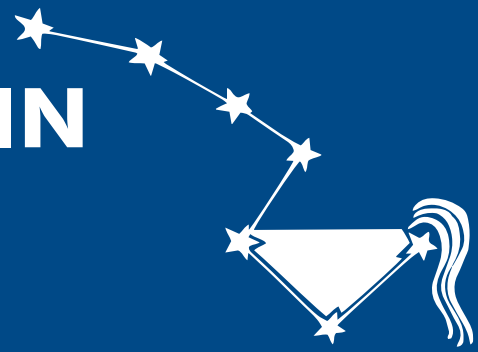


# THE DESERT FOUNTAIN

## HUMANE BORDERS

December 2020



COVER PHOTO: ED MCCULLOUGH

HUMANE BORDERS, INC.  
P.O. Box 27024, Tucson, Arizona 85726  
[info@humaneborders.org](mailto:info@humaneborders.org)

ARIZONA OPENGIS FOR DECEASED MIGRANTS  
[humaneborders.org/migrant-death-mapping/](https://humaneborders.org/migrant-death-mapping/)

[www.humaneborders.org](http://www.humaneborders.org)

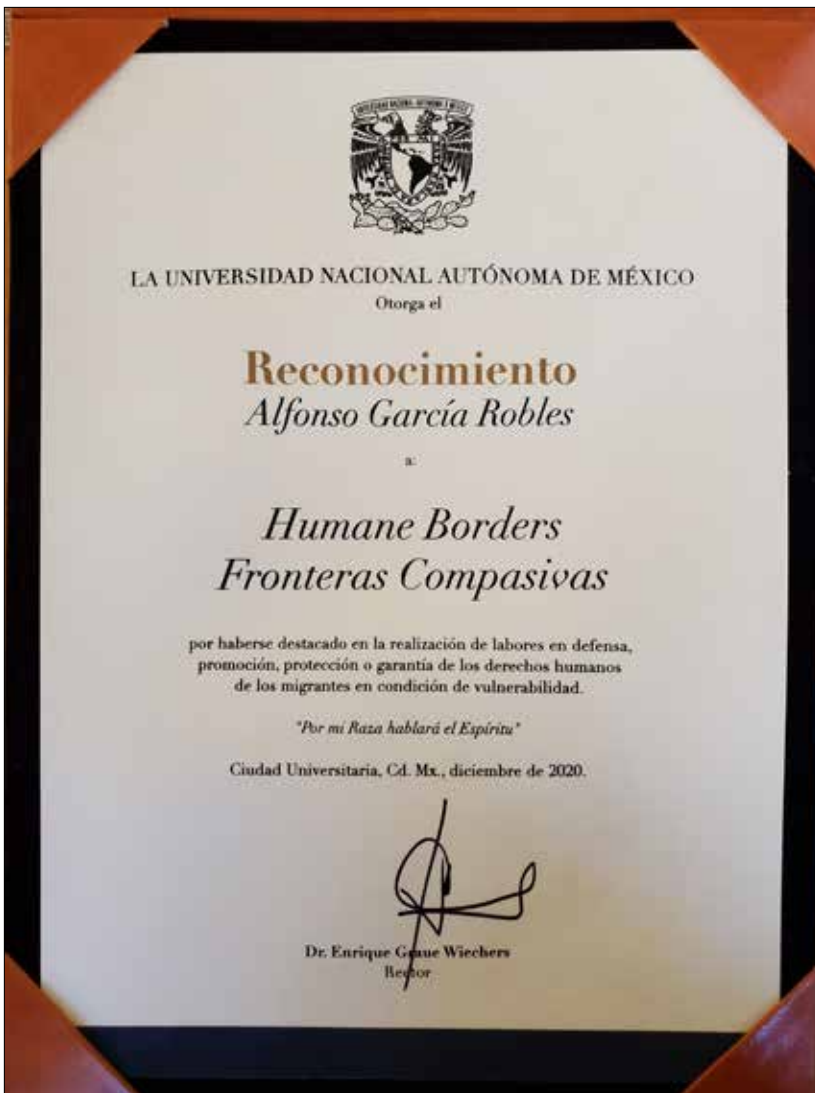
# HUMANE BORDERS RECEIVES ALFONSO GARCIA ROBLES HUMANITARIAN AWARD

On December 11, 2020, Humane Borders received the Alfonso García Robles Humanitarian Award from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), a large public research university in Mexico (350,000 students). UNAM has an office here in Tucson at the University of Arizona.

Alfonso Garci Robles was a co-winner of the 1982 Nobel Peace Prize for his authorship of the 1967 Treaty of Tlatelolco, which established a nuclear-free zone in Latin America.

UNAM recognizes the volunteers and staff of Humane borders “because it has excelled in the realization of work in defense, advocacy, protection or guarantee of the human rights of migrants with vulnerability.”

We are delighted that our work, especially that of all of our volunteers, is recognized and meaningful to such a highly respected university in Mexico.



# ABOUT DONATING TO HUMANE BORDERS

by Doug Ruopp

Everyone knows that southern Arizona has the saguaro cacti, fascinating plants that develop their own shapes (and personalities) over the years, and they are also amazing for their ability to survive the heat. Young saguaro need water near the surface to survive, but the drought down here hasn't been good for them. Regular trips to the desert this fall show that the mature saguaros' "pleats" are clearly closer, making the whole plants look thinner. The cause is the longest drought in years (512 weeks) that ended with monsoon rains in June last year, but started again this summer when we had the second driest monsoon on record. For the year we've had 6 inches of rain, about half the average 11.5 inches of rain. And last month we experienced extreme drought over 75% of the state. What water there is evaporates in these conditions, and of course, in our day to day lives people don't stop drawing from the water supplies that remain.

So, the saguaro cacti are one sign of climate change, and just how tough 2020 has been. Luckily, they adapt and some new saguaros can find the few wet spots in the cracks and wetter slopes to get a start with their shallow roots. Humane Borders hasn't really adapted to drought so much as we've doubled down. We've continued regularly checking and refilling our barrels right through the summer and into the fall. We've kept our trucks ready for the rough roads, which means constant repairs, maintenance, and a new truck. Working with our sister organizations we've purchased thousands of dollars of food and medical supplies for migrants. The hot summer was brutal in terms of the number of deaths in the desert (see our website), but we're doing all we can in spite of climate change, and of course, an arbitrary, indifferent political climate.

COVID 19, however, has required us to adapt in terms of the numbers of people who directly interact with us as volunteers and witnesses. A small,

dedicated staff and volunteer crew have kept things rolling. We are grateful to people from around the country who have supported us financially this year, and encourage all who are reading this to join us in doubling down and adapting by donating what you can.

(Checks can be sent to PO Box 27024, Tucson, AZ, 85726, or visit our website to see the various ways to donate by credit card.)



# NOT A DOUBT IN MY MIND: HUMANE BORDERS'S WATER STATIONS SAVE LIVES

by Sharon Ray, Tucson Volunteer

From 2004 to 2015, I worked as a teacher in migrant education. I traveled to migrant camps in the middle of Ohio cornfields and gave classes to field workers and their children. It is in the middle of those Ohio cornfields where I first learned about Humane Borders.

My students and I were very close. It was easy to develop rapport with them since my grandparents came from Mexico and worked the fields. My migrant students were aware of my respect and admiration for them, and would often share their accounts of crossing the desert to get to the U.S.

The harrowing stories of my migrant students crossing the brutal desert often brought me to tears. The storytellers would begin weeping over the reality that the people who were supposed to be helping them, the coyotes, had other motives. More often than not, these people had no concern about the health and safety of those crossing. Sadly, I heard stories of robbery, assault, and people being left to die in the desert.

In addition to being treated badly by coyotes, my migrant students shared heart-wrenching incidences of being mistreated by border patrol agents. My students would often

ask why people hated them so much, when all they were trying to do was put food on the table for their families back home and escape the violence and poverty from whence they came.

Even though I heard so much sadness from the accounts of the journeys of my migrant students to the United States, some of my students shared the feelings of hope and joy that they had when they saw the blue flags swaying in the wind in the middle of the desert. These blue flags were signs directing them to the lifesaving water stations put out to save them by Humane Borders.

These water stations not only helped some of my migrant students to be able to physically continue their

journey, they also helped them emotionally and spiritually, by giving them hope that allowed them to once again believe in humanity. My students shared how they knew the water



Sharon Ray and William break from studies for play

stations were safe and that good people placed them there, because they had heard about Humane Borders and the water stations bearing the image of La Virgen De Guadalupe from friends who had crossed.

There is not a doubt in my mind that the water stations put out by Humane Borders saved the lives of some of my students. That is why I was compelled to look into this organization and meet these angels of the desert who make saving lives their mission.

After moving from Ohio to Tucson, Arizona, I met Humane Borders volunteers and went out into the Arizona Sonoran Desert with them to service the water stations. Every time I went out, it was an emotional and spiritual experience for me. I wondered if the station I was standing at was one of the stations that my students had come across, and I wondered if anyone offered my grandparents lifesaving humanitarian aid when they crossed.

After volunteering with Humane Borders, I truly believe that their mission is one of utmost importance. Humane Borders is comprised of good-hearted people, who realize the value of every human life. Despite challenges they encounter, whether they be climate related, political, or related to a lack of volunteers, the members of Humane Borders are committed to providing lifesaving humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable. It is critical to encourage and support their efforts which promote hope, love, life, and humanity.

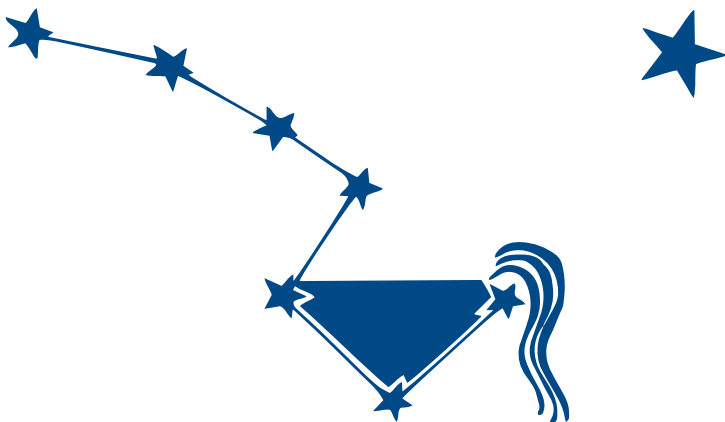
Sharon Ray  
Tucson, Arizona



Sharon Ray and Frank Sagona Volunteer for Humane Borders



Sharon Ray with one of her students in Iowa "pickle field"



# IT'S ON THE MAP – HUMANE BORDERS DEDICATES ED MCCULLOUGH WATER STATION

BY REBECCA FOWLER

*Tucson Samaritan Barry Gosling: Whenever visitors ask me how this all started and how we know where we are and where we're going, I give them "the Ed McCullough Story." I tell em' that Ed was out there walking the desert a couple of thousands of miles. Gosling breaks from his story and calls to Ed, "You don't have a record of that do you, Ed?" Says McCullough, "It's on the map."*

On August 20, 2020, a small group of masked Humane Borders and Tucson Samaritan volunteers gathered in the desert north and west of Tucson to dedicate one of Humane Border's newest water stations to Ed McCullough, a man who many in the Tucson desert aid community look up to as a living legend.

Since 2000, Humane Borders has built and maintained dozens of water stations located at strategic sites along the border where migrants cross vast, desolate desert mountainous spaces. Over the last twenty years, we have heard from a good number of border crossers who credit finding our water stations to saving their lives. So when Humane Borders commemorates a water station, we strive to remember individuals who have made a lot of impact serving the migrant community.

Humane Borders has named water stations after esteemed public figures like immigrant advocate Bishop Minerva Carcaño; former Inspector General of Mexico's National Commission on Human Rights Mauricio Farah Gebara; and more recently, *The Devil's Highway* author Luis Alberto Urrea and wife Cindy (who conducted much of the research that went into the book). But as Humane Borders Chair Doug Ruopp points out, we have a *special* group of stations that are named after the people who are all about the heart and soul of what we're trying to do, which is to *save lives*. And in our estimation, no one's work is more at the heart and soul of saving lives than that undertaken by migrant-trail mapping authority and Tucson desert humanitarian Ed McCullough.

Ed's wife and dedicated Tucson Samaritan Debbi McCullough recalls that back in 2003, before Ed started mapping migrant trails, volunteers working desert aid with Tucson Samaritans and No More Deaths knew locations where they'd encountered migrants by names like "the Dead

Suburban Wash," "Dead Cow Wash," or "The Oak Tree." But it wasn't until Ed started producing maps in a project that would encompass more than six years of walking migrant trails and hundreds of hours of meticulously mapping trails on GPS systems, that anyone could actually point to those locations on a map.



Ed McCullough Water Station

Debbi explains how Ed's project started out with mapping "a few hundred yards" and then "grew and grew until he was able to connect different trails and trail systems together." Says Debbi, "He started just driving the roads, and then he would walk a trail on both sides of the road, and then he'd come home and spend hours mapping the beginnings of trails. And then he'd go back and hike that trail to see where it led, and that would take several years." Two or three years into the project, says Debbi, Ed began to "get a long sense" of where the trails went, the direction that they were going, and he'd hike up to a mountain

pass to see where two or mails converged.

On the day of the ceremony, Reverend John Fife asked of Ed the answer to a question that was on the minds of those of us present. "Let's start with a confession," said Fife. "All of us have taken a stab at how many miles you've walked and mapped. It's time for a confession: I think you know. Just how many miles have you mapped?" Ed responded that because his first year of walking and mapping was accomplished without the benefit of a GPS, that he himself didn't know the exact answer. But he estimates that he mapped anywhere between 3,000 to 4,000 miles of migrant trails.

Thinking back on what desert aid was like before Ed McCullough mapped those thousands of miles, veteran Humane Borders and No More Deaths volunteer Lois Martin is "amazed" that "we didn't lose

some volunteers out there.” Martin remembers, “But then Ed arrived and he was without fear when it came to driving into the most remote and desolate of places. Sandy, muddy, whatever, he went! He was intrepid. He would go anyplace in order to map it!”

Humane Borders resident mapping wizard Mike Kreyche – who was mentored by McCullough - points out that McCullough’s mapping “resulted in a four-inch binder full of maps covering the south and west of Tucson and other areas as well.” These are the maps that desert aid workers Tucson Samaritans and No More Deaths use today to hike migrant trails to get food and water supplies to migrants. Says Kreyche, “Those maps, along with the GPS trainings that Ed gave, made it easy for a person to explore, even on their own, even not having been to those places before. Ed’s work enabled so many other people to hike trails to leave life-saving water supplies.”



Counterclockwise: Doug Ruopp, Bob Kee, Reverend John Fife, Debbi McCullough, Dr. Norma Price. Ed McCullough is front and center.

Since 2008, Ed McCullough’s work has also contributed to the work that we do at Humane Borders as reflected by the stark red dots found on our death maps (Visit our website and click on “Migrant Death Mapping”). Ed worked in partnership with the Pima County Medical Examiner’s Office to map the GPS coordinates where recovered human remains were found. Each dot represents the physical location where the remains of someone’s son, daughter, husband, wife, father, mother, sister, brother, loved one were recovered. McCullough’s maps thus serve an additional vital function apart from desert aid in raising public awareness of the many migrants who have lost their lives crossing.

I am proud and humbled to be among the amazing cast of characters present that day to honor Ed McCullough, and to hear everyone express their love and gratitude for the man and his phenomenal work.

Reverend Fife closed the ceremony reading the following blessing written by Southside Presbyterian Minister Allison Harrington:



Reverend John Fife Blesses Ed McCullough Station

*Blessed Are The Hands That Strike The Rock.*

As the people journeyed through the desert, they found they were without water.

The Lord said to Moses, “Strike the Rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.” (Exodus 17:6)

*Blessed are the hands that strike the rock  
Flooding the desert with water.*

*Blessed are the feet that hike the trail  
Walking in the holy footsteps of migrants.*

*Blessed are the voices that call out like choirs of angels:  
!Somos Amigos! Somos de la Iglesia! Tenemos agua y comida!*

*Blessed are the hands that heal  
Washing feet and bandaging blisters.*

*Blessed are the maps and logs and the GPS devices  
Sacred guides to saving lives.*

*Blessed are the gallons of water placed on dusty trails  
That make the desert bloom with life*

*Blessed are the make-shift shrines to those who did not make it*

*!Los Desconocidos Estan Presente!  
Blessed are the hands that strike the rock  
The hardened hearts of border patrol agents  
The seemingly insurmountable wall of hatred and fear  
The formidable border of death as a deterrent*

*Blessed are the hands that strike these rocks!*

*Blessed are Humane Borders, Tucson Samaritans, and No More Deaths*

*The hands that strike the rock  
Flooding the desert with life*

*Until no brother becomes lost never to be found  
Until no mother stumbles and falls never to rise  
Until no father is left behind with a jug of water to wait for help that may never come.*

*Blessed are the hands that strike the rock  
And flood the desert with life.*

## OUT-OF-STATE VOLUNTEER STORIES



Barbara Warren with granddaughter and Tucson resident Nicole Goddard

### **Barb Williams** **Indianapolis, Indiana**

I am from Indianapolis and am a member of a Catholic church whose congregation is approximately 60% Latino. A good number of these folks don't have papers. I have stood by along with other members of my congregation and have borne witness to the trials and tribulations that these beloved members of our community confront in their daily lives. Some of our members have been forcibly detained by ICE, others have lost jobs and have lost the capacity to adequately support families because they were denied drivers licenses. It saddens and angers me to watch the news and hear undocumented people referred to as "illegals," a label that robs them – and us – of our collective humanity.

Being a part of this community, I am also aware of the privileges I have that I did nothing to deserve, all on account of being white. In the summer of 2019, as I watched the news and observed from Indiana events unfolding on the border, seeing how families were torn apart and children detained separately from their parents, I thought that this would never happen to these families if they were white asylum seekers. I felt like I needed to gain a better understanding of immigration and asylum-seeking policies, so I

decided to travel to the border to Tucson, Arizona to gain some insight.

After conducting a little research, I was very impressed to find that there were a goodly number of Tucson organizations performing vital services on behalf of immigrants. For example, I was fortunate to procure economical accommodations with BorderLinks, an immigrant advocacy organization that offers educational programs and workshops for delegation groups and individuals who come from near and far.

Once in Tucson, I started my three-week tenure in Tucson volunteering for Casa Alitas, a Catholic organization that provides housing and hospitality for newly arrived migrant families bussed in by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Once families have requested and have been granted asylum (a very convoluted process in terms of which families win asylum and which ones are turned away), Casa Alitas welcomes families and provides them with hot meals, showers, changes of clothing, hygiene products, calls to family to check in, and travel arrangements.

On my first day with Humane Borders, I had no idea what to expect when I hopped into a two-ton truck to venture out into the desert on my first water run with Doug Ruopp. The Arizona Sonoran Desert in the winter is a very foreign sight to a girl from Indiana accustomed to snow in the Midwest. The starkness of the desert was in itself beauty to me. However, the longer I spent time in the desert, the more I realized the dangers of crossing. Doug explained the importance of the positioning of water stations and of the flags as a pinpoint to people who run out of water. As we bumped along in the truck, I could not help but think how difficult traveling on foot would be for people attempting to cross this vast desert space. I could not begin to imagine what this trek would be like for an individual on foot, much less for an entire family – for mothers and fathers carrying small children and fleeing violence in their own home countries. If any of us were threatened with the brand of violence that communities are facing in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, we would move heaven and earth to remove our children from the situation. And this is all these people are doing!

After going out with Humane Borders, I couldn't look at a desert landscape the same without thinking of unseen travelers trudging through the terrain. A day later, on a ninety-mile excursion to Phoenix from Tucson, I looked out the window at the vast desert landscape from the safety and cool comfort of our air-conditioned rental car. I wondered how many people were crossing just outside of our view.

I came to the border in an attempt to understand immigration policy more fully. I left not having gained a lot of insight into the policies, because even for the short time I was in Tucson, they seemed to change constantly. I did leave, however, with a greater awareness of community and appreciation of volunteers and organizations trying their best to make a transformative change on the border. The problems seem overwhelming at times, yet Humane Borders volunteers keep going out and doing their best



to make sure that those crossing the desert can find vital water to keep them alive. I am so very impressed with the compassion and empathy of all volunteers, programs and systems in place to help these travelers trying to better their lives and often to stay alive. I was hoping by now to be back working once more with the good people of Tucson, but Covid-19 had other plans! When it is all over, I will be back to help in any way I can.

Humane Borders, thank you so much for this opportunity and for your generosity. Please stay safe, secure, and healthy in these uncertain times.

Much Peace,  
Barb Williams  
Indianapolis, Indiana



Leti Iverson refills water station in the Arizona Sonoran Desert

## Ann Iverson Northern California

“I can’t do a lot, but I can do a little bit, and this is my little bit.” That’s how our driver, Mike Monroe, described his decision to volunteer with Humane Borders to help with the problems related to the immigration crisis. Mike and his wife Lesley were two of four Humane Borders workers my daughter, Leti, and I met while we were in Tucson.

Mike’s words resonated with me. Why had I come to volunteer with Humane Borders? I have always been a bit of activist, but what’s more, I am an adoptive mom of two girls from Guatemala. So, in 2018 when I began seeing pictures of children who looked like mine locked up in cages, I just knew I had to do something to help at the border. But what could I do? It wasn’t like I was a doctor or a lawyer who could provide immediate professional help to those waiting at the border. And as a woman in my sixties, there were limits to the physical challenges I could tackle. But after researching Tucson organizations that provided assistance on the border and learning of the work done by Humane Borders, I knew I found a place where I could do “my little bit.”

And so in October of 2019, my older daughter Leti and I volunteered with Humane Borders on three different water runs. We traveled to remote stretches of desert along Arizona’s border with Mexico, and for three days, we serviced multiple water stations that have been strategically situated along paths migrants frequent on their dangerous crossings into the U.S. Each day we accompanied two veteran volunteers who were especially trained to drive up and down steep, rutted roads while hauling a 320-gallon tank of water and other supplies on the back of the truck.

We beheld beautiful landscapes of cactus-covered plains, ranchlands, and federal wilderness preserves with unusual ancient mountains ringing the valley to the east and west of us. Due to the rain the week prior to our visit, the desert was surprisingly green and covered in wildflowers. Mike and Lesley had moved to Arizona from out of state not long before, and they happily shared with us what they had learned about the local desert geography and natural world. Because this place was so appealing to the eye, it would have been easy to feel like we were on vacation if we didn’t know that so many people had died attempting to cross this desert landscape.

No, this was not a vacation. We were there to help people who were traveling on foot through the beautiful but deadly desert. Mike explained that even if migrants were nearby, it was unlikely we would ever see them. Migrants don’t usually reveal themselves to people who they’re not sure of – they won’t come out from under cover unless they’re in mortal danger. Dressed in the camouflage paid for with money migrants pay to coyotes to help them cross, in the desert they would be invisible to our eyes. Mike said that we might find migrant belongings – water bottles, clothes, or other items which are discarded along the trails or abandoned on roads where travelers are picked up or apprehended by Border Patrol.

We visited multiple water stations each day. Most of the time, we found water barrels full, but other times, we found that there had been usage which indicated that perhaps as many as five people had taken water since the station was last checked the prior week. These barrels were refilled, but first we tested the station’s water to ensure that algae content was not too high, and we tasted and smelled the water to check for quality or tampering.

On our second day out, we witnessed a stronger reminder of the seriousness of our mission. We discovered that vigilantes had vandalized a water station that was located on private ranchlands with permission from the landowner. The flag which makes the site visible from a distance had been tossed to the ground, the flagpole

had been bent, and the water barrel was riddled with shotgun holes and emptied of its water. Suddenly we were reminded of the cross that we had seen our first day out which marked the site where the remains of a migrant were found the prior year. His



Leti Iverson Replenishes Water Station

remains were discovered less than 100 yards from a water station which had been similarly vandalized. We carefully and solemnly replaced the flag, stand, and water barrel with new ones.

We were once again reminded that no one makes this journey lightly. Flyers distributed along the border in Mexico warn migrants not to attempt the journey: “¡No Vaya Usted! ¡No Hay Suficiente Agua! ¡No Vale La Pena! (Don’t go! There’s isn’t enough water! It isn’t worth the pain!) Crossing the desert is much too dangerous, and many people have died trying. But for many migrants, there is no legal path of entry. They fear even bigger dangers back home, and so they are willing to take the risk.

A month after our time with Humane Borders, I [Ann Iverson] traveled to Brownsville, Texas to assist “Team Brownsville” in their efforts to prepare, deliver, and serve meals to the 2000 asylum seekers who at that time were living in a homeless camp at the base of the international bridge in Matamoros, Mexico. Unlike the migrants who attempt to slip into the US undetected at the Arizona border, these migrants were hoping they could enter the “right” way, the legal way. However, the federal government has placed increasingly more difficult hurdles in their path in attempts to discourage granting of asylum.

Early last year, the migrants waited patiently for their turn to enter the country and apply for asylum. Many people would wait for several weeks to apply for asylum since applications were “metered” – only a few were allowed each day. Shortly thereafter, the ironically named Migrant Protection Protocol or “Remain in Mexico” program was initiated, and after applying for asylum migrants were compelled to return to Mexico to wait months for their court date. The numbers of people waiting at the border then



Tucson Samaritans and Humane Borders Volunteers very often find migrant belongings like these shoes that have been left behind. Photo Courtesy of Debbi McCullough

swelled to tens of thousands. Now, finally in the midst of the global pandemic, all hearings of applications for asylum have ceased. Yet thousands of people are still waiting at the border.

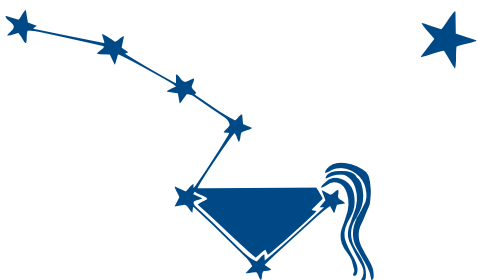
I wonder what will happen to the migrants who have waited patiently to enter the U.S. the “right way.” Will they have to give up and head home to the country they were forced to flee in the first place? Will they find some way to eek out a new life in Mexico? Or, will many of these asylum seekers choose the perilous path of entry through treacherous desert landscapes, hoping they can make the crossing undetected to finally reunite with loved ones in the U.S.? There is some consolation knowing that many might rely on the life-giving waters provided by Humane Borders volunteers.

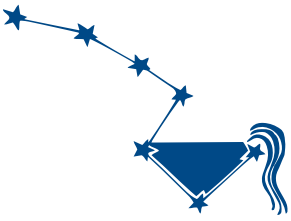
### Haunted by a Little Girl’s Shoe Leti Iverson

When I was a small child, a young pastoral intern came to our church to give a slide show presentation on what was happening along the border in the Arizona Sonoran Desert. He had just completed a stint with a desert humanitarian aid organization that provided water to migrants in the desert. I was too young to understand everything that I saw on those slides, but I remember seeing a photo of a little girl’s plastic shoe

that had been found in the desert. The shoe was like shoes that I wore and I wondered what happened to her. Was she okay? Or did she die? Where is she now? The picture of that little girl’s shoe made a lasting impression on me.

Another way you can support the work that we do at Humane Borders is to purchase gifts like t-shirts and caps for donations. Visit Humane Borders at <https://humaneborders.org/> and click on "Gifts for Donations"





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P.O. Box 27024, Tucson, AZ 85726  
info@humaneborders.org  
www.humaneborders.org



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FRONTIERAS COMPASIVAS  
**HUMANE BORDERS**

