

## **Oscar Canales**

*A father of four*

*A business owner who has created jobs for US citizens*

*Has repaired roofs for dozens of homeowners in the Triad*

### **Early Life: Hardship in El Salvador**

Oscar was born in San José de la Fuente, in the state of La Unión in El Salvador, in 1983. He was the second of five siblings; his parents worked as subsistence farmers. "Our family was poor, we could never afford to see a doctor," he said. Lack of access to medical care resulted in the death of an older sibling before he reached his first birthday. Poverty also restricted the family's educational ambitions; schools cost money, and his father could no longer afford to send him by the time he turned thirteen. Oscar worked in the fields with his father. When he turned fifteen, he was sent to work for an aunt in the capital of San Salvador. It was hard work that didn't pay well. He continued working for her and other family members until he turned 21, in 2005.

### **A Journey to "El Norte"**

Tired of scraping to get by, and having heard stories of neighbors and relatives who had made it to the US, a friend invited him to go with him to "El Norte". They paid a "coyote" who claimed he could get them work permits once they arrived at the border. Crossing the Rio Grande during daylight, they walked right into Border Patrol, confident they would be given these permits they had heard so much about. They were detained for two days, and then given a sheaf of papers in English ordering them to appear in immigration court. "We've got our permits," they thought, unable to read English.

### **Hard Work & More Sacrifice**

Within two weeks of arriving in Greensboro, Oscar was working 8-hour days as a dishwasher at KW Cafeteria for \$150 a week. Two weeks later Oscar and his friend paid an attorney to look at their "permits" with them, and that's when they realized they had missed their court dates. Oscar was ordered deported *en absentia*. He continued working as a dishwasher at local restaurants for another year, which is where he met his wife, before starting to work in construction. Within a year, their first daughter was born; she tragically passed away just eight days before her first birthday. Today they have three kids - Karen was born in 2012, and George in 2016. They also co-parent 17 year old Shirley, his wife's daughter from a different marriage. (Please note, we cannot reveal his wife's name publically or answer questions about Oscar's family members' immigration status, given ICE's recent newly aggressive enforcement actions against family members of people in sanctuary except to say that his children are US citizens.)

### **Creating Jobs for US Citizens & Guilford County Residents**

Oscar started his own company in 2012. The company has employed around five employees constantly since 2013, and has several US citizens on staff. The business has paid several thousand dollars in taxes, and has served dozens of clients from single-family homes to larger businesses and schools.

### **A Fateful "Slip of the Foot"**

On April 5, 2013, Oscar was in his car sitting at a red light. His foot slipped off the brake, and his car bumped the car ahead. Finding that both drivers were ok and not discovering any visible damage, but wanting to be cautious, Oscar and the other driver waited for a police officer to take an accident report. The officer ran Oscar's Salvadoran I.D. through

their records, and mistakenly brought the record of a different Oscar Canales who had a extensive criminal record. Oscar was taken to the Guilford County Jail, where ICE was alerted to his presence, and he was transferred into their custody the same day. After several days in Winston-Salem & York, SC detention centers, Oscar. ended up at Stewart Detention Center for six weeks. Finally, thanks to community activism by Alerta Migratoria and a stay of removal petition filed by attorney Jessica Yañez, Oscar's deportation order was temporarily suspended, and he was ordered to report to ICE in Charlotte once a year.

### **An Unwelcome Surprise, an Ankle Monitor & a Terrified Family**

At his annual appointment this past year, on October 26, ICE took his passport, and informed him that his deportation order would be reinstated. At a follow-up appointment on Dec. 19, he was ordered to leave before January 18, 2018, and was fitted with an ankle monitor. Deporting Oscar would tear apart a family of five, and would substantially damage a business that has provided steady employment for US citizens and Guilford County residents. It would not have any positive impacts on this family or on our community.

Under our current immigration laws, once attorneys have been denied final requests for a stay, there is nothing *they* can do to stop deportation. But over 2,000 times in the past three decades, members of Congress have filed "private bills" to protect individual constituents from deportation.

**As his elected representatives, either Tedd Budd or Mark Walker can choose to file a private bill on Oscar's behalf.** AFSC has worked with representatives in states like Colorado to file private bills that have won protection from deportation for other immigrant parents. Ultimately, we would like for the laws to be fixed humanely. Until then, representatives who claim to want to protect some immigrants from deportation, and who want to support local business owners, must take action to that end. Either elected official could file a private bill today.