



Photos courtesy of Priscilla Gonzalez Sainz

**ARACELI GUERRERO**, an immigration lawyer based in Santa Ana, works out of her dining room area.

## 'Status Pending' documents first-generation immigration lawyers' inner lives, challenges

BY VERA CASTANEDA

Araceli Guerrero finishes a full day's work in her Santa Ana law office. After spending some time with her three children and putting them to bed, she sets up a home office in her dining room area. The work continues.

She's an immigration lawyer specializing in lawful permanent residency and naturalization — an almost Sisyphean task during the Trump administration. She's also the inspiration for the short film documentary "Status Pending," directed by her youngest sister Priscilla González Sainz.

After Sainz graduated from Stanford University, she worked for Guerrero in the solo practice law office.

"I saw how difficult the whole situation was for her in terms of keeping up with all the constant changes," Sainz said. "I could connect what I was seeing in the news with how it was coming to fruition in the work that she does with her clients, how

she was constantly stressed and brought work home with her."

The film follows the lives of five immigration lawyers who met working at a high-intensity law firm in Los Angeles. Each opened their own solo practices across Southern California and created an informal support group. Guerrero, Alma Puente, Elizabeth Uribe, Gladdys Uribe and Jose Osorio are in constant communication with each other, whether it's grabbing a coffee or a group text chain. The support group, composed of first-generation Mexican Americans, help each other figure out how the latest immigration policies (or tweets from the president) will affect their clients and provide emotional support for the cases that keep them up at night. "I will never get used to seeing families torn apart," Puente texts the group at one point in the film. She had sent the text at the end of a hard work day where she met with Claudia, a wife and mother of two whose husband was taken into custody. Puente started the process of con-

necting Claudia with non-government funded housing resources and then clocked out of the office to take her own kids to their baseball game.

The documentary goes back and forth between law offices where families are legally fighting to stay together and the lawyers' own families. Feeling burnt out, the hanging existential question for the lawyers becomes: How long can they continue in this line of work?

The film made the rounds through this year's festivals — AFI Fest, Double Exposure Film Festival, Marina del Rey Film Festival and OC Film Fiesta. On Oct. 22 through Nov. 3, the documentary is available for online viewing through NBC's Meet the Press. Starting on Sunday, it will also be available online and broadcast globally through the rest of the month on Al Jazeera English.

In this condensed and edited conversation, Sainz talks about what it's like working

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## D.A. is accused of keeping facts from defense

An assistant public defender claims that the O.C. district attorney's office isn't turning over information that can be crucial to defendants' cases.

BY BEN BRAZIL

Assistant Public Defender Scott Sanders claims in a court motion filed this week that the Orange County district attorney's office has for years systematically withheld information from a special handling log that could be crucial to defendants' cases.

The log was used by deputies during former D.A. Tony Rackauckas' tenure to record their interactions with jailhouse informants. It became crucial to the illegal jailhouse informant scandal, when Sanders discovered that the district attorney's office and sheriff's department were illegally using jailhouse informants to obtain confessions in 2016.

Sanders claims that D.A. Todd Spitzer, who took office in 2019, has continued to withhold the log's information from defendants.

D.A. spokeswoman Kimberly Edds said in a phone interview that the district attorney's office has been reviewing the special handling log and making notifications to defense attorneys when issues have been identified.

"When the current district attorney administration learned that the prior district attorney abandoned its action plan to review the Sheriff's Special Handling Log (SH Log), District Attorney Spitzer immediately directed a top to bottom review of the SH Log by a team of veteran prosecutors," Edds said in an emailed statement. "That review, which involves a complete review of every inmate listed in the log to determine if Brady and discovery obligations have been met, has been ongoing for the last year, and is nearing completion."

Edds said the special handling log review is expected to be finished possibly at the end of this year or beginning of next year.

"What's taking so long, you're going very, very slowly," Sanders said in an interview. "None of us buy it."

Deputies initially denied the existence of the log during the 2014 and 2015 hearings for the case of Seal Beach mass murderer Scott Dekraai, though it eventually came to light.

After Sanders exposed the district attorney's office and sheriff's department for using illegal jailhouse informants, a judge removed the death penalty from the table and kicked the district attorney's office off of one of the biggest cases in Orange County history.

"The concealment of the [special handling log] was almost unquestionably the single most important factor in

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**ALMA PUENTE**

talks to Claudia, a wife and mother of two whose husband was taken into custody. Puente is one of five immigration lawyers featured in the film documentary, "Status Pending," which is available for online viewing this week on Al Jazeera English.



## NONPROFIT TO BRING MOBILE ALTAR TO NEIGHBORHOODS MOST AFFECTED BY PANDEMIC FOR DAY OF THE DEAD

BY BEN BRAZIL

The Day of the Dead has special significance this year as a deadly pandemic continues to disproportionately affect Latino communities.

Although traditional celebrations and local events have been canceled due to public health risks, a local Latino nonprofit plans to bring the celebration to the homes of those most impacted by the virus in Orange County to honor the deceased.

Latino Health Access, a Santa Ana-based nonprofit that advocates for the health of the local Latino community, will bring a mobile Day of the Dead altar through select areas in Anaheim on Oct. 31 and Santa Ana on Nov. 1.

The cities account for about 36% of the county's COVID-19 cases.

"Many of the events have been canceled, but we still want to

honor those people who have passed away this year because of COVID," said Karen Sarabia, program associate for the Latino Health Access COVID-19 response team.

The nonprofit is organizing it as part of the Latino Health Equity Initiative. The county launched the program in June in partnership with Latino Health Access after data revealed that the Latino community, particularly in Anaheim and Santa Ana, has taken the brunt of the pandemic in Orange County.

Anaheim is 56% Latino and Santa Ana is 77%.

Through the initiative, Latino Health Access is offering testing, outreach, education and referral services.

The Los Angeles Times reported in late September that while Latinos make up 39% of the state's population, they account for 61% of the state's cases and 49% of COVID-19 deaths.

Sarabia said the nonprofit and a few local artists are converting a 28-foot flatbed truck into the altar. She likened it to a float in the Rose Parade.

Residents will be able to take photos with the altar. They can also provide offerings or write down the names of their loved ones and place them on the altar to honor the deceased.

Latino Health Access runs a few COVID-19 testing clinics in the city. Sarabia said they will also bring the altar to those locations.

There will be an opening and closing ceremony, both featuring Aztec dancers. The location of the opening ceremony on Oct. 31 has not been determined. The closing ceremony on Nov. 1 will be held at the Latino Health Access parking lot at 450 West 4th St., Santa Ana.

About five local artists are currently working hard on building the altar. The work has been in-



Courtesy of Karen Sarabia

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ONE OF the skulls that will go on a Day of the Dead mobile altar.





They see those kids laughing at her again. She stomps away from school. The crisp, white blanket of snow cracks like eggshells beneath her feet. She looks behind her and sees her jagged footprints.  
"Footprints," she says. "My footprints!"

Courtesy of VAALA

**A FEW PAGES** from Bao Phi's "My Footprint" featuring Thuy, a Vietnamese American girl.

## Viet Book Fest spotlights Vietnamese American children's literature

BY VERA CASTANEDA

The Vietnamese American Arts & Letters Assn. (VAALA) wanted to put an emphasis on the letters portion of the organization's name, and they're taking it to the beginning with a spotlight on children's literature.

Viet Book Fest kicked off on Oct. 3 and continues every Saturday from 3 to 4 p.m. this month. The ticketed virtual book festival, moderated by third-grade teacher and children's book storyteller, Maya Lê Espiritu, features authors and illustrators in a Zoom-style setting encouraging kids in the audience to participate.

By choosing to focus on children's literature, VAALA wanted to emphasize a generational transfer of storytelling in the Vietnamese American community.

"Our community is relatively new in terms of being Vietnamese American. It's only just over 45 years old," Thuy Vo Dang, VAALA board member and curator

for UC Irvine's Southeast Asian Archive, said. "Because there is this shift away from that first generation with the elders who are passing away, we were looking towards what the future of the Vietnamese American community could look like.

"Even a decade ago, we did not have enough children's books with Vietnamese stories to warrant a whole festival. For us, the timing seemed really appropriate because there's enough material to work with."

The event was planned as an in-person, one-day festival at the Garden Grove public library. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, VAALA pivoted to virtual programming with the help of Anat Schwartz-Meron, a doctoral student at UC Irvine. They also partnered with LibroMobile, the Bowers Museum and UCI Humanities Center.

Past guests this month included author Tran Thi Minh Phuoc, illustrators

### IF YOU GO

**What:** Viet Book Fest  
**Where:** Virtual  
**When:** Saturday, 3 to 4 p.m.  
**Cost:** \$5 donation for individual festival sessions; VAALA asks attendees to donate as they see fit.  
**Information:** [vaala.org](http://vaala.org)

Nguyen Dong and Nguyen Thi Hop, who focused on their book "Vietnamese Children's Favorite Stories," and Minh Lê, who wrote "The Green Lantern: Legacy."

Dang said the festival was strategically curated to highlight diverse stories along with recognizable names in the community.

On Oct. 17, poet and spoken word artist Bao Phi did a live reading of "My Footprints" and a Q&A. The award-winning book follows Thuy, a Vietnamese American girl who has two

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## Theaters across U.S. share 'It Can't Happen Here' radio play adaptation during election year

BY VERA CASTANEDA

As wildfires spread and COVID-19 raged in parts of the country around mid-August, 16 actors signed onto Zoom to record a radio play adaptation of Sinclair Lewis' "It Can't Happen Here."

"The world was crashing in on us," Tony Taccone, the play adapter, said during a YouTube live Q&A at the virtual premiere.

Lisa Peterson, the director, said Carolina Sanchez, who plays the character Sissy Jessup, would tune in wearing scrubs. Sanchez made a career change to nursing and went back to her home state in Florida to study. Others also logged on from remote locations like Canada. At one point, the Zoom audio recording sessions had to be cut off when those who lived in Portland, Ore., were, in one way or another, affected by wildfires.

With limited time and resources, the play was ready for distribution through the Berkeley Repertory Theatre by Tuesday evening. It's available for listening across the country in four free episodes on YouTube until Nov. 8.

The dystopian play deals with the rise of a demagogue who becomes president of the United States by promising to return the country to greatness. The play starts on May 1, 1936, in Vermont, six months before a presidential election. It follows Doremus Jessup, a local community newspaper editor, who sees populist candidate Berzelius Windrip as the beginning of a potential fascist dictatorship. Jessup writes about it but soon realizes editorials aren't enough. Once Windrip is elected, the plot takes a dark turn.

Lewis wrote the story (originally, a novel) during 1935 as fascism was rising in Europe, unemployment was high as a result of the

Great Depression and many wealthy people vocally opposed the New Deal.

Berkeley Rep and Taccone, the theater's artistic director at the time, first put on a play adaptation of "It Can't Happen Here" in September 2016 and ended production about a week before the presidential election.

Taccone reached out to Berkeley Rep's current artistic director, Johanna Pfaelzer, to revisit the material this year in the form of a radio play featuring a number of actors from the 2016 production and a handful of actors new to the project.

"He felt like it was a moment to reexamine this play ... with an impulse to say this is a story that really reminds each one of us of the power that we have to affect the government through our vote," Pfaelzer said.

Asked about the difference in production from 2016 to 2020 during the live Q&A, Taccone responded that four years ago most people assumed Hillary Clinton would win but now American sensibilities have changed.

"What's changed is that we believe it," Taccone said. "There's no question — the strife and the collapse of a conversation in the U.S., the level of tension over race, class, climate change, the overt authoritarian government and the assault on democracy that Mr. Trump has led the charge for — has changed the entire view of the play."

Peterson pointed out that they committed to the play in 2016 regardless of the election results.

"We were going to do it because it's an American classic and we used to say to each other all the time that [the play] is actually about this troubling tendency in the makeup of America," Peterson said.

**"This is a story that really reminds each one of us of the power that we have to affect the government through our vote."**

— Johanna Pfaelzer  
Artistic director of Berkeley Rep

"It's more than just about Winthrop. It's not just about Trump. It's not just about one person running for president. Although that was so eerily aligned, it's more about something in the American character."

As of this week, 105 theaters, colleges and libraries partnered with Berkeley Rep to share the radio play with their respective audiences, including South Coast Repertory.

"I'm actually becoming a very big fan of the radio play format because it engages the imagination in your brain to add the visual component, which is so sorely missing from our theatrical experience right now," David Ivers, South Coast Rep's artistic director, said.

Ivers added, "It's also a crucial time in our country where whatever side of the spectrum you fall on politically, exercising, promoting and really empowering people to vote is essential to our democracy."

South Coast Rep produced the radio play "Ten Dollar Taco" as the final part of a series called "El Teatro de la Comida" and is in the process of putting together more digital programming. Berkeley Rep is also working on another audio project focusing on 10 writers and their relationship to a specific location in Berkeley.

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**D.A.***Continued from page R1*

the decision of former Superior Court Judge Thomas Goethals (and current Associate Justice of the Court of Appeal) to strike the death penalty as a sentencing option in *People v. Dekraai*," Sanders says in the motion.

The details of what unfolded with the special handling log was outlined in a July report from special prosecutor Pat Dixon. That report described how Rackauckas' office announced in 2016 that it would seek to rectify the issue by reviewing the log and disclosing evidence of wrongdoing that had been kept secret.

Of the 1,157 pages in the log, only 243 redacted pages were turned over. Rackauckas put an experienced prosecutor in charge of the review, and prosecutors Dan Wagner and Scott Simmons were assigned to assist. Both were at the center of the illegal informant scandal as the lead attorneys on the Dekraai case.

Sanders described in his motion that the review was dropped and the log reburied after an appellate ruling affirmed the recusal of the district attorney's office.

"... It now appears that on or near the day of the landmark opinion affirming the OCDA's recusal — furious prosecutors exacted their revenge on defendants by re-burying the SH Log and placing it even deeper in the ground," the motion says.

According to the report, Spitzer learned of the prior office's abandonment of the log review in October 2019 and restarted informing defendants of past violations.

Yet, Sanders claims that Spitzer has kept the logs buried. His motion is asking for a recusal of the district attorney's office from the drug possession-related case of defendant Robert Barr. Sanders said in the motion that the district attorney's office is not turning over entries made in the log by investigator Jonathan Larson, who is a witness in Barr's case.

Sanders said Larson is a



Mark Boster | Los Angeles Times

**ORANGE COUNTY** Assistant Public Defender Scott Sanders, seen in 2014, said mass killer Scott Dekraai has been the victim of a "conspiracy of silence" among authorities.

former special handling deputy who made entries in the special handling log.

"Why, then, are we here four years later with the prosecutor's office still unwilling to turn over entries from the SH Log made by J. Larson?" the motion says.

Sanders said in an interview with TimesOC that he doesn't trust Spitzer to rectify the special handling log issue, in part, because of his track record with Wagner.

Sanders said in the motion that Wagner was "unquestionably one of the leaders in the intentional concealment of Brady evidence from the SH Log..."

Sanders said in an interview that just two months after Spitzer acknowledged that the special handling log concealment was an issue he would seek to correct, he was recorded in an online video praising Wagner and Simmons during a retirement party for the prosecutors.

"I have nothing but respect and admiration for them," Spitzer said of Simmons and Wagner.

Sanders said Spitzer also promoted Wagner after he became D.A. in January 2019.

**OTHER ALLEGATIONS**

In the court motion, Sanders also accuses Spitzer and the district attorney's press office of employing a "combination of brazenly false accusations, character assassination and intimidation" toward him.

An example detailed in the motion describes how the district attorney's office

responded to a protest held in August that was critical of Spitzer. The district attorney's office announced that Sanders was running for district attorney and that the protest was being held to "further an agenda" to replace Spitzer.

Sanders denied that allegation.

The motion also says the district attorney's office conveyed in September to the county Board of Supervisors that interim Public Defender Martin Schwarz should be replaced "with someone who will terminate Sanders or force him to stand down on issues related to OCDA misconduct."

"The Orange County district attorney's office files 70,000 cases a year," Edds said in the statement. "We litigate legal motions in a court of law, not in the press as has been the pattern and practice of the Orange County public defender's office. It is disappointing that Mr. Schwarz, as the interim, not permanent public defender, who reports to the Board of Supervisors, continues to allow one of his taxpayer-funded attorneys to hijack unrelated cases in order to further his own personal agenda."

"It is clear that Mr. Sanders cares more about advancing his own political and personal agenda than representing his client, which is the work the taxpayers pay him to do."

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**ALTAR***Continued from page R1*

tensive. The group has been meeting twice a week for a month and planned to ramp up efforts over the final two weeks.

Giovanni Vazquez, a local artist from Anaheim helping to construct the altar, spoke to the significance of the Day of the Dead. "I think it's important because ... this is how we remember all the dead and how we also celebrate the living," Vazquez said. "This is how we remember that we're going to go too. No matter which pandemic, no matter what cause, we are also going to die too."

He continued: "We

would like to share the art and try to make people think that death is also colorful and something we can celebrate ... Just being thankful that we met the people in our life, even though they have passed, we remember them."

Vazquez said the mobile altar will have the basic components of classical altars in Mexico, where the tradition of *Día de Muertos* originated. There will be candles, thousands of paper flowers, sugar skulls and many offerings.

There will be a prominent large skull and several smaller skulls with butterfly wings. Vazquez said those represent "the sacred migration of the living." Monarch butterflies, which migrate to Mexico

in November, are important symbols of Day of the Dead.

He said there's a legend in Mexico that if a butterfly visits a home after the passing of a loved one, it's as if the dead is visiting the family. People can write the names of their loved ones on the butterfly skulls.

Luis Herrera, a local artist from Santa Ana who is working on the altar, said through Vazquez's translation that the Day of the Dead is the only way they have to express remembrance for the deceased.

"So the dead know we care for them," Herrera said.

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**BOOK***Continued from page R2*

moms.

Phi said the story was inspired by his daughter. They went on a trip together and she started chanting "my footprints" while marching in the snow to amuse herself. The moment stuck in Phi's mind. He started writing children's books after he noticed there weren't many books about Asian Americans to share with his daughter. He published "A Different Pond" in 2017 followed by "My Footprints" in 2019.

His third children's book "Hello, Mandarin Duck!" is set to be published in spring 2021. It's about a duck who finds itself in a new neighborhood.

Friends from different cultures in the neighborhood rally around the duck to welcome it and protect it from authorities who want to take it away because it doesn't belong there. A fourth children's book is in the works as well. It's based on a poem he wrote titled, "You are Not a Virus," in response to anti-Asian discrimination and racism during the pandemic.

Phi is also working on a Vietnamese American zombie revolutionary novel and a new manuscript

combining essays, poetry and memoir elements.

During an earlier session, Phi read a short excerpt from "You Bring Out the Vietnamese in Me" and set up a fill-in-the-blank mini poem template for the audience.

He wrote the poem in his 20s influenced by Sandra Cisneros' "You Bring Out the Mexican in Me."

"I didn't want it to be a respectability politics poem," Phi said. "I wanted it to be celebratory but celebrate the complexity, contradictions and nuances of what it means to be a Vietnamese person."

The fill-in-the-banks poem template elicited responses of items that reminded the audience of a Vietnamese household — a bamboo tree, a flower made of fiber optic cables in a glass case, red envelopes, raw rice in a garbage can, fish sauce in a mayo jar, Son Mai paintings.

About 30 families have attended each session, and Facebook live engagement reached 800 to 1,000 people.

Christine Tran, newly hired VAALA managing director, said they planned the events thinking of the local Orange County community, but audience engagement turned out to be international.

"It was really surprising to see all these folks sign-

ing into the Zoom from across the country and outside of the U.S.," Tran said. "There was somebody from Vietnam, South Korea, Canada."

Dang added, "In some ways, those folks who are living in areas where they don't have a high concentration of Vietnamese Americans like we do here, they tend to crave that interaction and that kind of cultural resource even more. Having the ability to do this on Zoom or broadcasted on Facebook live will allow for those folks to introduce some of these ideas."

The event on Oct. 24 featured Pulitzer Prize-winning author Viet Thanh Nguyen, who was to read "Chicken of the Sea" with his son and co-author Ellison Nguyen along with illustrator Thi Bui and her son Hien Bui-Stafford.

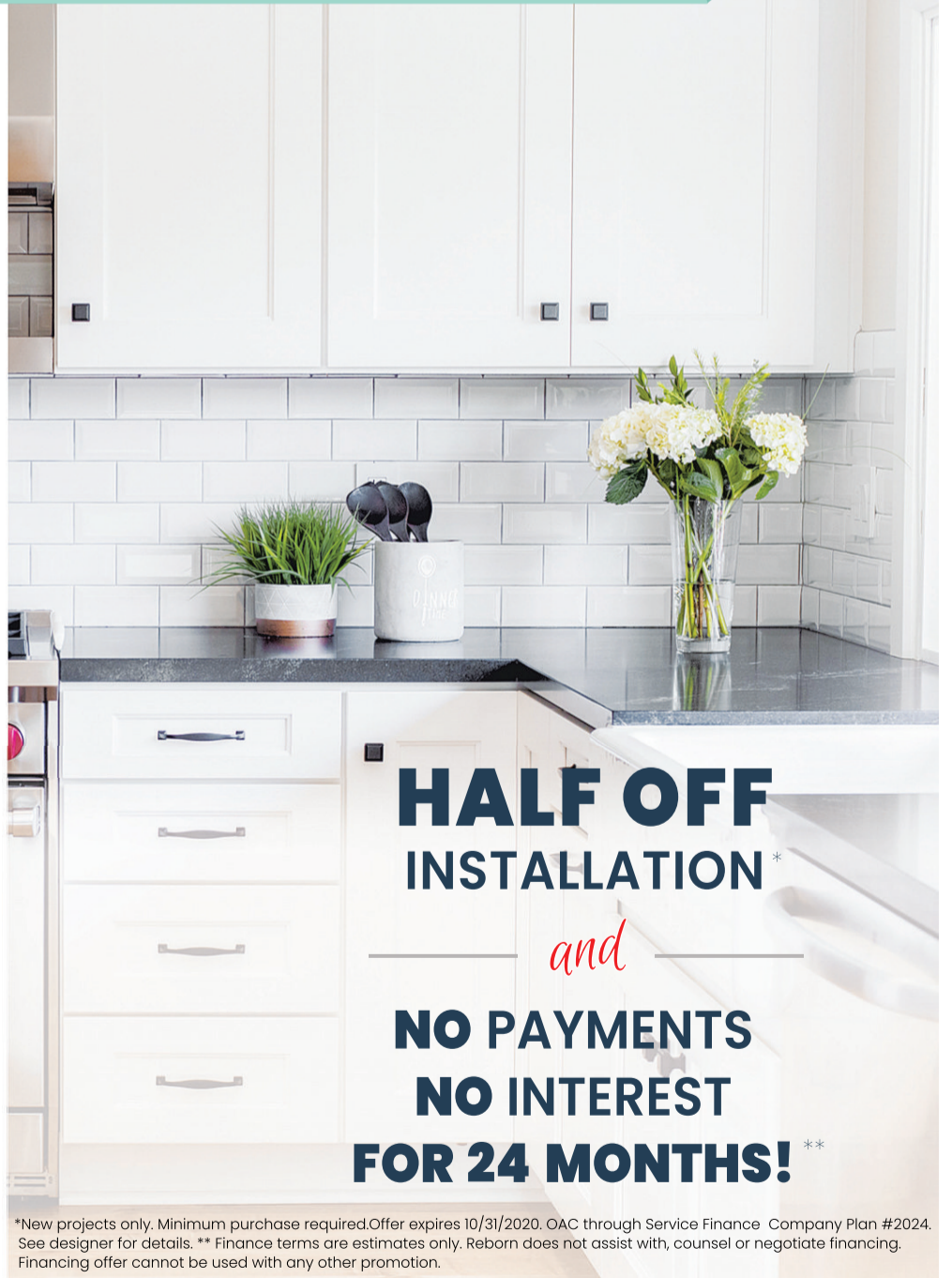
The last festival session on Oct. 31 is scheduled as a Halloween celebration with authors and illustrators. The event will include a DJ, scavenger hunt and other activities. VAALA is fundraising with items like autographed books featured in the festival.

Proceeds will go toward their future community arts programming.

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## LAWYERS

Continued from page R1

with family, the making of the documentary and pressures unique to first-generation kids.

**Q** How did the idea for this film come about?

**A** At some point, I learned that Araceli was part of this lawyer support group because she was always texting them. As a joke, they call the group the minions or the tribe because they all started at the same law firm. I asked her, "Do you think that they might be up for making a film about this group?" She said that I could ask them, and they were all onboard immediately. She was the last one to agree.

I felt that this was a side of the story that I hadn't really seen portrayed in a lot of the work that documentarians are doing on immigration. Before this film I had made a short film called "Room 140" about the day that detainees are released from detention centers. "Status Pending" was another side of this bigger, huge conversation about immigration.

**Q** Why do you think your sister, Araceli, was the last to say yes to participating in the documentary?

**A** Both of my sisters have always been really supportive, but Araceli knows more about what I do in the film industry. When she was at law school at BYU in Utah and I was in high school, I would intentionally visit her in January so she could take me to Sundance and drop me off and go to law school and then pick me up. Part of it was knowing a lot about what it takes to make a documentary, but I think the other part of it was also being so busy and stressed, knowing that it would take some time. Maybe being concerned about privacy and what her clients would think. It was also a question of whether she wanted to be on camera. The other four have spent more time on camera, particularly being on the news. This was very different for her. I really appreciate that she came around to it. And I know the only reason probably is because she supports me and loves me. Otherwise, I'm not sure she would have done it.

**Q** Is there a difference for you when documenting a family member versus the other four lawyers?

**A** Because she's my older sister, I've always seen her as a bit of an authority. So when I'm on set trying to direct, it's almost like butting heads when I was shooting at her office. I say that jokingly.

What I've learned is that if people agree to be in a documentary usually it's because they have a lot of faith in that filmmaker. It's so much trust and so much responsibility to take someone's story and put it together in a film or any sort of artistic piece because there's so much that's going to be left out.

It's a little bit harder to establish a relationship where you want them to see you as a filmmaker. When it's a family member, they know you as you whether it's the little sister or the daughter or the tia. Breaking through that barrier in some cases can be extremely fruitful because you have all that history and context and it takes a camera for you to get that out of that person. Making personal documentaries is so much about the filmmaker and about the story



Photos courtesy of Priscilla González Sainz

"STATUS PENDING" follows immigration lawyers, Araceli Guerrero, Alma Puente, Gladdys Uribe, Elizabeth Uribe and Jose Osorio.

when you're working with family. In this case, I tried to keep myself out of the film.

**Q** In your director's statement, you used the word activist to describe the lawyers. What went into the thinking of using that specific word?

**A** When I think about activists, I think about people who make choices in their daily lives for the better of others. I feel like they're activists because their job is to help people. The fact that these individuals have devoted their life to uphold the law that they believe is the best for people, makes them activists. I also know personally that they really care about their community. All of them do volunteer work and public service. My sister does a lot of pro bono work in Santa Ana. They all do. They really care about their communities, not just in their professional lives but in their personal lives. Something that drives my work is featuring relatable "normal people" who do little things or big things that make a difference.

**Q** How did you decide which clients to follow?

**A** I definitely interviewed more clients than were in the film. A big part of that was I had to keep it to certain lengths because of my short film grant. Afterwards I felt like this could have been a longer film. Maybe I'll make a follow-up piece because there's so many people and so many stories. I tried to include cases that I felt the lawyers had a lot of either mixed feelings about or were just really personally affected. Also, it had to do with access and which people were willing to be on camera.

In Alma's case, I know that what happened with Claudia's husband really affected her for a while. It still does. That he was taken into custody in front of her a little bit before we started filming and the weight that she felt of trying to help this woman who was left alone with two daughters. A big part of what a lot of them feel is guilt when something goes wrong. That's where the support group comes in because they'll remind each other that they're doing the best they can at all times.

**Q** Rudy (one of Araceli's clients) is featured in the first scene and at the end of the film. He's also on the poster. Tell me about why that image was selected for the poster.

**A** It's the strongest image I felt we had in the film

because Rudy represents the work of all five lawyers. He represents why they do what they do. Some of them said this when they saw the film. It's such a difficult landscape for them, and it probably will be for some time. It's a moment of hope, and I wanted to end on a high note.

Also, Rudy is just such a compelling character. I wanted to make his own film. He's someone who's just so aware of the mistakes he's made. He's someone who feels like he doesn't deserve [citizenship] and then comes to accept that he does.

**Q** Have you heard feedback about the documentary from the people featured in it?

**A** It's always concerning to show the documentary to people, especially because you spent a lot of time with them and in the end there's only a little bit of that footage, especially in a short film. I went to Rudy's house and they were very emotional. They really loved it. I love when a film can help someone open up about something. To me it sounded like it was a way for Rudy's son to tell his dad, "I know you made mistakes, but I'm really proud of you." And that was such an incredible moment.

Some of them haven't seen the film. I don't think Claudia has seen the film. It's just too difficult, and she's still having a really tough time because her family is still not together. Alma is still working with them. I think sometimes the act of telling your story is a cathartic process, and sometimes that's all that they want to be involved with.

**Q** There was so much breaking news about immigration and detention within the timeframe of filming, and the text messages brought that element into the documentary. How did you decide which text messages to include?

**A** That was such a grueling process. It could have been an entire film based on the text messages. Fortunately, I worked really closely with my producer Laura Reich and editor Sarah Garrahan during that process of making these tough decisions because we knew it couldn't be a lecture, it couldn't be a history lesson. It ended up coming down to what text messages related most to what was happening on screen at that time. The text messages were also edited and then reviewed by the lawyers. They were shortened

and some legal jargon was replaced.

**Q** There was this emotional scene with Araceli toward the end where she talks about how challenging it is to keep up with the new immigration policies and how she'll keep doing this type of work as long as it feels right. Do you remember the question that was asked to her at that moment?

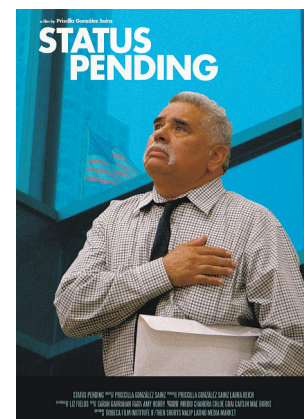
**A** That day in itself was a pretty intense shoot day, and I haven't talked about it to anybody. I had been filming with most of the four, and I didn't actually have a lot of footage with Araceli because she was busy or she couldn't let me come in. I had been talking to her for a while to try to get her to let me just come into the office and watch her work. I could tell she was in a funk. I knew there was all this tension and stress, but how do you get an introvert, a very private person to tell you what is going on? As a director, I wasn't really getting any-

thing out of her.

She told me it was time to go. I had wrapped up, and she just started talking to me about her day. I didn't really ask her a question. I had set the camera down and luckily it was on, but I really only got the end of that. It was a really rough day, and there's so many of those days that internally it's a struggle for her about whether she wants to keep doing this anymore. If the system keeps fighting against everything you believe in, at what point do you break? They all still struggle with it, but they decide to keep going and take it a day at a time.

**Q** Part of what was compelling about the film was the lawyers questioning whether they were going to keep working in their fields or not. It happens to many people in various careers, but there are specific pressures about being first generation that play into that thought process too.

**A** Do you think that it's about our feeling of re-



"STATUS PENDING" poster featuring Rudy, one of Araceli Guerrero's clients.

responsibility toward others or our feeling that we need to be successful in order to make our parents' struggle worth it?

**Q** Both.

**A** I agree. When you feel like you're not succeeding, it's so much heavier because it's not just you. It's your whole history — everything your parents did, the life your grandparents had, the hopes and dreams. And when you feel like you're not succeeding, you don't feel like you're doing that justice. That definitely plays a big part into what goes on for them, and a lot of us who are first generation who carry that extra bit of weight.

**Q** What's the latest update on all five lawyers? Are they still practicing?

**A** It was a question at the end of the film about whether they were going to continue. All five are still practicing and active in their own law firms. In speaking to my sister, I know that she still struggles with a lot of this and especially how complicated everything got because of COVID. Araceli has been slowly going back to work with during the pandemic. And that's the same for everybody. Elizabeth Uribe was featured in the L.A. Times. Alma Puente is running for City Council for El Monte.

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TimesOC is published Sundays by Times Community News, a division of the Los Angeles Times. Subscriptions are available only by subscribing to The Times, Orange County.

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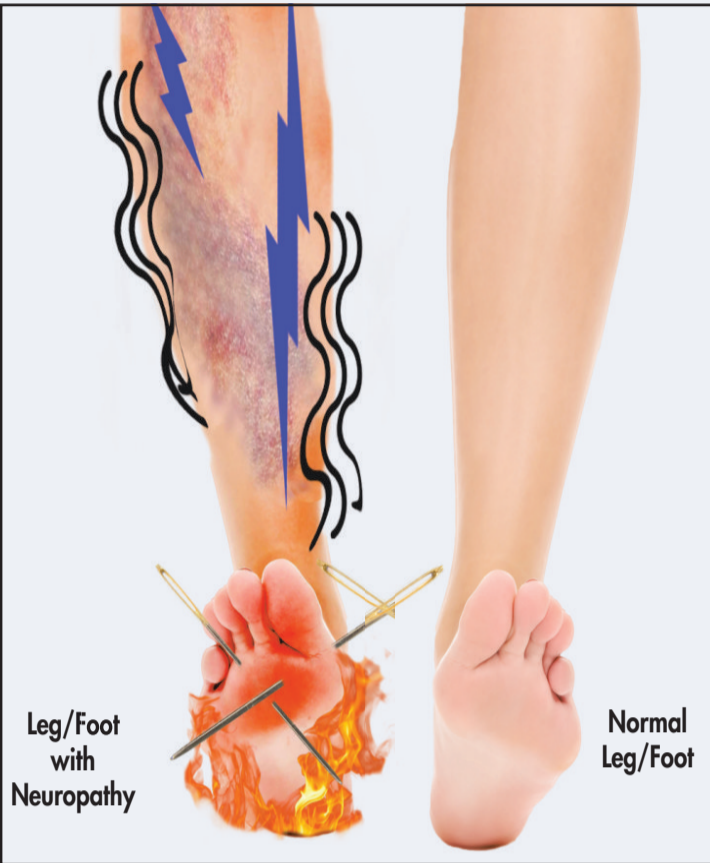
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Topic: Non-surgical & drug-free approach to get relief from unrelenting

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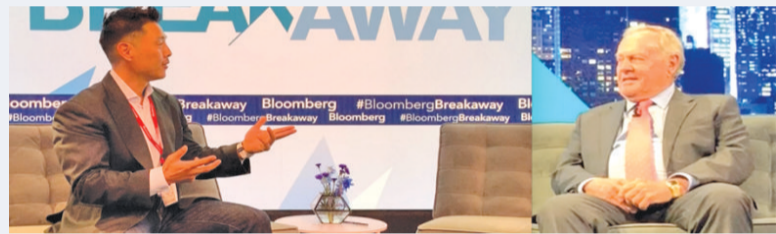
#### Discussion includes:

- What REALLY may cause peripheral neuropathy
- Three most common symptoms of neuropathy
- New drugless treatment options available for your unrelenting nerve pain and numbness
- How Spinal Stenosis, Degenerative Disc Disease, & even high blood sugar & cholesterol may cause neuropathy.
- Discover why cortisone, epidurals, prolotherapy, prp, or injections may or may not work for you.
- Why ask your doctor about Neurontin, Gabapentin, Lyrica, Cymbalta.
- The truth behind therapy & why it may not work for you.

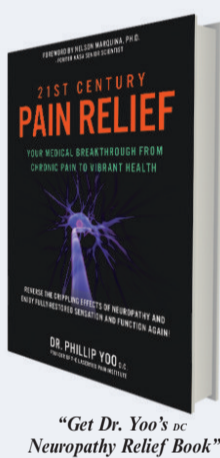
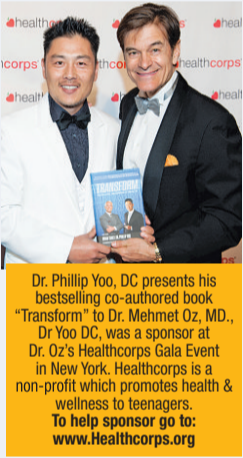
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- Can't sleep due to pain at night
- Burning pain
- Leg cramping
- Afraid of falling
- Poor balance
- Pain when you walk
- Sharp electrical-like pain
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- Prickling or tingling sensation in hands & feet
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Dr. Phillip Yoo, DC presents his bestselling co-authored book "Transform" to Dr. Mehmet Oz, MD. Dr. Yoo DC, was a sponsor at Dr. Oz's Healthcorps Gala Event in New York. Healthcorps is a non-profit which promotes health & wellness to teenagers. To help sponsor go to: [www.Healthcorps.org](http://www.Healthcorps.org)

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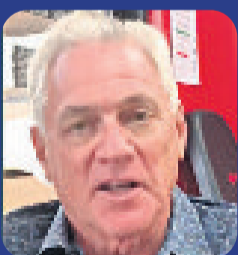
"After getting no relief from Gabapentin, Lyrica, and Cymbalta, The tingling and numbness is finally gone after applying what I learned at the seminar."

— Carla Visnic, Anaheim Registered Nurse



"I had severe spinal stenosis causing excruciating back pain, leg cramps, foot numbness & weakness. I didn't want to have spinal surgery so I went to the neuropathy seminar and am finally relieved to have found a non drug, non surgical option that my doctor never told me about. Now I can sit without pain, sleep without cramps, & walk without numbness & more leg strength!"

— Jim Carel, 75 yrs. Palm Desert



"I can feel my feet for the first time in 10yrs. after laser cell signaling & software therapy." "I've been suffering from lower back pain & peripheral neuropathy in my feet for 10 years causing poor balance & excruciating nerve pains in my legs and feet. But after 1 laser procedure for my back and feet, along with 1 shockwave (software) therapy treatment, that 10 year back pain is almost gone and I can feel the bottom of my feet for the first time in 10 years."

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