



in our own backyard

THE HIDDEN PROBLEM OF
CHILD FARMWORKERS IN AMERICA
<http://www.ourownbackyard.org>

Part I: The Hidden Problem

Essays by Migrant Youth

Child farmworkers write about their families and their lives as migrant workers.

*Source: PBS NOW with Bill Moyers, March 28, 2004,,
<http://www.pbs.org/now/politics/migrantchildren.html#essays>*



Motivation Education & Training, Inc. (MET) is a private nonprofit organization funded by a variety of public and private grants and contracts. Each year Janie Alaniz asks program participants in her Texas program for teens 14 to 21 to reflect on their experience as migrants.

Guadalupe Reyna, 20:

My Motivation

My motivation for going on to further education is my father and his diabetes. My dad has gone through so many things in his life, and even after all that, he has always stuck to migrate work to support the family. About fifteen years ago, my father was diagnosed with diabetes. It had come as a shock to the family but my father seemed so determined. My father had gotten cut on his leg while on the job, after a couple of weeks, the wound wasn't healing correctly. So my dad went to the doctor; the doctors told him he was diabetic, and the wound would heal as fast as it was support to so he might have to stop working for a while. The doctors also told him that if it got any worse they might have amputated his leg.

I was three around years old when this all this occurred. My sister, Marty and I were too young, so my parents thought it might be best if we weren't told about my father state of well being. My father had to constantly inject himself with insulin. My father appeared to be just fine, but he wasn't. The condition with his legs wasn't doing any better either. The wound was getting larger and my father was force to stop working while it healed. At that point, my older sisters and brothers had to step in, they had stopped attending school regularly so they could work a couple of days to help support the family. Finally, my brothers and sisters dropped out of school completely, and started working full time in the fields. My dad started to take care of my sister, Marty, and I, while everyone else in my family

went off to work. They worked from around five o'clock in the morning and come back home around eight. They worked so many hours that they would come home Marty and I were already in bed. We would hardly see my mother and siblings, only on the weekend and sometimes not even holidays. So we grow accustomed to only my father. Then one day my sister, Marty and I woke up in the morning and my father wasn't there, but instead my one of my older sister and her husband in his place. We cried all that morning, so my sister had to explain to us that my dad had gone back to work. My father had gotten tired of being supported by the family instead he wanted to support the family. Marty and I waited up past our bedtime to see my father, but when he finally got home he was so tired and all he wanted to do was sleep. I cried myself to sleep that night because I didn't understand why he left us, to be take care of by my sister. The next couple of days where the same, so were the next couple of weeks. My sister explained to us constantly, why he wasn't staying home with us and we were okay with it, after a while. The father that Marty and I has gotten so attached to had up and left us one day to go back to work. My father's health was still at jeopardy. He wasn't able to inject himself daily anymore, and he couldn't eat as well as he had been, we had to keep up with everyone else on the field, but he was lagging behind. My father only went to the doctor when he felt sick, instead of going to every appointment. At our lowest point, we couldn't afford to buy his insulin nor his injections. He went for weeks, without his prescription. By this time, my sisters were marrying off one by one and the income for the household was shrinking. Even through all that, my parents were still plan on supporting the rest of the family on a lousy salary of a migrant worker. My

fathers illness was getting worst, he was losing weight quit rapidly, his teeth were begin to wiggle, and his hair was falling out, too. He was beginning to look older then he was. My parents were force to apply at a clinic for low income health care. My fathers' life was taken over by his diabetes. My dad going back to work was the worst thing he could have done, my father life was falling apart. At this time he was force to stop working a second time. This was when he finally got the diabetes under control. He attended the doctor regularly, ate right, and injected himself on time. The wound on his leg was slowly going away with the treatment of specialist. His life was under control again. My father's diabetes is still now under control, but the wound on his leg comes and goes. Now at the age of eighteen, I know my family never intended any harm, by taking my father from me, I'm just glad we got through with our family.

I always ask my parents why they don't think of getting a year around job, instead of all the hassle of their current migrant job; their reply every time is that they don't have an education. I want to further my education so that I'll have a great career, one that wouldn't put me in harms way, or kept me from my family, the way I grow up. I'm not trying to forget my migrant background, but I want to change the future, I want to break the cycle.

Brenda Lee Hernandez, 21:

Beyond A Dream

Being a migrant myself has put me through various circumstances that others might have gone by in their life. As migrants we do work that other people have not experienced and still they can't seem to understand the fact that what we do is not as simple as it seems to be.

My family has been migrating for the past eighteen years traveling from one place to another. I remember that each year around spring break my parents would withdraw us from school to go to Pasco, Washington. Leaving relatives and friends behind was hard, but getting used to other places was even harder. We did this for ten years until my grandmother from my dad's side passed away. It took us two years to start heading up north, but this time we would only go in the summer. After these two years we would leave again during March and come back around November.

Migrating can be difficult at some point or another. Being on the road for hours can be tiring and dangerous. This was one of my fears of my parents driving because when my mother was single they lost a brother on their way home. No one knows when something can go wrong things just happen for no reason sometimes. Every time that we would leave a place I remembered to ask and pray to GOD that he be with us at all moments. We never had trouble getting a place to live in which was good. All we had to worry about was cleaning it. The contractor that we

have been going with for years has always provided us with a home. Working in the fields is not such a good experience, but this is my biggest reason why I want an education. No matter how bad the weather was we would always have to work. Having to work for minimum wage and under the sun was not good at all because I would get all burned. When it rained we got all soaked and there was no way we could change until we got home. Sometimes with the frequent weather changes that happened we would get sick and still have to go to work.

When I started high school was when things got tougher. All I would think about was to hurry up to get the credits I needed. It didn't take much time for me to realize that one of the major problems was trying to finish as many classes as I could before migrating so that it would give me the time to work and at the same time get an education. Most of the time there was extra work that I had to make up in order to get a complete grade. There were always stacks of papers on my desk that needed to be finished. There was never a day that I gave up, but there were times when I couldn't take it any longer and what kept me going was my parents' encouragement towards education. This was leading me beyond a dream. They want for me to be and have what they never could.

Having a college degree is important because I not only want to be an example for my family, but to other migrant students who have been through almost the same life. My parents want what they were unable to

get and they have given me their encouragement to keep on studying. I want to be a migrant student who can let others know that we can be what we want not letting anything interfere with our education. Shooting for a bachelor's degree is what I want and I know that by working hard anything can be accomplished.

I truly admire a migrant who keeps going to higher educate themselves because now we need more than just a high school diploma. I'm thankful that we have teachers and programs like MET that help us migrant students towards getting educated, but most of all our parents who have taught us through hard labor work that there is nothing else better than getting educated. The day will come when I will have my own family and I would not like the children to go through the same experiences. I would like for them to get an education as I will thinking not of today, but always on the future. Education is a value to me that I won't regret ever having because this will be with you forever. All I can say as a migrant is that by getting educated I can make a difference.