



P.O.V.'s "Al Otro Lado"

By Natalia Almada

Tuesday, August 1, 2006, 10 p.m. on PBS (Check local listings)

Filmmakers' Statement

In Mexico there is a saying, "Poor Mexico so close to the United States and so far from God." This is no truer anywhere than in the north of Mexico where the world's most powerful, wealthiest country is just a stone's throw away. My family has lived in Sinaloa for six generations, but it was my generation that saw how free trade with our wealthy neighbor changed our economy and culture. This compelled me to make a documentary that looked at the economic crisis that was forcing so many young people—in fact, leaving our towns without productive young men—to immigrate or to traffic.

Corridos are virtually the only music you hear in the streets of Sinaloa. For over 200 years it has been the musical underground newspaper that today tells the news of the illegal drug traffickers and immigrants, people who in the rural communities are considered not criminals, but heroes because they provide necessary jobs, infrastructure and have a dispensable income. I decided to use *corrido* music as a thread throughout the documentary because not only did it provide some culture, color and texture to an otherwise glum reality, but it was also was a way to hear the voice of the people most affected by the economic crisis and least heard in the mainstream media.

I met Magdiel while shooting at the fishing boat factory in La Reforma. I had heard that there were local composers who sang about fishermen who traffic, so I asked the owner of the boat factory if he knew of any such composers. "My nephew" he answered. When Magdiel sang his *corridos*, "El Navegador" and "Lobo Marino," and then told us of his need to get out of La Reforma because of the economic hardships, I knew we had to follow his story. Then one day when I was in New York City I got a call from Magdiel saying he had met a *coyote* who had agreed to take him "to the other side" for free, in exchange for a *corrido* that he would compose about him. I had to follow him. This experience not only gave the documentary a narrative climax I never imagined when I conceived of the project, but it also changed and shaped my own views on the immigrant experience, which I have tried to bring to the forefront in **Al Otro Lado**.

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