Because we really were born for this, we who came to await the painful effort of our death.
Woven from footage collected over a quarter of a century, ROCIO is the story of a mother’s love and the American Dream.

When doting mother of three Rocio is suddenly diagnosed with terminal kidney cancer, her son Dario takes a leave of absence from Harvard College to come home and take care of her. Their battle against the disease leads them into the world of alternative medicine, where they find hope shimmering at a clinic across the border.

The catch: Pursuing this last chance at survival might mean giving up everything they’ve ever worked for.
I made this movie because I witnessed several miracles while shooting. As a fervent atheist, I of course did not register any of them until it was too late to ask the source.

First miracle: my mother sent the cancer into remission solely by juicing, something her doctors at UCLA said would “never” happen.

Second miracle: she regained sensation in her legs one day, right in front of the camera. Again, something we were told not to expect. Soon after, she was walking around the house with the aid of a walker. It was worth it just to go to her appointments and see the lab coats’ eyes widen in secular astonishment.

Third miracle (a bit of numerology): I was born on February 9, 1993. It was a Tuesday. Rocío once told me Tuesday was the most cosmic day of the week.

She also said 11 was my lucky number, and on January 11, 2011, I got a call from an admissions officer at Harvard College informing me that I was a “likely candidate for admission.” It was one of the happiest days of my life. It was also a Tuesday.

Our old passports read that on October 21, 1995, Rocío and I entered the United States through the San Ysidro checkpoint. My new passport reads that on the very same day nineteen years later, on October 21, 2014, I was admitted back into the country through the very same doors. I carried her ashes home.

It was a Tuesday.
From the Director

Departure Number
424311214 30

Department of Homeland Security
CBP I-84A(11/04)
Departure Record

PAROLED
Until NOV 19, 2019
DA

Oct 21, 2014 Sys #144

Family Name
GUERRERO MENESES

First (Given) Name
DARIO

Birth Date (Day Mo Yr)
09.02.93

Country of Citizenship
MEXICO

20141021 US-VISIT 20141021 SINGLE USE
Reviews
From the Harvard University Department of Visual and Environmental Studies

“ROCIO is one of the most moving and ambitious documentary film theses I’ve seen at Harvard in my many years of teaching here.”

Ross McElwee  Professor of the Practice of Filmmaking

“Dario’s film is deeply, daringly personal, gazing at once with intimacy and an unwavering and at times discomfiting eye at his Mother, and his family, at the end of her life. Little quotidian details stand out and remain with one — moments of apperception that would pass unnoticed before a less attentive filmmaker. A remarkable accomplishment.”

Lucien Castaing-Taylor  Professor of Visual Arts and Anthropology

“Dario created a film in which history and everyday life, the political and the personal, the extraordinary and the ordinary, seem to be folded into each other, and where everything lies in the almost imperceptible shifts between them.”

Laura Frahm  Assistant Professor of Visual and Environmental Studies
About the Filmmaker

Dario Guerrero, creator of the documentary **ROCIO**, is an undocumented Harvard graduate. His story first received national attention in September 2014 when he published an essay in the Washington Post titled “I told Harvard I was an undocumented immigrant. They gave me a full scholarship.”

Following up on this story, a Telemundo news crew reached out to Dario and found him living in his grandmother’s home, some 3,000 miles away from school in the crime-ridden, massive slums of Nezahualcoyotl just outside Mexico City. Dario’s story again made national headlines, this time under the guise of “Harvard student took his dying mom to Mexico, now he’s not allowed to leave.” This is the subject matter of the present film. This is the story of **ROCIO**.

Dario also co-directed 2013’s **A Dream Deferred** with college roommate Alex Boota, a documentary following several undocumented Harvard students as they apply for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. Funded by the Harvard Law Documentary Studio, it was a Regional Finalist in the Student Academy Awards.
Coverage

The Boston Globe

He just graduated from Harvard. He’s also undocumented. Will he be deported?

Dario Guerrero took his mom to Mexico when she was dying. It cost him his DACA status.

By Laura Wides-Munoz January 19, 2018
https://goo.gl/wEMt7Z

CBS NEWS

Harvard student who took dying mom to Mexico gets humanitarian visa

Associated Press October 14, 2014
https://goo.gl/plcmzi

The Washington Post

I told Harvard I was an undocumented immigrant. They gave me a full scholarship.

When I discovered my status in high school, I was worried I wouldn’t be able to attend college at all.

By Dario Guerrero September 24, 2014
https://goo.gl/y5xMso
Q & A

Was any of your footage staged?

Everything was staged for the camera, but the home movies were found in the state you now see them.

What was your emotional connection to your mother as you were growing up?

I realized after she died that I never really knew my mom as anything besides my mom. She cooked our meals, took me to school, took me and my siblings out on the weekends, taught us how to have fun. Most of the time she was just a presence in our home to me, albeit an intensely loving one. Our relationship was give and take - she gave, I took. I absolutely loved her, but I rarely really experienced her company as a person. I was always stuck in my head, in my books, in my homework, preoccupied with me. I regret that.

How was the decision made to withhold true diagnosis from your mother?

Since my dad speaks better English than my mom, he was the point man for medical affairs when I wasn’t there. He called me one night in October 2013 when I was still at school and told me the tumor in my mom’s kidney was cancerous and stage four. He said he didn’t want to tell her so as not to frighten her. I took it as an order for me too. I told my brother in February and my sister in March. I told my mom in March too, when I decided she was at a point where it would encourage rather than hinder her recovery.

How did you feel about having to drop out of college in order to take care of your mother?

I knew I would hate myself forever if she died and I had not done everything in my power for her.

What was your experience of the "new age" cancer treatment facility your mother stayed in? The director? The staff?

I thought it was heaven. It was everything we tried to do at home, but perfected. I took comfort in the fact that there were only (presumably) wealthy and (presumably) educated white people staying with us. I believed we had to be onto “something” special if we all arrived there through independent research. Unlike the doctors back home, the staff and director made an effort to educate (with talks, books, tutorials, online sources) us about the “how” and “why” of the treatment.

After she died I found it difficult to justify having spent $15,000 for 3 weeks, and that at times the treatment really did felt “sold” to us. Not that the medical racket being run in the States is any better, but it’s still frustrating.
The final days of your mother’s life - were you with her when she died? How long was she in hospice treatment?

We left the clinic in late July - defeated. My mom was tired of the treatment, tired of diet, tired of everything. We went straight to Moroleon. She lived for about three weeks. Our plan was to pursue anything available. We even tried a shaman. At some point I transitioned from still having hope to hoping for the end. She was at home until the very end. I was with her most of the time, changing, feeding, comforting her. Her sister-in-laws bathed her. Every morning I looked up the signs of death and hoped more would manifest quickly.

What did you have to do to get back into the US?

A few days after she died, when I was in Mexico City with my father’s family, I called my Resident Dean at school. I explained the situation and he relayed my story to a senator, a congressman, and Harvard’s Office of Federal Relations in Washington. I got a lawyer to work on my case pro-bono through a friend back home, and they all got in touch. I wrote several letters explaining why I left the United States, provided evidence of kinship between my mom and I, and her death certificate and translation. The first application was rejected. The second was approved minutes after the AP published a story on me. I had to fly to the US Consulate in Tijuana to do an immigration interview and get a travel document.

How did you feel about being at the center of an international news story?

Amazing. Amidst my crumbling world, it felt good to be cared about, even if the compassion was sometimes feigned. I saw the media as a tool for me to get back and make my film more interesting. It was fascinating reading people’s (sometimes scathing) opinions about me and my story.

Looking back now, what are your feelings about the whole ordeal?

I used to feel like this ordeal had broken me and my family.

Now I know it was a rebirth.
Rocío

a film by

Produced by Joe Betance
Press Kit Design by Pat Capulong
Marketing and Publicity by Dominick Love

WWW.ROCIOFILM.COM

WINNER
HARVARD COLLEGE
HOOPES PRIZE
Ca nel nicnotlapaltzintli, ca nimecapalli, ca nicacaxtli, ca nicuitlapilli, ca natlapalli, ca nitco ca nimamaloni, camo nonenemian, camo nonequetzayan in ompa tinechmihualia, Nochpochtziné, Noxocoyohué, Tlacatlé, Cihuapillé.

Because I am only a field hand, I am your basket, your porter's leather strap, I am the tail, I am the wings; I need to be led, carried upon your shoulders, for the place to which you send me is an unfamiliar realm, Virgencia mia, Youngest Daughter of mine, Lady, Queen.

"You’ve made an unusual and beautiful film."

Robb Moss
Chair of the Harvard University Department of Visual and Environmental Studies