

Detainee Allies Oral History Project, UC San Diego

Narrative name: Saul Alejandro Miranda Cardenas

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My name is Saul Miranda Cardenas, A UCSD student taking Race & Oral History of San Diego,

Course: HIUS 120D

It is May 21, 2019

I am going to read letters from Luis, who is in Otay Mesa detention center, who he writes to Otay Allies, now known as Detainee Allies.

Hi Otay Allies, it's a pleasure to meet you again. First, thank you for the support you are giving us and may God bless you with this brief greeting.

You asked me in the previous letter certain points, I will answer with pleasure.

Do you have access to the computer? R / Yes, we have access to the computer only to type, because they only have a program to type and does not have internet.

Are writing materials provided? R / No

Pens, envelopes, stamps, notebooks, but we buy them since they do not provide us that

What can be sent inside a package? I asked an officer and they told us they can not send us anything, only what is in the police station, you can only send money and we can buy from inside.

What should you buy and what do they provide? In hygiene they only provide soap and shampoo, but the soap and shampoo they give us causes us dandruff and grains, and we are forced to buy that.

Do you have basic information on how to represent yourself? Yes, there is a program called elogpi* that gives us advice, but it is difficult to receive a call from that program, I noticed since the beginning, and I'm on my way for my 2nd court meeting, but they have not called me yet.

Do you have yard time or time outside? Yes, we have specific hours to go to the yard; the yard is a small place of 74 meters to play basketball, and on Wednesdays we leave at 10:00 am to a small soccer field.

Can you listen outside? Yes, only listen

Can you listen when there are demonstrations? Yes, but if it is during yard time, they remove us from the yard and lock us up, again.

Can you see outside? I can only see some mountains and a few trees on Wednesday, there is nothing else.

That is the answer to your answers. Thank you for communicating. I hope for another answer and thank you for supporting all of you as an organization, thanks for helping us in our struggle, may God bless you today and tomorrow.

Note; I'm sorry for my writing, but I'm in a little pain in my right arm! Thanks for everything!
Sincerely, Luis

Hello Kimberly,

My name is Luis. I am a young man of 19 years old, it was very hard for me now that I am 19 years old on May 05 last year, it was very difficult since I was arrested and brought to Otay Mesa detention center. I am a Salvadoran national, I am very studious and hardworking, in El Salvador I studied up to 3 years in high school specialized counter technician in: Assistant Accountant and Business Administration.

I came to the border with the caravan group, because I did not know Mexico and this was my first time in the United States. I left the violence and discrimination in El Salvador that I experienced daily, and for the lack of support for young people, and I did not come with family.

I want the world to know that

"The Migrants, we are:

The hope of our families

The hope of our Countries

The hope of a better society

The hope of a better world

We are the hope that does not stop shining

We are a light that never ceases to illuminate

Roads forces and above all, Lives
And we are not what President Trump believes”

I would like the world to know, no matter how it is published, you can take all my information even my photograph, what I want is to make aware that we as migrants are not a danger to society.

My experience as a detainee is very hard, but I am willing to suffer, because there is no other option, because I am afraid to return to my country.

Can you receive visitors? Yes, I can receive visitors, but I do not have anyone who can visit me. Can you make calls? Yes, I can make calls locally. Do they give medical care? Yes, they give medical care but there are very angry doctors. Is the food enough? !No! There is very little food they give and the food we receive is sometimes in poor quality, especially: flour tortillas, salads, drinks and the food is poor quality. Do they treat you with respect? !No! In this detention center there are many officers who are very aggressive to answer and a friend recently received a very aggressive treatment and we do not deserve that.

Thanks for everything Kimberly for writing since your words have given encouragement to my life, thank you for everything, I send you many kisses, a rain of hugs and a flood of blessings, thank you for everything, thanks for being my family

Sincerely, Luis

August 5, 2018

Hello Luis

My name is Kate. Unfortunately, Kimberly can not write anymore, so I'm writing to you instead of her. I am one of the organizers of Otay Allies and I read your letter to Otay Allies with lots of interest. Thank you very much for answering our questions! They will help us a lot, because we try to learn as much as possible about the conditions in Otay Mesa. We are not lawyers, but we are looking for resources and supports for you. I hope you know that there are many people - especially in California - who do not agree with President Trump's policies. We know that many of you are fleeing situations that are quite dangerous and need asylum. I am sorry that they are not treated well when you are simply asking for help.

A little about me: I'm originally from Canada, but I've been living in San Diego for 10 years now. At the moment, I am writing from the city of Montreal in Canada, because I am visiting my family here. I am a teacher at a state university in San Diego. I teach urban geography with a focus on social and environmental issues. I have a 9 year old son (Dimitri) and a husband (Greg). We live with two dogs and some chickens. My parents live with us for six months of the year.

Some years ago, I spent 1.5 years living in Ecuador to work with young migrants. I also have a lot of experience working with young migrants from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico on the US border and in Mexico. I lived in Honduras for 4 months, many years ago, and I know a little bit of El Salvador (only by bus). I have found several young people from El Salvador in my work. They told me about the difficulties with gangs in their country. I'm sorry that your life is so difficult.

Where are you from in El Salvador? Do I live in the countryside or the city? Do you have a family in El Salvador or in the US? How many siblings do you have? How long did your trip to the USA last? Did you come by plane, train, taxi, and/or foot? What are your wishes for the future?

Well, it's a great pleasure to meet you Luis. Thanks, again, for sending us so much information. We are a small group, but we are doing everything we can to ensure a dignified and respectful treatment.

In solidarity,
Kate

Hello Kate,

Let me tell you a little about me, my name is Luis [REDACTED]. I am from El Salvador I am 19 years old, in El Salvador I _____ accountant specialized in accounting assistant, I enrolled to the national university of El Salvador to study the profession of my dreams which was ENGINEERING IN SYSTEMS, which I could no longer continue, because of the lack of support that we have as young GAY guys in El Salvador, if you read this I am a GAY guy who fled from his country, because of the mistreatment and discrimination I received every day from being at school, my instructors, the family, the police, and the government. Since we are GAY we do not have the support from anyone in Otay Mesa San Diego California.

In the letter/card you ask me some things which is a pleasure to be able to answer them,

I come from [REDACTED]. El Salvador its a department located in the central area of El Salvador, it is the first tourist city of my country since [REDACTED]. It has one of the best beaches in El Salvador which attracts many tourists and is one of the most beautiful places for the sport of surfing.

I lived in [REDACTED] all my life, I lived in a small colony called [REDACTED] 15 minutes from the famous boardwalk [REDACTED] and 20 minutes from one of the best beaches of that place called [REDACTED] if you could imagine most of my time was spent on the beaches by the ocean, it is my life as anyone would say, the sea is my hobby.

I have family in El Salvador, who are my mother, my stepfather, and my three brothers, unfortunately my father separated when I was 9 years old in 2008 from there I lived alone with my dad and my other 3 brothers with my mom but my mom never left to visit me, I have family in the United States but I do not count on her (Aunt) because when she realized that I was GAY they gave me back

My trip through Mexico lasted about 1 month, since I was one of the hundreds of members in the 2018 caravan. Our trip was hard as we traveled by train, ray, taxis, bus and a long time walking.

My desires for the future are: to finish my studies and be a systems engineer, to help my family, to be a successful person, to help others, to help migrants and above all to give myself completely to GOD since day one he has not abandoned me and continues with me no matter who I am and where I come from.

Well this is a little bit of my life, Kate. Well, I thank you for your solidarity and thank you for caring for us as detainees. Believe me, we feel a deep satisfaction knowing that we are not alone. Thank you, I hope to meet you someday and may God bless you today, tomorrow, and always thank you.

Luis

Monday, August 27, 2018

Hello Luis

Thank you very much for writing me with so much information about your life. [REDACTED] looks like a beautiful place. Do you know how to surf? Surfing is very popular in San Diego. Once I tried

it; it is really difficult! I hope my son learns to surf in the future. At the moment, he is afraid of the sea because there are many poisonous stingrays here. But he's only 9 years old...

It seems that the situation is really difficult for gay youth in El Salvador. Hey many discrimination? I also read a letter from your partner, [REDACTED]. I'm glad you have each other during this difficult time. Are you working with lawyers to help with your asylum case? Do you have documented examples of persecution to help with your case? I am not a lawyer, but I know that the courts require evidence of persecution for asylum cases. I am sending hope and solidarity to you and [REDACTED].

It seems that there is a really rapid rotation of detained migrants. Do you think you'll be in the Otay Mesa detention center for much longer?

Since you shared a lot of information about your life, I will share more about my life. I was born in a city of approximately 80,000 people in southern Ontario, Canada. I lived near the border with the United States, but we crossed infrequently. I have an older brother who still lives in Canada. We traveled a lot when I was young, but mainly through Canada and the US in a camper. My mother was an English teacher and my father was a lawyer. My mother worked mainly with students of English as a second language, many of whom were refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, Poland and other nations in crisis in the 1970s. I grew up loving the outdoors and nature, which may be the reason why my studies in geography. I am a 45 year old woman.

I return to teaching at San Diego State University on Thursday. I will teach a class on research methods to about 20 students. I love teaching, but I still have to prepare for my classes!

Until next week,
Kate

September 24, 2018

Dear Luis

Hello Luis. How are you doing these days? I have not heard from you for a few weeks. I hope you are well, despite your current conditions. I am sending you strength and love.

Also, I'm sending you a poem for Javier R. Cinacchi:

Two Paths

I only know two ways:
the one of conformism,
and trying to fight,
for reaching a longing.

And if the longing remains,
lost in oblivion,
just need to find,
the new cause to fight.

In the star observed,
light traveling in time,
the star may or may not exist,
owner of the distant light that I see.

And it may or may not be my dream,
reality someday.

That light that I see from afar,
when I raise my sight from the ground.

Elevate the sight to observe,
beyond the earth,
it is possible to fight well,
to move forward in life.

And seeds planted in the ground,
not intended to be forgotten,
be a tree raising its branches,
of longing in longing, you can achieve it.

With love, Kate