

Wyoming Tribune Eagle, July 14, 2016: “Immigration affects real people.” Casper Star Tribune, July 16: “Discrimination leaves bitter legacy.”

“There are things more important than borders drawn by conquerors and politicians,” Jack Pugh comments as regards to immigration. “There are things more important than the racism and economics and the politics of our immigration policy and law.”

When ICE officers barged into the modest home of Irma Avina in Cheyenne in the predawn hours of January 24, 2012, she had lived in the United States for fifteen years. Her salary for full time employment at Little America was \$15,552 in 2009 and \$18,887 in 2010. Federal income taxes were deducted from these wages.

Mr. Pugh rightly deems the wages “pitiful.”

“Ultimately this is about families,” he observes, speaking of the shattered families of the women arrested in the Cheyenne raids. “They have been here many years, are peaceful and rooted in our community. They have done no harm.” Ms. Avina was one of several women detained that morning.

Here is an account from one of the affected children: “They (the agents) started to kick the door. My sister and I got up, really scared. My sister was crying, she is only five. . . they were screaming at my mom . . . they told her she was under arrest, turned her halfway around, and the sheriffs put handcuffs on her and took her away.”

Another child reported that “four men from ICE” were already in the home when the two sheriffs arrived to join them. Imagine the mother, alone with her children, overwhelmed thus.

“Ramon” came to Cheyenne in 2000 on a temporary work permit secured by a commercial construction company. When his visa expired, Ramon stayed on at the request of his employer. For sixteen years he was one of the company’s full-time employees. After his wife and a child born in Mexico joined him, the family grew by two more children, both born in Cheyenne.

“The family came to my attention because DACA gave their first child an opportunity to be documented and secure employment to save money for college,” says Carol Pascal.

Ramon advanced to site supervisor and was issued a company vehicle. His company travel took him across three states. The family bought a home and has been paying federal income taxes. They prayed for immigration reform to prevent the breakup of the family.

“Ramon is supportive of the President’s policy of deporting undocumented immigrants who have committed a crime,” Ms. Pascal explains, “but now he fears that he, his wife, and their oldest child will be deported and separated from their American-born family. Despite living with this uncertainty, the family was pleased that their oldest child was

DACA-qualified.” Children left behind by deported parents are often relegated into foster care.

When Wyoming implemented a "real ID" policy that requires extensive proof of status and residency, Ramon was unable to renew his driver's license. He now works only a couple of days a week—for the same employer who does not want to let him go—but must rely on friends to help with the mortgage. The oldest child's dream of going to community college is on hold, as every cent is needed to sustain the family.

“The SCOTUS decision does not affect the ‘Dreamers’ who qualified under DACA,” Ms. Pascal hastened to add. “However, it has caused fear and uncertainty among families who have lived and worked here, sometimes for decades. It’s criminal to impose that kind of suffering on children, many of whom are U.S. citizens.”

Al Ayala is eighty-one years old. “I was five months old when my parents were expelled from New York and deported to Mexico,” he said. This, even though his mother, of Polish extraction, was born in Pennsylvania.

“This was during the depression-era thirties,” he said. “Jobs were scarce. We were blamed and rounded up solely because of our dark skin.”

Mr. Ayala showed me reports of what transpired back then. “Mexican Repatriation,” authorized by President Herbert Hoover, was carried out by local authorities, particularly in states with large Hispanic populations: California, Texas, Michigan. The number of people caught in the raids are estimated between 500,000 and two million. Researchers agree that tens of thousands were legal immigrants or citizens. Forced to leave immediately, with but the clothes on their backs, their monetary losses amounts to untold millions. Children born in the U. S. struggled to survive in a foreign country. For many, the injustices left wounds that never healed.

Ironically, a few years later the U.S. government invited Mr. Ayala’s family to return to the U.S.

“I don’t know exactly why or how it happened. I do know America needed skilled workers for the war effort. My father was a machinist. Suddenly he was of value.”

Though residing in the United States ever since, Mr. Ayala remains bitter over the suffering indiscriminately imposed on his family and others.