[< 1st-Generation Mexican American Attempts To Save Migrant Lives In The Arizona Desert](https://www.npr.org/2019/06/21/734016436/1st-generation-mexican-american-attempts-to-save-migrant-lives-in-the-arizona-de)

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STEVE INSKEEP, HOST:

It's Friday, which is when we hear from StoryCorps. For the past 17 years, Maria Ochoa has ventured into the Arizona desert to try to help people crossing the border from Mexico, people who find themselves stranded or in danger. She also searches for those who've gone missing. She came to StoryCorps in Tucson, Ariz., with her friend and fellow volunteer Alma Schloor (ph).

MARIA OCHOA: If you fall and you sprain an ankle or you break an arm or something like that, you can no longer keep up with the group, so they leave you behind. And if you can't move and you lay there for a while, there's vultures circling all the time. And I have stopped and walked towards where they're circling to see is it an animal that they're circling or is it a person that's out there? Whenever we have found a person in the desert, we ask, are you in any pain? When was the last time you ate or drink anything? Or do you know where you're at? If they're OK, then we hand them food and water and we leave them there. If they're not OK, we call for help.

ALMA SCHLOOR: What does it feel like when you have to leave people?

OCHOA: That is the saddest thing. You want to help them, especially when they tell you, well, just take me into town and I can have somebody come and get me from there. And you can't do it. You can't do it because if you should get stopped by Border Patrol, you can end up in prison.

SCHLOOR: Is there anyone you still think about?

OCHOA: The one that always comes to my mind is searching for a 19-year-old young woman that was seven months pregnant travelling with her husband. She was tired and couldn't keep walking any longer, so the group left them behind. They looked for a shady spot where she could stay. The husband left her there to try and find help. He got a little bit lost but finally found a Border Patrol officer, and they went back to look for her, and she was gone. We went out four or five weekends searching in the desert. We never found her. Her name was Grecia. My whole life - I mean, I come from an immigrant family. My mother herself crossed into the U.S. when she was 12 years old. I have family on both sides of the border. And we can't generalize and say they're all, you know, bad people because they're not.

SCHLOOR: What do you like the most about doing this work?

OCHOA: One of the greatest satisfactions has been being able to help people. Keep them from dying - that's the most important part. If we can save one life, our work is worth it.

(SOUNDBITE OF FREDRIK'S "MILO")

INSKEEP: That was Maria Ochoa speaking with her friend, Alma Schloor, about her work with the Tucson Samaritans. Their StoryCorps conversation will be archived, along with hundreds of thousands of others, at the Library of Congress.