

ON FOOT

TRAVERSING THE MOST PERILOUS
ROUTE TO REACH SAFETY

TEXT AND PICTURES BY
HUGO GONZALEZ

BASED ON TRUE STORIES OF
EXTRACONTINENTAL MIGRATION.



**WARNING: This comic contains
sensitive content about sexual
violence.**

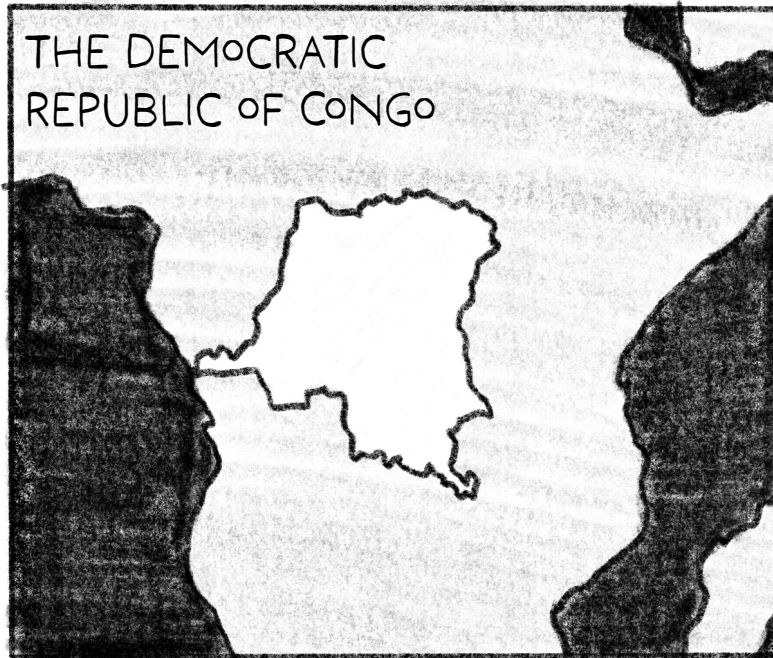
This comic was written and illustrated by:
Hugo Gonzalez
for Doctors Without Borders

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR SPEAKING WITH ME. IS IT OKAY IF I ASK YOU A FEW QUESTIONS?

YES, OF COURSE, THANK YOU FOR SEEING US.

WHAT'S YOUR NAME AND WHERE ARE YOU COMING FROM?

MY NAME IS THERESE AND THIS IS MY SON, JEAN. WE ARE FROM THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO.



HOW OLD ARE THE BOTH OF YOU?

I'M 34 AND JEAN IS 11.



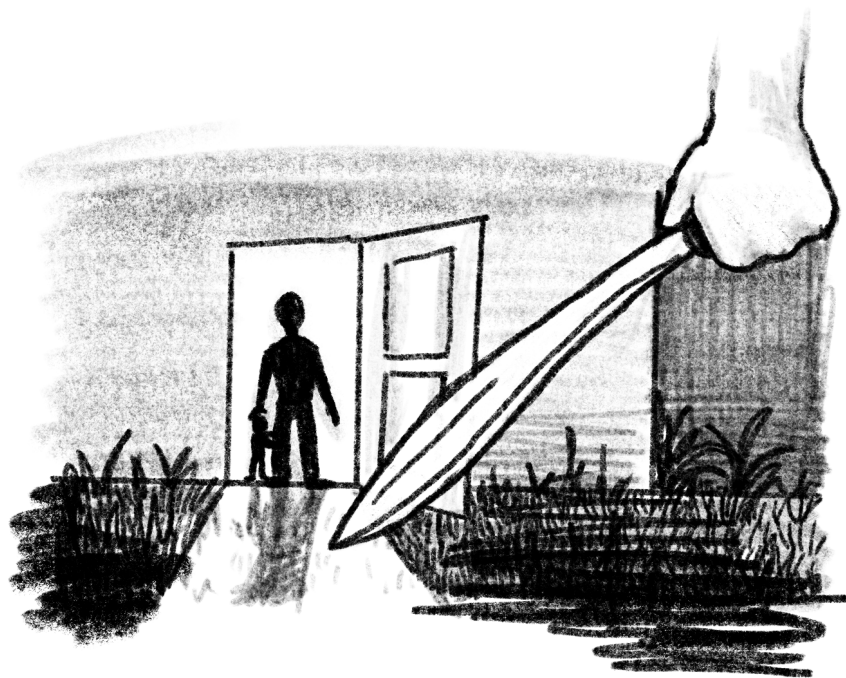
WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO LEAVE YOUR HOME?



WE WERE DISPLACED BECAUSE OF VIOLENCE IN OUR TOWN. I HAD FRIENDS TELLING US THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD GIVE REFUGE.

DID ANY VIOLENCE HAPPEN TO YOU?

WHEN THE ARMED MEN CAME, FIRST THEY KILLED OUR NEIGHBOR. THIS WAS WHEN WE STARTED MAKING PLANS TO LEAVE.



MY HUSBAND WAS A LEADER IN OUR COMMUNITY, SO THE NEXT DAY THEY TOOK HIM. RIGHT IN FRONT OF US.

WE STILL DON'T KNOW WHERE HE IS. WE HAD TO LEAVE TO PROTECT JEAN.

MY HEART WAS BEATING SO FAST. I'M STILL SCARED ABOUT WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN IF I GO BACK.

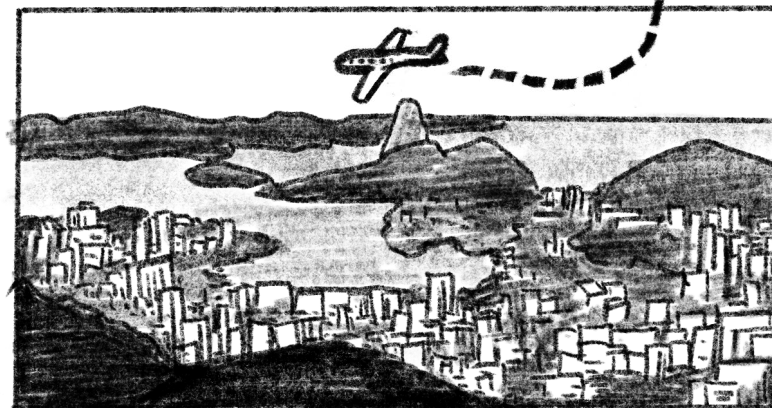
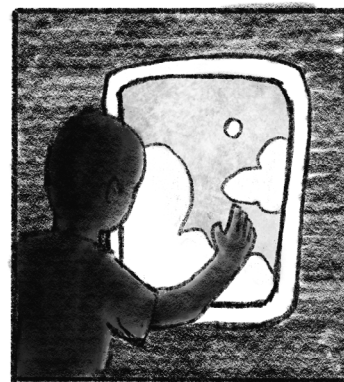
THAT'S HORRIBLE I'M SO SORRY THAT HAPPENED. WHERE DID YOU GO AFTER?



WE FIRST ESCAPED TO ANGOLA.

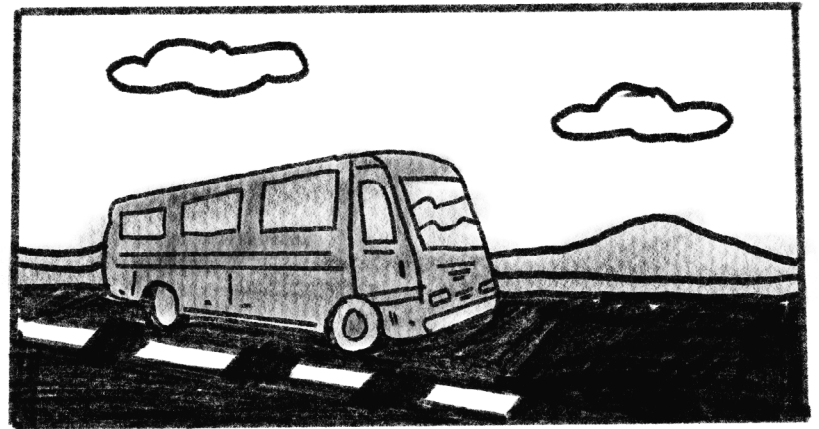
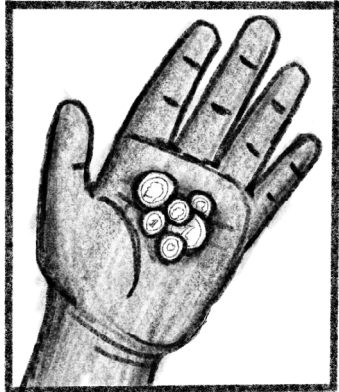
WE LIVED THERE FOR TWO MONTHS WAITING FOR OUR BRAZILIAN VISA.

WHEN WE FINALLY GOT APPROVED, WE TOOK A BUS TO ETHIOPIA AND FLEW TO BRAZIL.



I WAITED IN BRAZIL FOR THREE MONTHS.

I PICKED UP ANY JOB I COULD FIND. I WAS SAVING
UP LITTLE BY LITTLE UNTIL I HAD ENOUGH TO KEEP
MOVING.



FROM BRAZIL WE TOOK A BUS TO BOLIVIA, FROM THERE
TO PERU, THEN ECUADOR, THEN COLOMBIA.



COLOMBIA



AND DID YOU PASS THROUGH THE DARIÉN GAP?

THAT WAS THE HARDEST PART...



WE SPENT FOUR DAYS IN
THE JUNGLE.

YOU WALK FROM 6AM
TO 6PM. UNTIL THE SUN
GOES DOWN.

THROUGH DENSE BRUSH
AND WAIST-HIGH WATER.

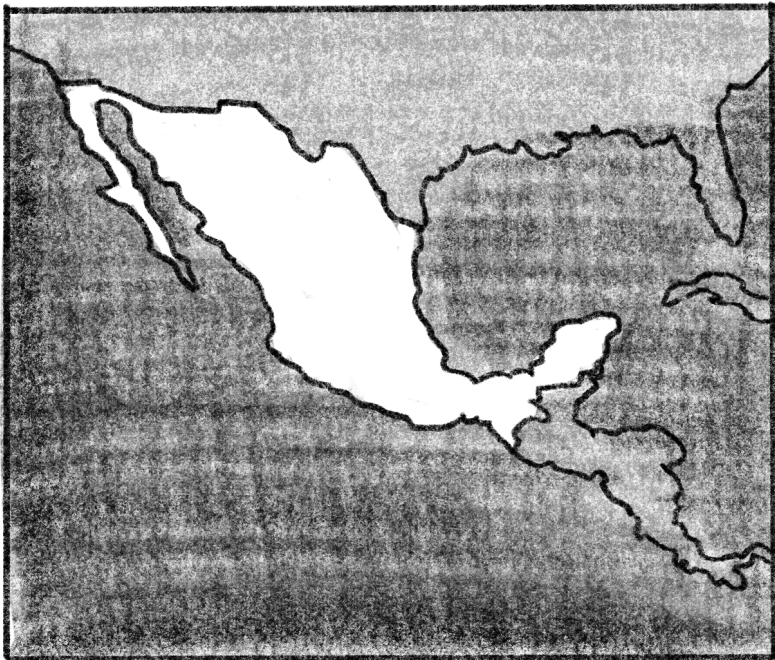


WE CAME ACROSS THE BODIES OF DEAD
PEOPLE.

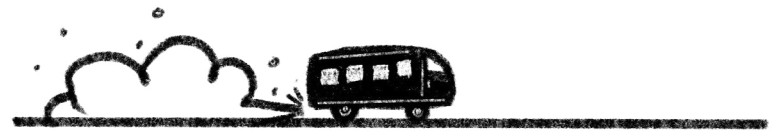
MANY FAMILIES HAD ENDURED VIOLENCE.

AND SOON, SO DID WE...

MEXICO



AFTER THAT WE CONTINUED ON BY BOAT, BUS,
AND ON FOOT THROUGH CENTRAL AMERICA,
BEFORE WE ARRIVED HERE IN MEXICO.



WE ENTERED THROUGH CHIAPAS AND
TRAVERSED THE MOUNTAINS OF OAXACA.

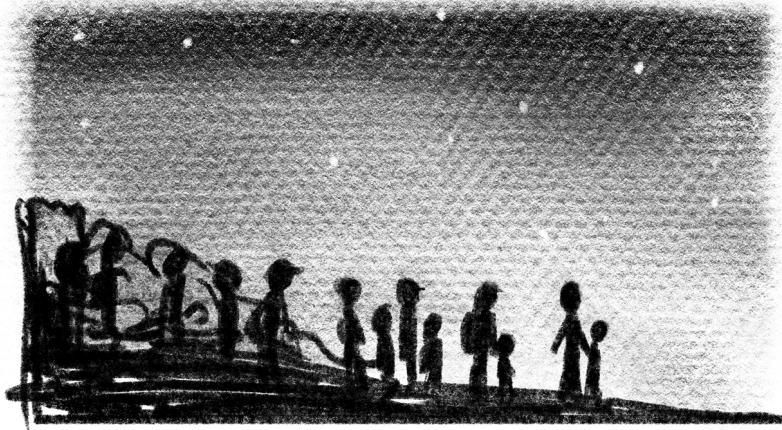


WHEN WE ARRIVED IN OAXACA, WE
ENCOUNTERED MEN WITH GUNS.

DO YOU KNOW WHO STOPPED YOU?

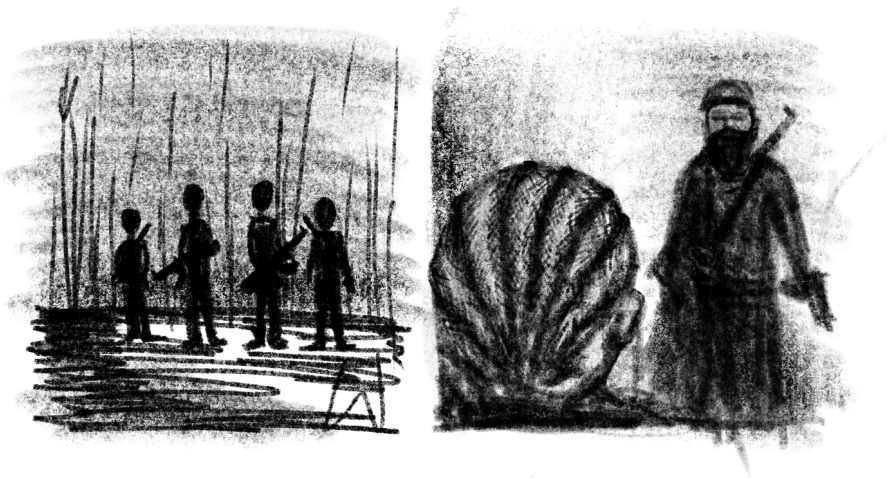
I'M NOT SURE.

WHAT HAPPENED?



WE WERE TRAVELING ON FOOT IN A
GROUP. THE MEN POINTED GUNS AT US
AND THEY BEAT US UP.

THEY STRIPPED ALL OF US.



MEN, WOMEN, CHILDREN.

THEY TORE OFF MY CLOTHES WITH KNIVES.



I BEGGED FOR MERCY.

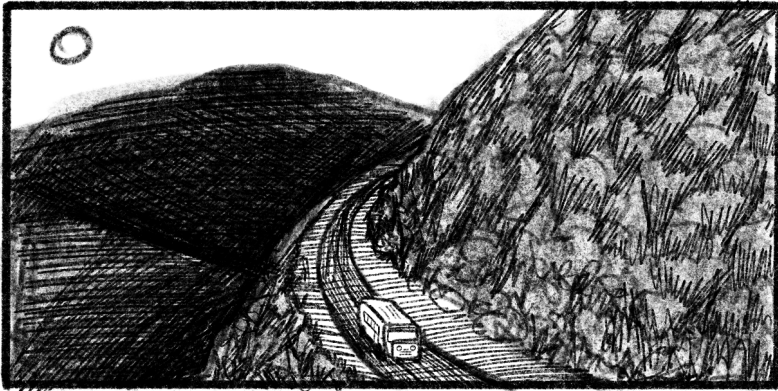
PLEASE LET US GO.

off...

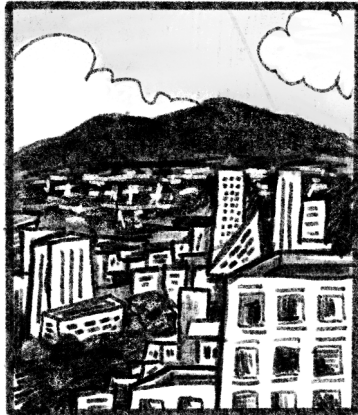
PLEASE

PLEASE STOP

WE HAD TO KEEP MOVING.



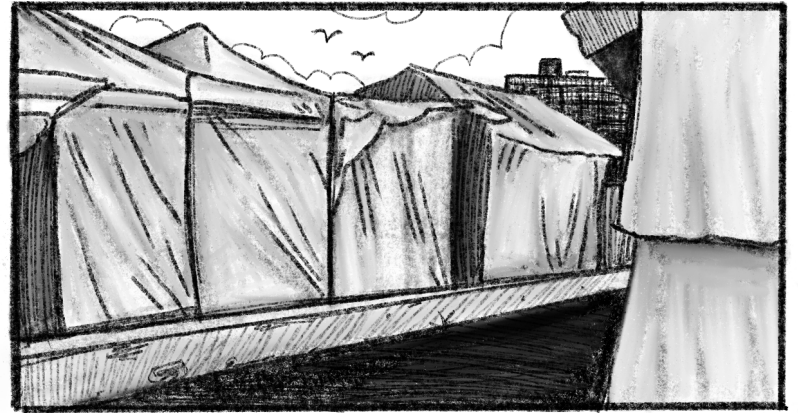
STOPPING BRIEFLY IN
CHOLULA.



BEFORE REACHING
MEXICO CITY.



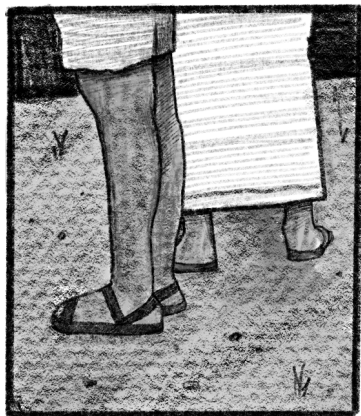
YESTERDAY WE HEARD YOU OFFER MEDICAL
SERVICES AND WERE HELPING PEOPLE MAKE
THEIR APPOINTMENT TO APPLY FOR ASYLUM.



OF COURSE WE HELP!



WHERE WILL YOU GO NEXT?



WE'RE WAITING TO
HEAR BACK ABOUT OUR
APPOINTMENT.

BUT TOMORROW WE LEAVE
FOR THE BORDER.



AND IT'S JUST YOU TRAVELING?

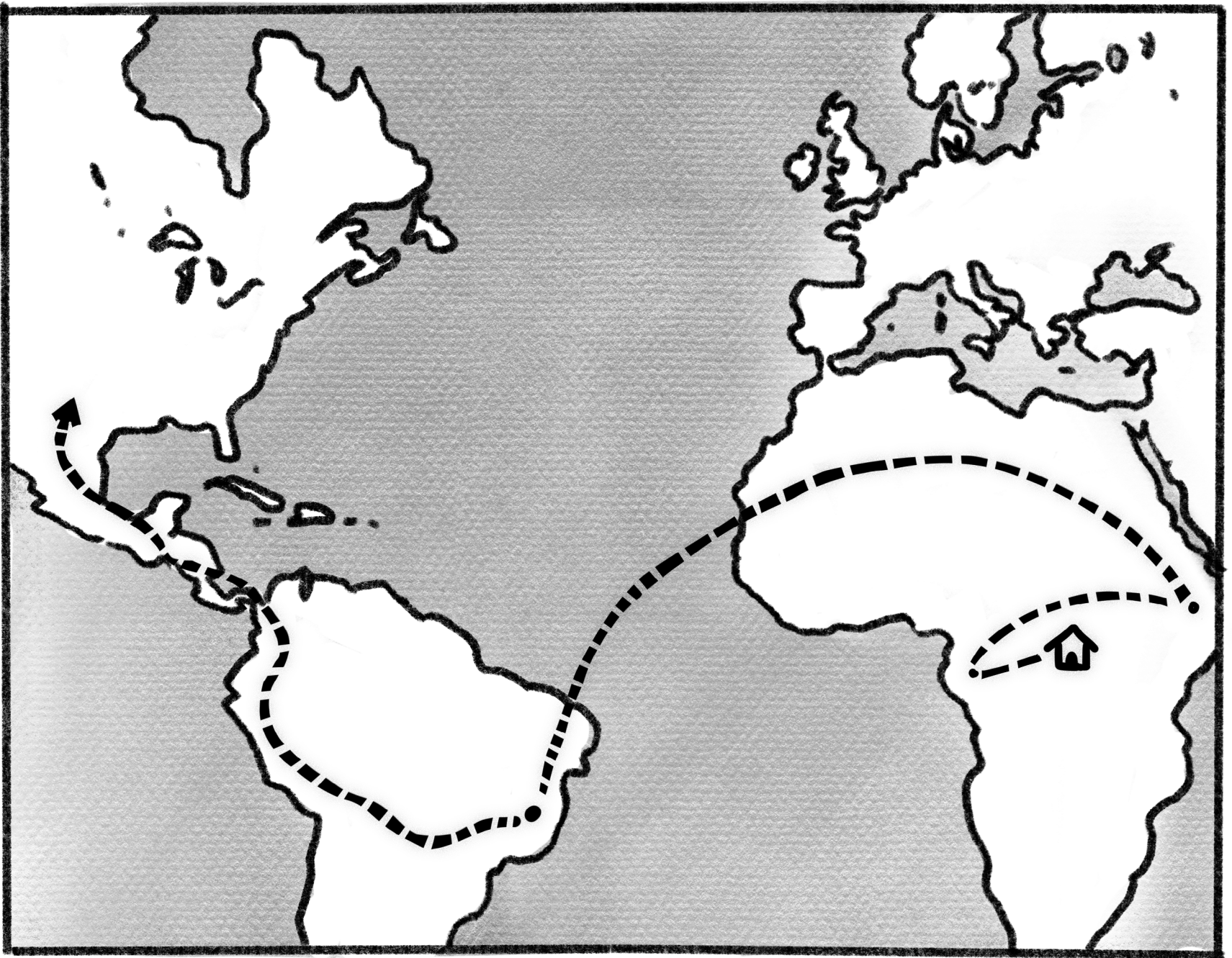
ONLY ME AND JEAN. WE ARE MEETING
OUR FAMILY IN THE UNITED STATES.

WOW. HOW DID YOU DO MAKE THAT ENTIRE
JOURNEY JUST THE TWO OF YOU?

...ON FOOT.



THERESE & JEAN'S JOURNEY



EPILOGUE

In 2023, the Biden administration began requiring people seeking asylum at the southern US border to do so using the CBP One mobile app as part of a series of policies aimed at curbing migration. These policies left many people like Therese and Jean stranded for weeks or months in dangerous Mexican border cities as they waited for appointments to begin the asylum process, often without access to essential services and at risk of being harmed by criminal groups.

In January 2025, this sole, flawed pathway for asylum requests was closed when the Trump administration removed scheduling functionality from the CBP One app. Vulnerable people waiting at the southern US border—including those who had already scheduled appointments, like Therese and Jean—were left with even fewer options seek asylum.

Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is an independent international medical humanitarian organization that helps people in need in more than 70 countries around the world. In Latin America, MSF teams provide health care, mental health support, health education services, and cultural mediation to people on the move along migration routes in Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Panama.

MSF believes that our principles of impartiality and neutrality are not synonymous with silence. Our teams bear witness to the experiences of the people we help, and we speak out about the conditions that cause them harm.

In the Americas, where US migration policies have put thousands of already vulnerable people traversing the Latin American migration corridor at even greater risk, we have repeatedly called for humane policies and the establishment of protection mechanisms to safeguard their health, safety, and dignity.

Visit www.doctorswithoutborders.org to learn more about our medical humanitarian work and get involved.



