



Credit

Mark Abramson

An Immigrant's  
Dream for a Better Life

By David Gonzalez Jan. 21, 2015

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The pictures of Blanca's life in California look ordinary: relaxing with her parents on the banks of a river, dressed up for her quinceañera, studying at school, moving into her first off-campus apartment. Yet to her — and to thousands of other immigrants whose parents brought them to this country without authorization — the pictures represent lives that reach for the future, aware of the obstacles that could one day take it all away.

The joy that advocates felt [last November](#) when President Obama announced broader initiatives to grant legal status to children and parents who are here without authorization has now turned to fear. Republicans in Congress have announced that they plan to undo the president's executive actions. Those moves have already prompted debate and protests where the issues will be put into high relief.

"That's a great way to start the conversation, but it becomes the theater of politics," said [Mark Abramson](#), a photographer who has been documenting Blanca and her family since 2013. "The children start to be seen as lone wolves, but what about the parents that brought them here? I wanted to do a project that encompassed the students in an intimate way, but also the parents, since I don't think that was being addressed."

Photo



The family moved Blanca into her first apartment in Berkeley, Calif. Undocumented immigrants typically have a difficult time signing legal papers, which would include a lease. Aug. 27, 2013.

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His project “Neither Here Nor There” – which includes a short documentary he did with Gabriela Bortolamedi – details the lives of Blanca; her parents, Eduardo and Gloria; and her 10-year-old sister, Sonia, who is the only family member with United States citizenship. The project offers a close, quiet look at Eduardo’s long days with the landscaping business he has built up since leaving Mexico and moving to Bakersfield, Calif., in 2000, when he was lured by promises of easy money. Mr. Abramson shows Gloria in the fields, where Blanca, 20, worked as a child. And of, course, it tracks the life of Blanca, whose days are split between her pre-med studies at the University of California, Berkeley and phone calls with her father to help him with everything from translations to accounting.

“The politicians talk about us like we are only numbers,” Blanca said. “But we are people, human beings, with families.”

Mr. Abramson said he wanted to explore the world of young people like Blanca — commonly known as Dreamers, from federal legislation known as the Dream Act — ever since 2010, when he encountered young advocates in Washington as a video intern at The Washington Post. The legislation failed, but his interest stayed strong. On one level, he could relate, because he was an immigrant himself — his parents were Soviet Jews who had come to this country in 1978, then returned to Moscow shortly after Mr. Abramson was born in 1988. He and his mother returned to the United States 10 years later, after stops in Austria and Spain.

“Why is it that we, as Jewish immigrants, had one way of immigrating and have an easier path, and all these kids had a different experience?” Mr. Abramson said. “I moved around so many times. Why was I so privileged and why do others have a different experience at the southern border?”

He first met Blanca in 2013, after she had just enrolled at Berkeley through a program that allowed immigrants like her to qualify for in-state tuition. She had also – thanks to changes in the law introduced

by the Obama administration — been able to obtain a more stable status that let young people like her get a driver's license, open bank accounts and the like.

## Photo



Blanca watching a telenovela on her laptop in her Berkeley apartment while cooking dinner. Nov. 23, 2014.

## Credit Mark Abramson

Although Blanca understood what Mr. Abramson and his partner wanted to do, it took a bit to explain the project to her parents. It helped that he spoke Spanish, did not use their surname in order to protect them as much as he could and, above all, patiently eased in. He would follow Blanca at school, or her father tending to the homes of his client or her mother picking grapes. When he visited the family, he would crash on the floor.

“It’s really humbling, this whole experience, for somebody to allow you into intimate quarters,” Mr. Abramson said. “It really has been a blessing. They have gotten accustomed to us. It took time, but they started to make us part of their lives, including us in happy moments like family gatherings and baptisms.”

When President Obama announced his expansion of immigration policy in November, Mr. Abramson said the family seemed more hopeful than ever. Gloria, Blanca’s mother, was especially excited, he said.

“It was heartbreaking,” Mr. Abramson recalled. “Gloria said, ‘Does this mean I can go back and visit my mom?’ I knew she would not be able to. Blanca might be able to travel with a school program, but her parents would not be able to. All they want to do is go back, but what about their daughters? The kids don’t know anything else but this country.”

Which is why the parents agreed to allow their lives to be documented.

“There is a lot of love and incredible sacrifice,” Mr. Abramson said. “Everything is for their kids. They

always told me that hopefully this project can help other people. But if it helps their daughters, that is what's most important.

Photo



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