Center.

Farmworkers lingered in the dark hall. Sunlight filtered into a large, bare room where a man sat by himself on a stool watching the news on TV. It was a cool winter day, the desert heat still subdued.

I leaned against the front desk while Carlos talked to the farmworkers. I was reminded of my time as a social worker in San Francisco. I'd start my day sitting by the front door of St. Vincent de Paul. Homeless people stood in line for coffee and I signed them in. The issue then, the mid-1990s, was not migration but NIMBY. Help the poor but not in my backyard.

"Coffee?" Carlos asked and showed me a chair.

He came to the United States from Mexico in 1977 and got involved in the farm labor movement a short time later. In 1980, he began organizing agricultural workers in El Paso. That effort led eventually to the opening of the center to help migrant families with food, shelter, and other day-to-day needs.

I saw only a few workers that day. Carlos said they would begin drifting in around March for the April onion season. In July, the chile harvest will start; it draws the most farmworkers. They'll stay through December and the start of the pecan harvest.

In the summer and early fall, Carlos said he'll shelter about a hundred

men and women a night. They'll sleep on the floor, wrapped in blankets but dressed for work, including their boots. They'll wake up and stumble from the floor to a coffee machine and then to the buses that carry them to the fields.

Most of these workers are about fifty-five. Younger workers often leave for New England, where they face less job competition. The older workers stay close to Mexico, visiting family on days they have no work. Sometimes Carlos sees them rummaging through photos in their wallets and on their cell phones, looking at spouses and children, parents and siblings, exuding a desolate feeling that mingles with the smell of sweat and coffee and cigarettes.

The older workers have been harvesting for years in New Mexico's Luna and Hidalgo counties, not far from El Paso. They might travel an hour to three hours, depending on the location of the field. They pick by hand and use plastic buckets. The landowner determines how the workers will be paid, by the day or by the pound. Some days last longer than others. Carlos rifled through a pile of pay stubs: \$38.78. \$53.96. \$58.

"You work today, and you don't know for how long, but you go out anyway," Carlos said. "You don't know what might happen tomorrow. Maybe there's no work. Maybe you're deported."

"I CAME TO ARIZONA only to work," Rosa tells me.

In Mexico, she had been a bank teller and earned forty dollars every two weeks, full-time. She and her husband would take vacations in Tucson to visit his aunt. While she was there, Rosa babysat, part-time, and made one hundred dollars a week. When she became pregnant with her first child, she asked her husband how they would provide for this baby in Mexico. Rosa and her husband applied for U.S. worker visas and moved to Tucson in 1998. She cleaned houses and brought in more than three hundred dollars a week. Her husband worked as a landscaper. When it was time to have the baby, they returned to Mexico. She now has two boys, Gerardo, thirteen, and Emiliano, ten, both born in Mexico. If she'd delivered them in the States, she thought she would be accused of using her children to receive welfare. She wanted to be a mother, yes, but she also wanted to work.

It makes her sad that people think she came here to receive benefits and take jobs from U.S. citizens. I think she means it makes her angry, but no, her voice expresses a despondent confusion that she would be thought of in such a way.

“They say we are all killers, robbers,” she says.

Occasionally, yes, she is sure, a Mexican immigrant does a bad thing, but not every one of them. They are not all awful people. She has been told by Americans that they could not work the hours she does at the taco factory. Twelve, twenty hours, no way, they say. They don’t need to. They’re citizens. They can work somewhere else.

THE MEXICAN MEN and women at the country club all had work permits. Most of them stayed in Chicago with family who had come to the States before them. A few had worked in vineyards in California. What English they knew, they learned on the job.

During my first days at the country club, I’d follow the Mexicans out to a toolshed every morning after we received our job assignments. Cut golf tees, pick dead branches, trim hedges, clean sand bunkers, whatever it might be.

When I’d grab a rake, for instance, one of the Mexicans, sometimes Anarbal, sometimes Santos, would say, *No, no, mister. That’s my rake. Okay*, I’d say and take another one. *That’s my rake*, Miguel or Raul would say. For every rake I chose, someone, Antonio or Lydia or whoever, took it from me until I was left alone in the shed with the last rake.

I wondered what was behind their behavior. Were they asserting seniority? Were they worried that the country club would replace them with gringos? Did they think, What will happen to us?

I never asked. I did not complain. I knew I’d only look weak if I ran to the supervisor. I pushed back another way. I hung out with the Mexicans in the morning as we waited for our work assignments. I ate my lunch with them. I spoke to them in what little Spanish I knew. I asked about their lives. I told jokes. I talked about the trouble I’d had finding work as a journalist. They nodded at this. They knew what it was like not to have work.

*Muy difícil*, they murmured among themselves. Very difficult.

There was no one particular moment when things changed. The harassment just eased until it stopped.

One afternoon, while we were eating lunch, a club member came into the breakroom and asked for our supervisor. She had a complaint about water spilling into her yard from one of the country club’s drainage pipes. The woman approached several Mexicans. They did not speak English and pointed to me.

“It would be nice if someone here knew something other than Spanish,” she snapped.

I passed her comments on to the supervisor.

“Well, if club members gave us the money to hire people at a decent hourly rate, we wouldn’t have to hire Mexicans, would we?” the supervisor said.

“I don’t know,” I said.

His comment didn’t surprise me, but his blunt assessment did. He stared at the floor for a moment and then shook his head. He told me to help Anarbal trim a hedgerow.

Anarbal grew up on a farm in Chiapas. He followed friends to Chicago in 1995. He had worked at the country club for more than ten years and spoke English better than he gave himself credit for. After work, he cooked at an Italian restaurant every evening but Sunday and rarely got home before ten. He came to work in clothes stained with grease and tomato sauce, his eyes half open, face drawn.

I found Anarbal in the toolshed. He called me Mister although I had told him my name several times. He had difficulty pronouncing Malcolm. Mister spared him the trouble. I didn’t mind.

I grabbed a pair of shears and followed him to the front of the country club. A hedgerow stood parallel to the entrance. Club members drove past us. We began cutting errant twigs. Anarbal trimmed judiciously. He stepped back, examined his work and made adjustments. He raked fallen twigs into a pile and scooped them into a bag. I hacked at the hedgerow as if I were in a knife fight. I didn’t care how the bushes looked. I resented being here, resented this mindless drudgery. I wanted to tear them up by the roots. I wanted to stomp them into the dirt, kick and scream and rip them to shreds. I threw my shears. Anarbal grabbed my arm.

“What are you doing, man?” he said.

I didn’t answer. I knew I’d leave, score a freelance gig and get on with my life again. Anarbal wasn’t going anywhere. He may not have wanted to, I don’t know. He let go of my arm and said nothing more, but I knew he expected me to respect his job.

MANY OF THE farm laborers at El Centro de los Trabajadores Agrícolas Fronterizos don’t have work permits and consequently are hostage to low wages, because they have no legal recourse to object. Landowners send buses to the center to pick up the workers at midnight. They leave about an hour later and arrive at the fields well before sunrise. The landowners bring them early, so they can start harvesting at sunrise. They wait without pay in the cool desert air and watch the flight of bats. Some

farmers refuse to take workers who carry their own water. They want the workers to buy bottled water from them.

SINCE SHE LEFT SANCTUARY, Rosa has remained in Tucson. She never leaves the city. Never. She lives with a kind of disquiet that follows her like a shadow, a daily fear with an intensity that comes and goes. She accommodates this fear day to day but she does not allow it into her home. There she focuses on being a good wife and a good mother to her boys. Even if she is not a priority for ICE, she lives in the same situation as all other undocumented people. She hopes the critics of migrants are humane, despite their angry words. That they will not do the things they say.

“I don’t want to be deported,” her younger son tells her one night.

“It is not just us,” she tells him. “Have faith.”

“Faith in what?” he asks her.

Rosa has overheard her children tell their friends, If your family gets in trouble, find a church. You have rights. The right to look for help. You have that much.

The father of a boy they knew was deported. He tried to return and got lost in the Arizona desert near Douglas.

“Was he found?” I ask.

Rosa doesn’t know.

When she prepared to move into Southside Presbyterian Church in August 2014, Rosa consoled herself by thinking it would be only a matter of days before she returned home. She bought food to provide for her family while she was away. In the church she lived day to day. Her lawyer was negotiating with ICE, but it was taking longer than expected. Days turned into weeks. Weeks turned into months. Rosa hated the wait. She cooked meals for her family. Her husband stopped by after work, on the way home from his landscaping jobs, and then hurried off with the food to take their boys to Little League practice. Her children saw her on weekends, when they had a break from homework and baseball.

After they left, Rosa’s sadness deepened. It was hard to believe it had come down to this: to stay in the United States, she had to be separated from everyone, including her husband and children. She worried that the publicity around her case would lead to the deportation of her family. She paced her room, felt desperate for them.

Why stay? she recalls asking herself. Because Tucson was home now. Because living here provided an opportunity for her family that Mexico never would. Because she had done nothing wrong.

Rosa says she'd looked into becoming an American citizen. But she had no special skill to offer, and knew no American who would sponsor her. She and her husband made a life for themselves anyway. They worked, raised a family.

"How was that a crime?" she asks me.

I had no answer.

She spoke to other people in sanctuary around the country once a week for support. Volunteers with the church stayed with her, so she would not be alone. Some of them spoke only English. She didn't mind. She liked having them around.

Rosa helped around the church. She cleaned bathrooms, prepared meals for the homeless. She listened to the stories of men and women sleeping on the street and thought, *Well, I have it good here*, and for a moment forgot she was in sanctuary. Other days, when everyone left, she became aware of the silence. She thought of her family, how cut off she was despite having a phone and the company of volunteers. She wept.

ROSA'S TEARS would not have moved Gary. He had been at the country club for almost forty years. He had never worked with Spanish-speaking people before his supervisor, Joel, began bringing on Mexicans in 2005. Two of them, Oscar and Antonio, had worked for Joel at another country club for twenty years. They worked hard and accepted minimum wage, Joel told Gary. Gary called Antonio Tony. Antonio would ask him to call him by his name.

"You're in America," Gary told him. "You're Tony."

When it suited him, as in getting out of a particular job, Gary would remind anyone paying attention that he was the senior employee. He was convinced Oscar and Antonio wanted him to retire, so they could claim seniority. Gary had no plans to leave.

"I'm not putting down no sod, get one of the Mexicans," he'd say. "I'm the senior employee."

"Cállate, tortuga," the Mexicans told him. Shut up, turtle.

When he pulled the hood of his sweatshirt over his head and tightened it, pinching his heavy face into pockets of fleshy bulges and wrinkles, Gary did look like a turtle. Antonio and Oscar laughed. Gary did not speak Spanish. He didn't know they were laughing at him. He sat on a mower and watched Antonio and Oscar and the other Mexicans and me lay sod until he clocked out. He was fifty-eight. He lived with his widowed mother. He never married, never moved out of his parents' house. He

never had to face the world alone as Antonio, Oscar, Anarbal, the other Mexicans, and I had. He had never needed overtime.

AS I GOT READY to depart El Paso for Tucson, Carlos told me about one young Mexican man who got up at midnight to harvest an onion field. He arrived three hours later. He waited until seven, when there was enough light to work. By that time, so many workers had arrived that the young man was finished by 9:30. He was back at the center by 12:30. He earned just under twenty dollars. That night he was up again at midnight and boarding a bus for another field.

No matter what happens politically in the United States, Carlos told me, most workers do not think their lives will change. No matter what they do in Mexico, no matter how hard they work, they remain poor. Consequently, they will keep crossing the border into Texas and elsewhere. They will work about ten months and then many of them will return to their families in Mexico. If they're deported, they'll simply cross back. Some will make it, some won't. Most will, or others will take their place, because the landowners in Luna and Hidalgo counties need them.

Who else will pick the chiles, onions, lettuce, and cabbage? Carlos asked me.

WHEN ROSA'S LAWYER told her she could leave the church, she felt lost. She saw signs on the street—*We Stand With Rosa. Keep Tucson Together*—and cried. People stopped her and told her how wonderful it was she was out. She did not know them. They recognized her from news reports. When she got home, she sought the silence she had known in the church, until she could collect herself and control the emotion that overwhelmed her.

These days, she lives a cautious life. If she sees a police officer, she watches him. She follows all the traffic laws. She understands ICE is not looking for her; still, she remains aware. She knows people who have been deported, and they don't return. To cross the desert is really hard. They call from Mexico and tell their families, *stay in Tucson*. The cartels in Mexico are too strong. Drug traffickers compete with each other for control of Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez, and for the states of Durango, Sinaloa, Guerrero, Chihuahua, Michoacán, Tamaulipas and Nuevo León. *Mexico is very dangerous now*, the deported tell their families in Tucson.

Rosa stops talking, glances at her watch. She needs to leave for work. Eight hours today, maybe more. She doesn't know. I will follow her out

and leave Tucson for my Kansas City home, driving until dark. I'll be fast asleep in a motel when Rosa gets home, when the farmworkers get up, when the Mexicans at the country club start at dawn.

Rosa shakes my hand.

“No overtime,” she reminds me.