

# WHAT WE LEAVE BEHIND

*A Film by Iliana Sosa*



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71 Minutes

Publicity Materials:

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1FOyWM9JhbsaF-aKgHtbUOy\\_5YCqL5uJn?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1FOyWM9JhbsaF-aKgHtbUOy_5YCqL5uJn?usp=sharing)

Social Handles:

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/whatweleavebehindfilm/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/WhatWeLeaveBehindFilm>

Iliana Sosa's Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/la\\_ili\\_sosa/](https://www.instagram.com/la_ili_sosa/)

Iliana Sosa's Twitter: <https://twitter.com/Borderchild>

Iliana Sosa's Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/lailisosa>

### **Logline:**

After a lifetime of bus rides to the US to visit his children, Julián quietly starts building a house in rural Mexico. In filming his work, his granddaughter crafts a personal and poetic love letter to him and his homeland.

### **Synopsis:**

At the age of 89, Julián takes one last bus ride to El Paso, Texas, to visit his daughters and their children — a lengthy trip he has made without fail every month for decades. After returning to rural Mexico, he quietly starts building a house in the empty lot next to his home. In the absence of his physical visits, can this new house bridge the distance between his loved ones?

Over several years, director Iliana Sosa films her grandfather's work, gently sifting through Julián's previously unspoken memories brought up by the construction project and revealing both the daily pragmatism and poetry of his life. *WHAT WE LEAVE BEHIND* unfolds as a love letter to her grandfather, as well as an intimate and insightful exploration of Iliana's own relationship with him and his homeland.

### **Director's Statement:**

I have vivid memories of my grandfather Julián's visits to my home in El Paso. He would come by bus every month from Durango, Mexico, and visit for just a day, bringing jamoncillo, chile, and Mexican candy. He would smell of earth, his hands weathered from working the land all of his life. My entire family has made a living by the labor of their hands. They have worked as housekeepers, construction workers, and nannies. I'm the first in my family to go to college — let alone to become an artist — and my awareness of that privilege is baked into the self-reflexivity of *What We Leave Behind*.

My original intention in making this film was to explore my grandfather's work as a bracero and bring awareness to a period in United States history that many Americans don't know about. Braceros were agricultural workers brought to the US from Mexico during a temporary WWII labor shortage. While in the US, they were notoriously exploited for their manual labor — the word *bracero* means "one who works with his arms" — then forcefully repatriated when American xenophobia began to escalate. I was interested in understanding my grandfather's experiences as a bracero: the realities of a life moving between countries, the efforts to unite a family despite legal, financial, geographic, and cultural barriers.

Over years of production, I filmed numerous bus trips with my grandfather Julián, traveling back and forth between El Paso and Durango to capture his everyday life and, in turn, becoming closer to him. Growing up, I had trouble understanding Julián's rural dialect, his small-town habits, and his personal values. But making this film allowed me to get to know a man whom I hardly knew despite seeing him every month. Julián gladly welcomed me into his life, showing

me around Durango and indulging my questions about the past. Filmmaking pulled me closer to him, across the border and into his home. And as he began construction on a new house in Durango — intended for the whole family, on both sides of the border — the project's focus and approach shifted to something more personal. It allowed me to explore the ways migration has affected our family dynamics and shaped my identity, and it gave me space to reflect on the nuanced emotional and cultural realities of being part of a diaspora.

*What We Leave Behind* honors my family and tells their story — the story of people we don't often get to see on screen — with honesty and tenderness. It explores legacy, loss, and bonds across great distances. In light of the pandemic, I believe those themes are more resonant than ever. My hope is that people who have experienced the loss of a loved one will be able to connect to the film and find some healing.

—Iliana Sosa

## **Bios:**

### **Iliana Sosa – Director/Producer/Cinematographer**

Iliana Sosa is a documentary and narrative fiction filmmaker based in Austin, Texas. A former Bill Gates Millennium Scholar, she was born and raised in El Paso, Texas, by Mexican immigrant parents. Iliana's documentary short "An Uncertain Future," co-directed with Chelsea Hernandez and co-produced by Firelight Media and Field of Vision, premiered at the 2018 SXSW Film Festival, where it won a Jury Award for Best Texas Short. She co-produced the Emmy-nominated feature documentary *Building the American Dream* (SXSW 2019) and was field producer for the Emmy-nominated POV documentary series *And She Could Be Next*. Iliana has been a Firelight Media Impact Producer Fellow, Sundance Institute Development Fellow, Women at Sundance Adobe Fellow, and Berlinale Talents participant. Her work has been supported by JustFilms/Ford Foundation, Field of Vision, Austin Film Society, and WarnerMedia 150, among others, and Iliana has participated in the True/False Catapult Retreat, The Gotham Documentary Lab, the Jacob Burns Film Center Residency, and the Logan Nonfiction Program with *What We Leave Behind*, her first documentary feature. Iliana was named one of *Filmmaker Magazine's* "25 New Faces of Independent Film" in 2020 and one of DOC NYC's "40 Under 40" in 2021. She holds an MFA in film production and directing from UCLA and is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Radio-Television-Film at UT-Austin.

### **Emma D. Miller – Producer**

Emma D. Miller is a documentary filmmaker and creative consultant based in Los Angeles. In her role as development executive for nonfiction at Concordia Studio, she worked on Oscar-nominated and Emmy-winning projects that premiered at Sundance, Tribeca, and Telluride, including *Time* (Amazon Studios); *Boys State* (Apple TV+/A24); *Bloody Nose, Empty Pockets* (Utopia); *Homeroom* (Hulu); and *Procession* (Netflix). She headed development of new projects

for Edgeline Films; served as the casting associate for the first season of Edgeline's acclaimed Showtime series *Couples Therapy*; and was associate producer of the Oscar-nominated short documentary *Knife Skills*, which was acquired by *The New Yorker*/Condé Nast Entertainment. She was also associate producer of the Sundance award-winning feature documentary *Unrest*, which was broadcast on PBS's *Independent Lens*, acquired by Netflix, and shortlisted for an Academy Award. Previously, she was programming manager at the Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, where she oversaw all submissions to the Oscar-qualifying festival and managed the film selection process.

### **Isidore Bethel – Editor / Co-Producer**

Isidore Bethel is a filmmaker and educator. Films he has edited and produced include Laurent Bécue-Renard's *Of Men and War* (Cannes), Juan Manuel Sepúlveda's *La Balada del Oppenheimer Park* (Mexican Academy Award Nominee), Juan Pablo González's *Caballerango* (IDFA), Daniel Hymanson's *So Late So Soon* (True/False), Toby Bull's *Some Kind of Intimacy* (Viennale), and Dominique Cabrera's *Grandir* (ACID Cannes). His directorial debut, *Liam*, received the Paris LGBTQ+ Film Festival's Jury Prize, and his second film, *Acts of Love*, received Tacoma's Best Documentary Award after premiering at Hot Docs. *Filmmaker Magazine* included him among its "25 New Faces of Independent Film" in 2020. A graduate of Harvard, SAIC, and the École Normale Supérieure, he has taught at La Fémis, Sarah Lawrence College, and Parsons Paris.

### **Julián Moreno – Film Protagonist**

Julián Moreno was born in Primo de Verdad, a village of about 1,000 inhabitants in Mexico's northern state of Durango, on January 9, 1930. As a teenager, he worked construction jobs in his hometown with other locals, including the father of the woman he'd marry, Lidia Calderón. In the 1950s, he began work as a bracero, a seasonal agricultural worker, in the United States. During months-long stints in states such as Texas, Oklahoma, Utah, Colorado, and California, he picked strawberries, peppers, tomatoes, and cotton. Back home on his own land in Durango, he grew chilis, beans, watermelon, and corn. He traveled between Mexico and the US for most of his adult life — hitchhiking, sharing rides with friends, and taking the bus. When Julián was 40, his wife Lidia died, and he began raising his seven children on his own. He never remarried. Five of his children immigrated to the United States, but his permanent home remained in Durango. Julián lived there with his son Jorge, who lost his sight when he was young, until he died on December 8, 2019 with his children and grandchildren at his bedside. He'd stopped working only a few weeks earlier. Julián liked to say, "*Voy a ver cómo amaneció el mundo*" — "Let's see how the world woke up today."

## **End Credits**

### **With**

Julián Moreno

### **Directed by**

Iliana Sosa

### **Edited by**

Isidore Bethel

### **Produced by**

Emma D. Miller

### **Produced by**

Iliana Sosa

### **Co-Producer**

Isidore Bethel

### **Consulting Producers**

Katy Drake Bettner

Farihah Zaman

### **Writers**

Iliana Sosa

Isidore Bethel

### **Cinematographers**

Iliana Sosa

Judy Phu

Monica Wise

### **Sound Recordist**

Glenda Charles

### **Featuring**

Jorge Moreno

María Elia Sosa

Herminia Moreno

Rosa Lidia Moreno

Erasmo Alvarado

Juan Carlos "Pepino" Romero Alvarado  
Efraín "La Borreguilla" Moreno  
Walter René Moreno  
Sergio "Cabañas" Moreno

Marisol Alvarado  
José Guadalupe Alvarado  
Jesús Alvarado  
Guadalupe Iliana Alvarado

Pinto

**Additional Editor**

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**Teaser Editor**

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Paloma Martinez  
Andrés Treviño

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Laura Jáquez Bustillos  
Mina Fitzpatrick

**Sound Designer and Supervisor**

Lena Esquenazi

**Dialogue Editor**

Heidy Carranza

**Backgrounds Editor**

Pablo Fernández

**Foley**

Estudios Churubusco

**Foley Artist**

Alfredo Romero

**Foley Recordist**

Eduardo Gaytán

**Premix**

Pablo Lach

**Splendor Omnia Mix**

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**Composer**

Camilla Uboldi

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Splendor Omnia

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**Colorist and Post-Production Supervisor**

Ernie Schaeffer

**Post-Production Coordinator**

David Londoño

**Accountant for Splendor Omnia**

Marivel Villamil

**Post-Production Assistant**

Lucas Sylleros

**Conform**

Martin Dávalos

Isaac D. Hernández

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*Courtesy of the Gotham Week Project Market Filmflow Award*

Nice Dissolve

Pierce Varous

**"San Juan del Río"**

*Arranged for the film and Performed by*

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Higinio Chavarría Romero

Fidel Elizalde García

Guadalupe Salazar Vázquez

Ofelia Elizalde García

**Music Supervisor**

Fernando Heftye

**Grant Consultant**

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Amy E. Mitchell

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Arturo González Villaseñor

Emma D. Miller

Iliana Sosa

**Closed Captions**

Bridget Melton

**Title Design**

Yen Tan

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Logan Nonfiction Program

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