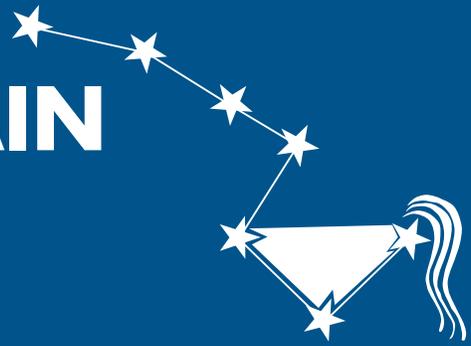


# THE DESERT FOUNTAIN HUMANE BORDERS

*December 2021*



TAMARA ALVAREZ REFILLS WATER BARREL ON IRONWOOD NATIONAL MONUMENT ROUTE PHOTO CREDIT: DOUG RUOPP

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ARIZONA OPEN GIS FOR DECEASED MIGRANTS  
[humaneborders.org/migrant-death-mapping/](http://humaneborders.org/migrant-death-mapping/)

## IN MEMORY OF GAYLE ANN WEYERS



Gayle Weyers on the Devil's Highway, May 2019 (Photo Credit: Rebecca Fowler)

*Gayle Weyers was a consummate humanitarian and ambassador of goodwill. "Stranger" was not a word in her lexicon. The front door of her and husband Don's Ajo, Arizona home was open to anyone and everyone anytime, their living room a de facto community space. Gayle's Arizona Room was the site of some of the earliest Ajo Samaritans meetings – and some marathon Scrabble games; at the Scrabble table, as elsewhere in life, Gayle was formidable. With her passion for social justice and Don's knowledge of local trails, the two became a tap root of humanitarian aid in the "West Desert." Gayle was outspoken in her beliefs, which is to say, Gayle spoke loud and clear: She walked her talk, both on the trail and in community meetings. No hour was too late for her to pull off one of her epic "rescues" of humanitarian aid workers when one of our vehicles suddenly broke down or we were desert marooned thanks to monsoon flash floods. On midday of Summer Solstice, June 23, 2020, Gayle Weyers, with uncharacteristic quietness, slipped away from us, leaving numerous stories and friends behind. Today, her larger-than-life spirit resides in tiny Ajo and the vast desert environs beyond.*

by John Heid

***Gayle Weyers ¡PRESENTE!***

# LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

## by Doug Ruopp

When I think about the numbers of deaths occurring in our country due to COVID 19 or even the opioid drug crisis, I wonder why our society isn't more effective at keeping people safe. Each of the thousands of lives lost in the desert over the last 21 years is a tragedy too, and it's hard to explain why the problem continues. Humane Borders and so many others consistently bring attention to the dilemma on the border and offer help to migrants in desperate need. Sometimes we're asked why we attract so many amazing volunteers willing to do humanitarian work in such an intractable political environment. While the answer is as individual as each of the volunteers coming from diverse areas of society, the knowledge that one way or another we're "doing the right thing" is universal.

However, as daunting as it can be from day to day to help when there is so much need, one aspect of our work should not be overlooked. That's everyone's need to connect. For me, as a representative of Humane Borders, I'm thankful that the work I do breaks down barriers between people who might not know we're in this together. Migrants and their families, of course, put some trust in me as I provide water or information, but equally as hopeful to me is the willingness of all kinds of people to talk with me and get to know me personally when they find out what I'm doing. From the reporter who came from some other part of the world and wants to know my motives to the guy who happened to be nearby and helped me fix a flat tire on the water truck, there's a sense our shared experiences and attempts to be kind are important.

The Humane Borders board has many opportunities for these kinds of interactions. They come from the never-ending care Bob gives families searching for missing loved ones on the border, to Dan's efforts with Phoenix area churches to supply asylum seekers with the food and supplies they need until their asylum case is heard, to Dinah's important work to connect with and persuade federal officials towards more humane and environmentally sensitive policies, to Anne's and Poncho's many ties with a variety of groups working with migrants right here in Tucson. And, of course, our staff, Rebecca and Joel work daily with individual volunteers and with a wide variety of nonprofit groups to coordinate and make sure our work creates effective relationships that can make a difference for migrants.



Doug Ruopp Volunteers on Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge Run  
(Photo Credit: Scott Powell)

I talked with a member of the Mexican National Guard while I was filling a water tank in Sasabe last week. We talked about our roles on the border, but we also talked about baseball and our families. And a couple of weeks ago, one of the directors of the new resource center shared with a group of us his life story and his efforts to welcome and meet the needs of migrants in Sonoita, Mexico. These are not unusual connections for the many volunteers from many groups interacting with people on both sides of the border. I believe we all have to step out, in whatever way we can (face to face being a bit tricky right now), and get to know each other. It's what I think will eventually bring about the collective resolve to find effective solutions to the big problems society is dealing with, and reminds us of what makes life rewarding.



## REFUGE FROM THE FOWLER'S SNARE: THE STORY OF DORA RODRIGUEZ'S BORDER CROSSING, JULY 1980



Dora Luz Flores, Turned 20, Celebrates Her First Birthday in the United States, September 15, 1980  
(Photo Credit: Carole Romeo)

*Dora Rodriguez was just 19 when the Salvadoran army started assassinating student activists in her village, and she had to make the decision to leave her home country to save her life. On July 5, 1980, Dora and 25 other Salvadoran refugees crossed over the Arizona Sonoran Desert into Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. The*

*monument, while hauntingly beautiful, is brutal and unforgiving in the dead of summer when daytime temperatures reach well over 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Dora would make two agonizing attempts to cross the U.S./Mexico border before crossing near Lukeville, Arizona for what would make the third time, on July 5, 1980. The story recounted below is told in Dora's own words as recorded in a Humane Borders Virtual Connections Meeting in February of 2020.*

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### Prelude: Psalm 95

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High  
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.  
I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress,  
my God, in whom I trust.  
Surely he will save you  
from the fowler's snare  
and from the deadly pestilence.  
He will cover you with his feathers,  
and under his wings you will find refuge;  
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

You will not fear the terror of night,  
nor the arrow that flies by day,  
nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,  
nor the plague that destroys at midday.  
A thousand may fall at your side,  
ten thousand at your right hand,  
but it will not come near you.

You will only observe with your eyes  
and see the punishment of the wicked.

If you say, "The LORD is my refuge,"  
and you make the Most High your dwelling,  
no harm will overtake you,  
no disaster will come near your tent.

For he will command his angels concerning you  
to guard you in all your ways;  
they will lift you up in their hands,  
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.  
You will tread on the lion and the cobra;  
you will trample the great lion and the serpent.

"Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him;  
I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.  
He will call on me, and I will answer him;  
I will be with him in trouble,  
I will deliver him and honor him.  
With long life I will satisfy him  
and show him my salvation."

\*\*\*\*\*



(Photo Credit: Anjo Antony)

Before I start, I would like to light a candle and have a moment of silence to remember all of our brothers and sisters who passed during my journey, as well as for all of the lives that have been lost in the desert since then. I would also like for us to take a moment to think of our migrants, all of

the men and women who are out there right now taking this journey.

I have been telling my story for a while now, especially over the past four years. This is very humbling to me because it is not only my story, as you know, but is also the story of twenty-five other people, thirteen of whom died that day, and twelve more, including my cousin, who survived. I use my voice to tell the story because the others cannot have their voices; their voices have been suppressed. And so I want to do my very best to represent them.

In late June 1980, we met in the capital of El Salvador to begin our third trip with our guides. When at last we made it to the border town of Sonoyta, Mexico, the three Salvadoran coyotes decided to contract smugglers from that town. Nobody ever mentioned that it was going to be 115, 120 degrees in the desert. Nobody ever mentioned that we would need appropriate shoes, clothing, lots of water, none of that. Instead, they just said, "You only need one gallon of water. You're going to be in Los Angeles

in four hours, the helicopter will be waiting for you across the border.”

In my group there were three young girls, and every time I share my story, I have to give them a special moment because they were three sisters aged 12, 14 and 16. And their mother believed these men, their mother trusted these coyotes, these smugglers, and she paid for them to come reunite with her in Los Angeles. These young girls had not seen their mom for five years. And we became really good friends, almost like sisters. So they believed in me. They believed that I could protect them. But they all three died in the desert.

The night that we started walking, a lot of my friends, my sisters on that trip, were wearing high heels, and they had rollers on their luggage. Because we were told that in a couple of hours we were going to be in a place of safety, and we were so naive and ignorant, we did not know anything. We didn't even know that cholla cactus existed, so we were not prepared. So we were in a big line, that was all you could see in the dark. A line of people walking, and within minutes, the first person started screaming and yelling because the cholla cactuses, they were getting in our feet.

At that time, I would say not even fifteen minutes into the desert, we were already exposed to the cruelty of the beautiful desert. It is a beautiful place, but it'll take you if you're not prepared. And that's what happened to us. Because we started walking and trying to figure out what were those thorns, what was getting to us, what was cutting through our shoes, what was cutting through our clothing . . .

That first night, the smuggler, the Mexican smuggler, he was young, and his father was with him. He left us because he knew he was in trouble. He knew he was lost very quickly. And he said, “You guys stay here and I'm going to go and get some help.” And with that, he went to go get help, but he never returned. But

he left his father behind, and his father was in his late sixties, and he walked through the whole journey with us because he didn't know what else to do or where to go.

. . . So the first night we had our first woman lose her life. We were sitting under a tree and the heat was so intense. Not even the ground was bearable. It was hot, it was terribly hot just to lay down on the ground. So we had taken all of our stuff and luggage and clothing and started making a camp under a tree. But this woman, she was a little heavy and she had a heart attack. So she died within a couple hours of our journey. So we all of us buried her as much as we could. We put clothes on top of her, her own clothes [voice breaks]. We put some leaves, whatever we could find to cover her, to give her some dignity. But we left her, we left her behind, her body stayed behind.

So we kept walking and walking, and from what I understand, we walked more than thirty miles. But the sad thing about the desert is you wander around in circles when you're lost . . . so by the third night, we had no

more water, our shoes were torn apart. Most of us had taken off our clothes, just leaving on little shorts and little shirts thinking that was the right thing to do. Most of us had already drank pee, our own pee, and we were running out. We had just one gallon with pee from everybody that we were drinking.

And then that third day, the men said we have to separate, we have to go and get some help - they felt they were a little stronger than the women. So they went. But they didn't get very far because they were found dead very close to us. But the Salvadorian coyote, who was a little bit stronger, he decided to stay with the group of women where I was found. And I didn't know, we didn't know, that his intentions were to hurt us and his intentions were to . . . his intentions were to have sex with all of us, and to drink our sweat to survive. Because I heard screaming and yelling when he was hurting and killing some of the young girls. Because they were found right next to him.



Border Patrol Agent Carries Dora Luz Flores to  
Waiting Helicopter, July 6, 1980  
(Photo Credit: © Michael Ging - USA TODAY NETWORK)

I believe the reason I am alive, it was because my mother gave me a verse in the Bible, and as you know, our migrants, our people, me included, we believe in our faith. And that's what keeps us moving when we are going through these



Dora, husband David, and grandchildren Elijah and Elena  
(Photo credit: Cynthia Moss)

journeys. So I remember the night before I was found, or maybe it was around noon, I remember seeing the beautiful, beautiful sky. I've been told that you lose sense of time when you are in distress and when you're about to pass on to the other world. But I remember seeing the beautiful sky with millions and millions of stars. It was just this beautiful, quiet, silent place. Well, it was silent because everybody around me was dead. [voice breaks] That's why it was silent. And the reason I survived was because I crawled under a tree to protect myself from this man. But even today, I feel guilty for not being there for my younger friends, the three sisters, because they believed in me. And I heard this man before he died, he was saying, "Oh, Dora is a good person. Dora has been good to us. I'm not going to hurt her. And she's dead anyway. She's already gone."

So the next morning, I believe we were found around noon, and we were found because a woman and a man from our group got out . . . We were rescued by the Border Patrol and the thirteen of us who were alive, we were taken to the hospital where we spent about a week. And I remember when I woke up after the helicopters took us to the hospital, being in a flatbed in a room with a lot of nurses around me. And these nurses were all crying because they were pulling all the thorns out of my body and my whole body was full of everything that is found in the desert. Because in the desert somebody said that he knew we could cut a cactus and find liquid. There's so much going through your mind when you're trying to survive, all you want to do to stay alive, so you will do whatever it takes. A lot of the men who were found dead close to us had rocks and dust in their mouths because they probably thought, you know, that it would help. Some of them had toothpaste all over their mouths.

After we were feeling better, the Border Patrol authorities decided to settle us in Tucson, where so many, many humanitarian souls came and got us and told us "You're not alone. We're here for you." I found a sponsor family for a whole year who I still call my family today. I grew older with them and that's how I ended up staying in Tucson.

But I did not know anything about asylum or what that was, I just didn't know. All I knew was that I had to flee my country because I would get killed if I didn't and I didn't want to die at 19 years old. I have a lot of people ask me what kept me going, and I believe it was my faith. Besides, it was probably not my time, and I want to believe there was a purpose for me in life to do the work and advocate on behalf of my brothers and sisters . . .

After thirty-eight years, I went back to the site where we were found. It's a beautiful story of healing, of grace, and respect. When I stood on the ground, I knew that was the place because I heard everything that was going on in the night of death. I heard the screaming. I heard the pleading for life. And it was more painful to me to know that we were only one mile away from the highway.

And now I will never stop working on behalf of my migrant brothers and sisters. For me, it's a mission and I try to be involved in as many, many things I can, and I work hand in hand with everybody. I believe that each of you have so much to give. And in the name of my brothers, you may never meet a migrant that you are helping. But just know that whatever you do, even if you say a prayer for them, it gets to us. We will receive it.

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*Today, Dora Rodriguez is the director of Salavision, a Tucson-based non-profit that exists to provide aid and support to asylum seekers and migrants deported to the remote town of Sasabe, Sonora, Mexico. In Sasabe, Dora heads Casa de la Esperanza Resource Center, a safe space in the Sasabe community where volunteers provide for as many as fifty asylum seekers a day. Persons are given hot meals, hot showers, a change of clothing and shoes, hygiene items, medical attention, legal advice, and phone calls to loved ones.*



Counterclockwise: Dora, grandbaby Alena, daughters Anna and Cynthia, Grandson Elijah, Sons Javier and Trevor  
(Photo Credit: David Rodriguez)

# A BASIC HUMAN ACT

## by Katharine Harer, San Francisco, California



We're slicing through the Arizona Sonoran Desert on Highway 286 in a water supply truck operated by Humane Borders. Faint yellow light rises into the sky behind the mountains, letting us know that in a

few hours it will be hot, desert hot. Steve and Tracey, veteran volunteers, sit in front and my husband, Bob, and I sit on the wide backseat behind them. Tracey is drinking out of a see-through plastic thermos, something thick and creamy, and Steve every so often takes a long pull out of a water bottle tucked next to him. In my sleep-dazed state, I think about thirst. The high tech water bottle I bought for the trip sits in a cloth bag at my feet next to two sandwiches wrapped in foil and an apple. I forget about the water. For the four plus hours of our trip from Tucson and back again, I never take a drink.

For migrants crossing, that's not an option. You can die in a matter of hours from dehydration, especially when you walk for miles under the blazing sun. In the summer, the average temperature can get up to 115 degrees, and migrants can't physically carry enough water to make the long journey on foot from the border to Arizona. Within a day many run out, and if a person is dehydrated to begin with, it may be a matter of hours before they die.

Since 2000, the group's volunteers have regularly checked and refilled water barrels along known routes used by immigrants. The migrants typically walk at night to avoid the Border Patrol, but other dangers await them, like sudden outcroppings of prickly cactuses and spiny desert plants. Rattlesnakes come out at night, and there's a type of cactus that clings to your skin and won't let go. Steve warns us: "Be careful when you walk around out here. Look out for these thorny things," he points to a grayish twig on the ground. "They'll punch a hole right through the soles of your shoes."

The migrant travelers find their way by the moon and the stars and have to be extra-cautious when they use their flashlights -- crouching down as they walk, sleeping under the rare mesquite tree or overgrown bush, eating a little something if there's anything left in their backpacks. They carry half-gallon plastic

water containers repurposed from jugs of milk and painted black so they won't show up under the Border Patrol agents' high-intensity flashlights or the brights of their headlights if they chase after them in their heavy-duty jeeps.

At one of the water stops, we find a discarded water jug, painted black, desiccated by the sun. At another stop we find two backpacks left on the desert floor, dirty and torn. I keep thinking about the people who carried these packs: were they running from an animal or from another human? Did the weight of the packs slow them down? Were they arrested and their belongings thrown away by the Border Patrol. Could there be any good reason to abandon a backpack when you're making your way on foot into the United States? Maybe some nice church group dropped off new, clean backpacks full of food and supplies and the migrants traded up. That's a nice story I tell myself although I'm not sure I believe it.

Steve and Tracey are smart, friendly, and make us feel welcome. Steve is a retired trial attorney from Boston and Tracey, also a transplant to Tucson, is transitioning jobs, from pharmaceutical research to animal care. We're four well-educated white people bouncing over the desert highway, carrying fresh water to those who need it, people we will probably never see because it's too dangerous for the migrant travelers to show their faces.

The gates leading to the water stations are padlocked because of the vigilantes who shoot their guns at the locked water barrels and empty the life-saving water onto the desert floor. Humane Borders installed new spring-loaded spigots, but the vigilantes are still finding ways to mess with the water stations. Tracey hops out and unlocks the gate, and we drive over the bumpy ground to a small pond a few feet from one of the sky-blue water barrels, set on its side for access to the drinking spout.

"See this cattle pond? Before we put a water station here, migrants were drinking from the pond and getting dysentery. We made a sign warning them not to drink the water, and then we installed a clean water barrel," Steve explains while Tracey unlocks the barrel and uses a tool that looks a little like a wrench to unscrew the spout.

I walk over to inspect the pond. The water is brown and brackish, but if I were dying of thirst, I know I'd drink it. I feel a surge of gratitude for the volunteers from Humane Borders



Katherine Harer Volunteers with Humane Borders (Photo Credit: Bob Harer)

and the other organizations who keep immigrants from dying of seemingly basic things like contaminated water and thirst.

Symptoms of dehydration that affect migrants walking across the desert include fatigue, brain fog/confusion, severe headaches, stomach aches, inability to urinate or defecate, leg cramps, and an

elevated heart rate. For someone who's healthy, severe symptoms can kick in by the second day and become life threatening by the third, when sodium levels rise, affecting the brain. Lethargy and confusion set in and quickly progress to a sleep-like state of reduced consciousness when you slip into a coma. Eventually, either your heartbeat or your respiratory drive come to a stop.

Back in the truck, Steve tells us they find clothes, backpacks and discarded water bottles all the time. Even though Humane Borders tries to count all the migrants who die attempting to cross the desert, Steve says that the true number could be three times or even ten times as many, as there are so many human remains that are never found. I'm still thinking about the abandoned backpacks. Were their owners able to continue? Are they in detention? Did they turn back, return to Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras? What happened to the people who started off carrying those packs?

Sometimes the four of us are quiet, staring out the truck windows. At other times, Steve shares stories of things he's seen or that others have told him. Towards the end of our route, he tells us about a man who'd run out of food and water and couldn't go on. The man flagged Steve down and asked him to drive him to the Border Patrol office. Steve told him he didn't want to do it, but the man insisted. He was sick and exhausted, so Steve did what the man asked and turned him over. "I felt terrible about it," he told us, "but I did what he asked."

Another story Steve tells us is about coming to check on a water barrel and hearing voices. He couldn't see anyone, not a sign, but he heard low, muffled sounds in the bushes nearby.

"I wanted to go over there and talk to them, but I didn't want to frighten them away. I honored their hiding place, replaced the water so the barrel would be full, and left without looking back."

I imagined being so close to other humans who you want to talk to, to help, to maybe share whatever food you've got in the truck, but not being able to do anything but refill the water barrel and leave.

On the ride home, our group of four doesn't say much. I can't remember eating my sandwich, but the foil is wadded into a ball, so I must have gobbled it down between water stops. I close my eyes but I don't sleep. I'm thinking about a story I'd read about a woman who'd crossed over from Mexico, fallen and broken her ankle and couldn't walk. The group she was with abandoned her in the desert, and she'd walked on her knees the rest of the way. She found pieces of cloth and carpet left behind by other travelers and tied them to her knees, collected rain in discarded water bottles, and she survived, flagging down a ride when she got to the highway. She said she looked up at the desert sky when she was alone at night and saw her mother in the stars, and that was what kept her going.

By mid-day, we've serviced all the water stations on our run. Helping to supply the water stations today felt like a basic human act, keeping people from dying of thirst in the desert. In the fiscal year 2021, 225 bodies were found near the Arizona border



Humane Borders Veteran Drivers Tracey Ristow and Steve Saltonstall (Photo Credit: Katherine Harer)

-- on trails, dry washes, desert valleys and high mountain passes. Authorities weren't able to identify them all, so their families will never know for sure what happened to them.



# NEVER FORGET

## by Scott Powell, Portland, Oregon



Scott Powell at the border wall near Sasabe, Sonora.  
(Photo Credit: Scott Powell)

The day after the 20th anniversary of 9/11, I pulled out of Portland, Oregon for the long drive South to the Borderlands. I had plenty of time to reflect as I drove. News coverage and social media covered the murderous events of 9–11 like they were yesterday. We heeded calls to “Never Forget” as we remembered, mourned, and honored those who tragically perished 20 years ago.

And now I was heading to an area of the US where more people have died than on 9/11. The Arizona Sonoran Desert has become a vast killing field where thousands of migrants have disappeared and perished. How many have died? No one really knows. Since 1990, nearly 3,800 migrant remains have been located. But many, many more have disappeared and have never been found.

In profound contrast to 9/11, these deaths have happened in the shadows and quickly forgotten. There are no annual days of remembrance, no calls to “Never Forget” in our national consciousness for these dead children, women and men. And unlike 9–11, this tragedy is still unfolding day after day, year after year. In 2021 alone, 233 migrant remains were found, one of the deadliest years on record.

Dawn was barely breaking at 6 am when I pulled up to the Humane Borders’ yard in Tucson. Doug Roupp was already pre-tripping the water truck and carefully going over the checklist before we headed out into the desert.

Our truck carried 300 gallons of water and an extra barrel and extra parts. Because these water stations are often vandalized by anti-immigrant militias and vigilantes, the truck is outfitted for making repairs. Barrels have been shot, punctured, drained. Water spigots have been broken off. Gasoline and turpentine poured into the barrels so they are now locked. Once a dead migrant was found near a dry barrel that had been sabotaged.

Our destination was the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge – a massive expanse of desert stretching all the way to the Mexico border. BANWR was established to provide refuge for endangered plants and animals, but had become a graveyard for migrants dying from dehydration and sun exposure.

Our task was to service various water barrels strategically stationed to help migrants stay alive. When the remains of a person are found, the GPS coordinates are recorded and mapped. Humane Borders volunteers carefully study these maps to see where deaths are occurring. They also scout the landscape for signs of migrant travel to decide where each barrel should be placed.

A large blue flag at the end of a tall pole planted near each barrel enables thirsty migrants to see the barrels from a distance. Some flags have solar lights on them to be seen at night. Doug said, “These barrels bring hope and tear down walls.” We tested and tasted the water from every barrel making sure it was safe. If it was questionable we drained it and refilled it with fresh water.

Doug told the story of a time he pulled the water truck into the local tire shop. A worker recognized the flags and realized these were the same people putting out the water. He told Doug, “You helped me and my family when we were crossing the desert.”

Then he went through the shop telling all his co-workers about what Humane Borders was doing. It was a deeply moving moment. I thought how beautifully that story brings home the reality that we are all the same, all belong to each other.

The desert can be a confusing abyss that strips away one’s sense of direction. It certainly did mine. But somehow Doug knew exactly where each landmark was located and amazingly found every water station. At times we had to turn in the mirrors so branches wouldn’t rip them off the truck.

The next day I joined Dan and Scarlett for a water run in the Oregon Pipe National Monument bordering the Mexico border in the Ajo Corridor. This stunningly beautiful landscape is also harsh and deadly. At our first water station, Dan read the following prayer:

*Loving Creator, full of love and mercy, I want to ask you for my Migrant brothers and sisters. Have pity on them and protect them, as they suffer mistreatments and humiliations on their journeys, are labeled as dangerous,*

*and marginalized for being foreigners. Make them be respected and valued for their dignity. Touch with your goodness the many that see them pass. Care for their families until they return to their homes, not with broken hearts but rather with hopes fulfilled. Let it be.*



Dan Abbott and Scarlett Bradford Service Organ Pipe Route Water Station (Photo Credit: Scott Powell)

We inspected, treated and refilled about six different water stations that day.

The next week I joined Rebecca Fowler, Humane Border’s administrator and Gail Kocourek with Tucson Samaritans. We drove over a steep mountain pass and into a remote canyon bordering the Tohono

O’odham Nation. Here we scouted for signs of active migrant trails to determine new water drops, and as always, kept watch for anyone in distress.

We came across a partly decomposed, partly mummified cow. It underscored the danger that if the desert is this lethal even for animals born and bred for this environment – how much more it becomes a deadly open-air furnace for vulnerable humans out of water and dehydrated.

Rebecca called out in Spanish, “Hello! Do not be afraid! We are friends of the Church. We have food and water!” Gail shared the time when she called out with a similar message, three travelers appeared out of the desert.

We didn’t encounter migrants then, but we saw many signs of activity – abandoned clothing, a blanket, empty water jugs under trees – all indicating this could be a good place for new water drops. We left a number of one-gallon jugs at various locations. New GPS coordinates were recorded so volunteers can monitor and bring out fresh water for future water runs.

My last water run with Humane Borders was with Phillip Hunger. We left at 6 am and headed into the hauntingly beautiful desert near Saguaro National Park West. Phillip put it

in four-wheel drive as we bushwhacked our way through new heavy growth from recent monsoons. He just missed stepping on the largest tarantula I have ever seen. This was the farthest run away from the border yet, but it struck me how even here migrants were falling and dying. We tested and filled barrels. Tragically, one station could not be serviced because the county had closed it due to militia vandalism.

I had been watching the horrors unfolding on the border for a number of years. So being able to serve with Humane Borders was a tangible way I could make a difference. I’ve worked with quite a few humanitarian organizations over the years, and I have to say that HB is one of the most effective “lean and mean” organizations I have worked with. I had incredible experiences with volunteers with Tucson Samaritans as well.

When you’re bouncing around the desert for six or more hours on a water run, you get an awesome opportunity to connect with other like-minded folks. The camaraderie and connection I had with the various crews was deeply rewarding. The goodness and heart of the volunteers and the spirit of activism in the community with other related organizations stood out to me as a beacon of hope.

While I saw the effects of suffering, death and the coldness of steel and razor wire of the militarized border, I also witnessed humanity at its finest, in the people of Humane Borders and others laboring tirelessly in saving lives endeavoring to make the borderlands a more compassionate place.

Thank you for an incredible life changing experience. I look forward to serving with you all again.



Phillip Hunger Plants Fresh Flag at Water Station on Avra Valley Route (Photo Credit: Scott Powell)



# GIFTS FOR DONATIONS

*Thank you for supporting the work we do at Humane Borders! You can purchase gifts like t-shirts and caps for donations. Visit Humane Borders at <https://humaneborders.org/> and click on "Gifts for Donations"*



👉 *Bandanas*

👉 *Hats*

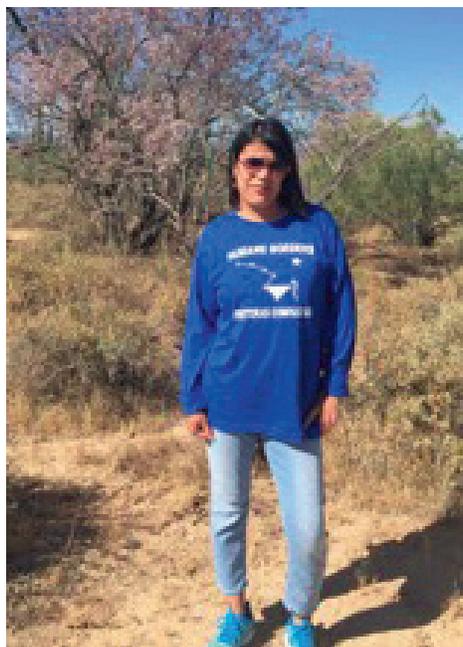


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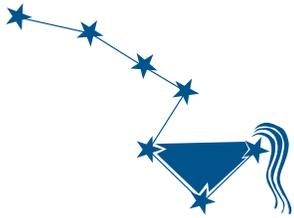


👉 *Masks*

👉 *Long-Sleeve Tees*



👉 *T-Shirts*



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