



PHOTOS BY MARGARET THOMAS—THE WASHINGTON POST

Louisa Lindsey and Donnie Lanham, 34, who was not expected to live when social workers brought him to Lindsey as an infant.

One Woman's Call to Love And to Shelter

By Steve Bates
Washington Post Staff Writer

Louisa Lindsey's New Hope Farm, adorned with thick weeds and rusted vehicles, appears as a drab portrait of poverty barely 15 miles from the chrome-plated offices around Dulles International Airport.

Inside her farmhouse, that image quickly fades in the light of a gentle spirit who has lifted the lives of 29 foster children, by last count, and a similar number of displaced elderly people whom she has sheltered in the last 35 years.

Lindsey, 70, is a one-woman volunteer human service agency, a frail safety net for those whom government cannot, or will not, serve. Her self-described "life's career" recalls a disappearing facet of rural American life: neighbor helping neighbor, even neighbor helping stranger.

Lindsey, who says she accepts only token payment from her adult boarders, puts it simply: "I'm just living the gospel."

The longtime widow isn't as spry as she once was, and the five men—who range in age from early thirties to early nineties—staying in her northern Loudoun County house fill her days. The house is a perpetual mess. Flies buzz and dogs bark intermittently in the cluttered living room, which features a pig thermometer, wax begonias in a plastic foam cup, family photos, a poster for the movie "The Trip to Bountiful," and a statuette pair of praying hands.

See LINDSEY, B4, Col. 1



Leon Compher, "going on 90," is one of many people helped by Lindsey.

A Woman Who Can't Say No to the Young or Elderly in Need

LINDSEY, From B1

Lindsey perennially claims to be on the verge of getting on top of the repairs and the cleaning, but there are meals to cook, and chickens and goats to feed every morning—even after the two or three times a week she works all night as a private nurse.

"You don't judge her by her housekeeping; you judge her by what she's done for people," says Al Dixon, who lives in nearby Waterford and often drops by to help. From time to time, some neighbors have complained about Lindsey's care of her farm animals and the old vehicles she keeps on her property.

County social service officials, citing confidentiality of the people they sent to the farm, say they can't talk about their dealings with Lindsey. Officials said they do not routinely inspect small boarding houses but have no reason to believe conditions at Lindsey's farm warrant investigation. State government officials said Lindsey does not need a nursing home or group home license because she has fewer than the number of boarders specified for regulation.

Growing up in Southwest Virginia, Lindsey said she patterned her life after an uncle who was a minister and found homes for the down-and-out. "There was no welfare then," she says. "When they couldn't find someone [to shelter a needy family], they'd call a clergyman."

After her husband died in the mid-1950s, Lindsey, with five children of her own, bought her farm a few miles from the village of Lucketts. Word got out that she couldn't say no to a request to shel-

ter. Six months after he arrived, it looked like the end. Donnie contracted a disease, thought to be spinal meningitis. A local doctor advised against taking Donnie to a hospital, saying he likely wouldn't live two hours, Lindsey says.

For hours, she rocked him in her arms, feeding him lemonade from a medicine dropper because it was the only nourishment his body would accept, she said. "We didn't have any hopes for Donnie, none of us," Lindsey said. "But Donnie wouldn't give up. There was such a great bond of love between Donnie and me at that time." She eventually adopted him.

Government officials "tried to take Donnie away a few times," and once succeeded, but she "went and got him back." County officials had heard rumors that he was being whipped, Lindsey said, and one agency wanted to send Donnie "to learn to run a computer with his head."

"He can't even hold his head up. I fought them. He is a very bright boy," she said, adding that he has received some teaching at home.

Donnie interrupts, choking out one syllable with determination, pausing to catch his breath for a full second, and moving slowly to the next syllable: "Let-me-teil-it!" His eyes shine with merriment and anticipation.

"All right, you tell it," Lindsey says.

"I-love-it." He pauses. "Peo-ple-ask-what-do-I-have-to-live-for." He catches his breath again, prepares to emphasize his point. "I-am-happy . . . They-ain't-got-what-I-got. Hap-pi-ness. Hap-pi-ness-and-love-in-my-heart."



PHOTOS BY MARGARET THOMAS—THE WASHINGTON POST

Louisa Lindsey's home is a jumble of people, animals and collected debris.

boarders. But some of her philosophy comes across loud and clear: Hard work and clean country air are good for the body and soul.

One troubled 17-year-old boy arrived on her farm in such bad shape that he wouldn't respond to his own name. She introduced him to farm animals in an effort to motivate him. "A goat, I think, helped bring him out a bit."

Lindsey insists she has done nothing unusual in caring for so many people that she can't count them all. "I was going to write them

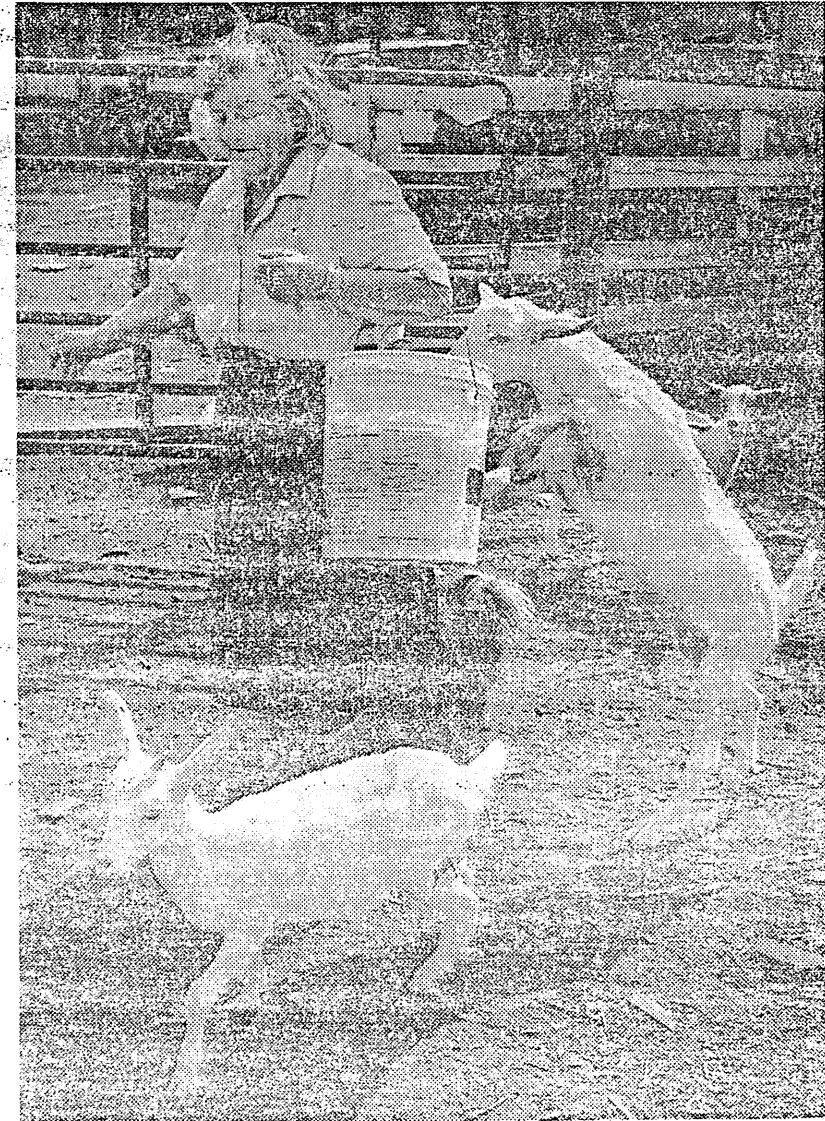
all down this morning, but I never have time," she says. "The chickens need water . . ."

"I think everybody seems pretty happy here. That's the whole good in life," she says.

"I might not have a mansion here, but I don't know anybody else taking them in."

"I don't know if I'll take anybody else. I've got too much going on," she says.

Donnie rolls his eyes in her direction, and grins, before getting in the last word: "I-know-you-will."



Lindsey prepares to feed some of the animals living at her New Hope Farm.

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After her husband died in the mid-1950s, Lindsey, with five children of her own, bought her farm a few miles from the village of Lucketts. Word got out that she couldn't say no to a request to shelter a troubled youth or a homeless senior citizen. For 3½ decades, the needy have passed through her haven on their way to independent adult lives or, in the case of many of the elderly boarders, have stayed until they died. Lindsey is particularly proud of the way the children turned out. "I'm happy to say they're all good workers; none of them is in jail," she says.

Three of her current boarders are men in their thirties who work, often not returning home till 8 or 9 p.m. The other two spend most of the day sitting in the living room joshing each other, napping and watching television.

Léon Compher, a placid, one-armed man who describes himself as "going on 90," is known as the "cat man" because of his affinity for felines. He can usually be found camped in his favorite rocker, dressed in flannel shirt, sport jacket and hat, even in the summer. Compher grins even when he dozes.

And there is Donnie Lanham. At age 34, Donnie is an adult mind trapped in an infant's body, wracked and withered by childhood disease that left him able to move only a few facial muscles. He speaks in strained syllables that seem like slow gargling to the first-time visitor but later become recognizable as expressions of highly measured thought.

Lindsey gets him out of bed, feeds him, washes him, changes him, props him up in the living room, helps him recline and positions him so he can watch a strategically placed television set. The routine continues all day, every day, between farm chores. Respite occurs primarily when Dixon or another neighbor takes Donnie to church or on another brief outing. On most of the nights that Lindsey works, a neighbor helps with Donnie.

He was a premature baby given little chance of living very long. When Donnie was a month old, county social service workers brought him to New Hope Farm. "He was just a little teeny thing, like that," Lindsey says, spreading her hands about a foot apart.

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His greatest satisfaction is "that-I-can-talk," Donnie says as Lindsey gets up from the couch and adjusts his head so that his cheek doesn't rest on his pillow and further muffle his speech.

"If-you-want-to-be-hap-py-come-look-at-me," Donnie says.

Particularly fond of vanilla ice cream cones and the music of the late Hank Williams Sr., Donnie dreams of going to the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. Dixon says he hopes to find a way to get Donnie there someday.

One of Lindsey's foster children was Catherine Hill, who came to her at the age of 7 in desperate need of a stable home. "When I came, I wouldn't eat . . . I couldn't even cry," says Hill, 41 and raising a family near Charles Town, W.Va.

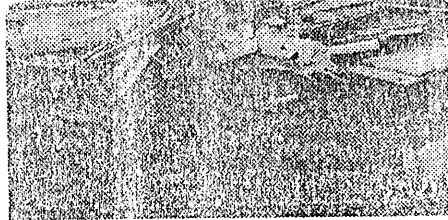
Lindsey "taught me a lot of things," Hill says of her 12 years on the farm. "The world would be another place if there were other people just like her."

Retired Loudoun physician Joseph Rogers, whose mother is cared for by Lindsey in Rogers' home, agrees. "She has very high standards and high goals—but not for her own comfort."

Lindsey says her five long-term boarders contribute a total of about \$200 a month to the household, most of it coming from an elderly resident's Social Security check. Lindsey earns \$800 a month for her outside nursing work and picks up extra money selling lambs, calves, eggs and milk. Even though the farm is paid for, she says, her modest income barely pays the taxes and the bills.

At first, Lindsey says, the Loudoun County government gave her "a dollar a day" to house each foster child, but after a few years she stopped taking that money. The last child arrived more than a decade ago. Although the county government has placed foster children in many other Loudoun homes, it has yet to open a permanent shelter for homeless adults.

Over the years Lindsey has opened her door to those with emotional problems, or physical or mental handicaps. Despite her deep faith, she says, she doesn't preach to her



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PHOTOS BY JUANA ARIAS—THE WASHINGTON POST

"We thought it would be a paradise But it was a lie."

For Latinos, Struggles Don't End in U.S.

10-22-95

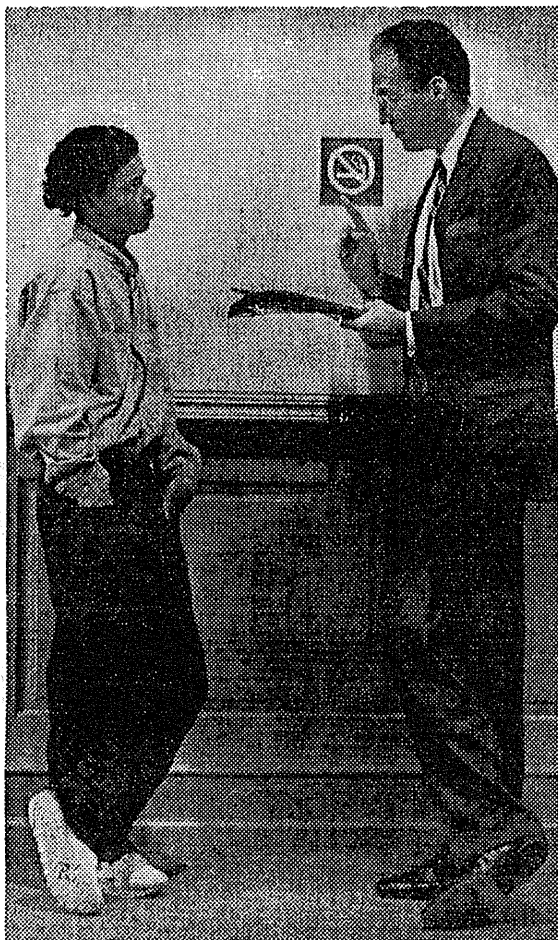
By Steve Bates and Charles W. Hall
Washington Post Staff Writers

Oscar, focused:

Above, Oscar Segovia, a Salvadoran native, thought about joining a gang but persevered and received his high school diploma, much to the delight of his mother, Maria Cristina Segovia.

Nelson, once an "Untouchable":

At right, former gang member Nelson Marcia, here with his attorney, John Kyonaga, says his scrape with the law persuaded him to change his ways.



Growing up in rural El Salvador, Oscar Segovia dreamed of a new life in the United States. For 10 years, he waited eagerly for the day when his father, who had settled in Arlington, would have enough money to send for the rest of the family.

But less than a week after Segovia and his mother arrived here in 1989, his father moved out, having little in common with them after their years apart. At 13, Segovia suddenly felt alone in a bewildering new culture.

As he began to sink in high school, trying to juggle his studies and two part-time jobs, there seemed to be no one Segovia could talk to. He rarely saw his mother, who worked almost 80 hours a week, and he said he was ashamed to approach teachers with his halting English.

"It's like you grow up without parents. It's not that they don't care, but they don't have time," he said. "By the time my mom gets home, I'm already asleep."

On the verge of dropping out of school and tempted to join a street gang in his neighborhood, Segovia got help from a school counseling program and received his high school diploma in June. But his path to success remains tortuous and uncertain. Now 19 and cleaning offices, he is looking for a job with regular hours, so he can attend community college.

See YOUTHS, A16, Col. 1

GOP for What Ails Them

dressing Broader Health Care Reform

where the doctor had done wrong. This year, Blaine put aside his

some \$270 billion from the medical insurance program for the elderly compared with projected spending if



To Latinos, Another Set Of Setbacks

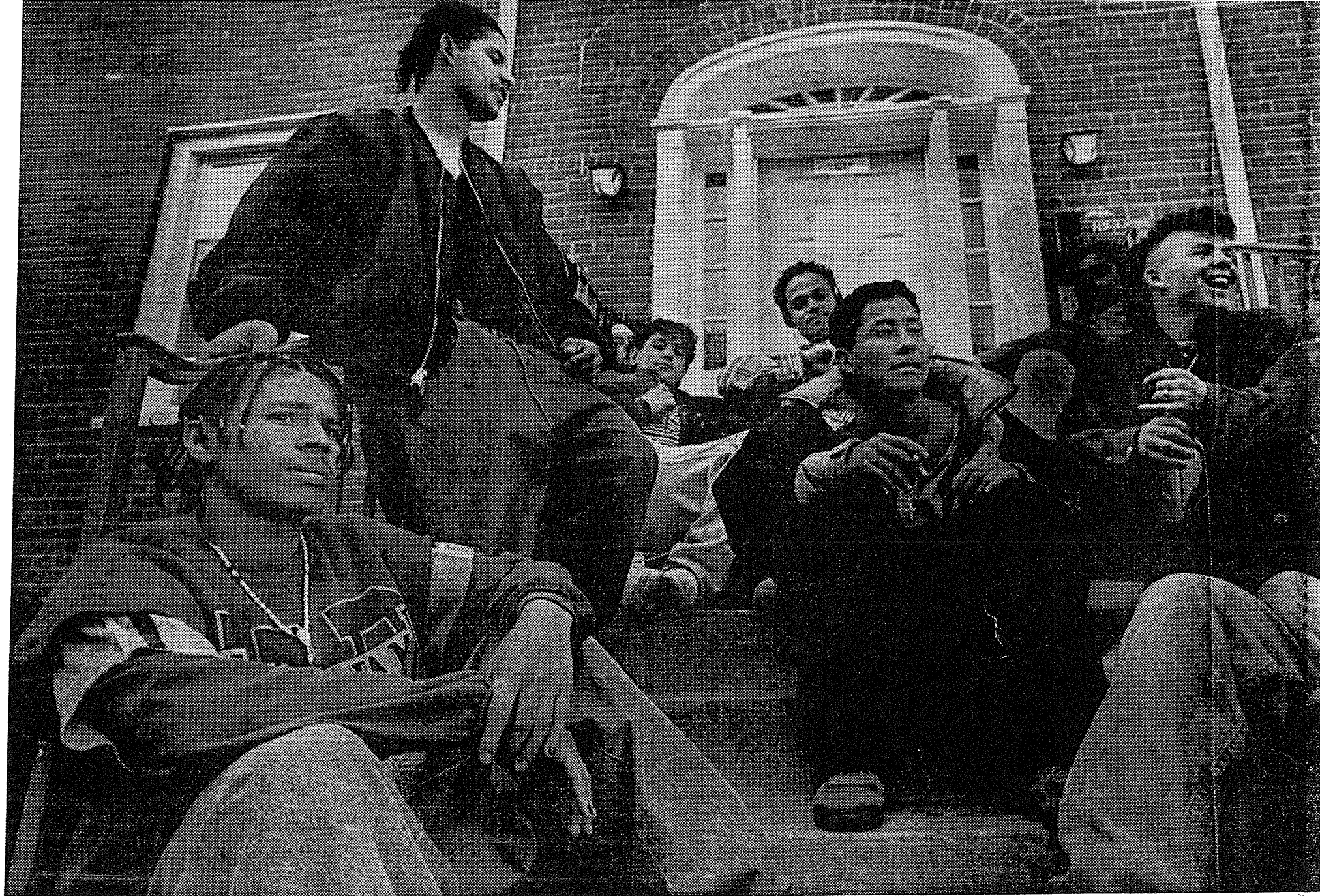
YOUTHS, From A1

Segovia is hardly alone in finding his new land to be a harsh, disorienting place. Fifteen years after a massive wave of Latino immigration began in the Washington area, many Central and South American youths here are struggling to adjust to life in the United States, and Latino parents and community leaders are concerned about their future.

About 50,000 recent Latino immigrants ages 12 to 24 live in the Washington area, part of a diverse metro area Latino population of nearly 290,000 that is three times as large as in 1980. Many of the young immigrants—especially those who fled war and poverty in Central America—are dealing simultaneously with family turmoil, lack of previous schooling, immigration restrictions and pressure to work long hours to help support their families.

Most of the teenagers, like Segovia, are managing to stay focused on school and the goal of a good career. Some others, lonely and confused in class and estranged from parents they joined in the United States after many years of separation, have dropped out of school, sometimes turning to street gangs for friendship and fast money.

"They arrive here at the age of adolescence and find they have to adapt to a family," said Marco Vasquez, a counselor at Bell Multicultural High School in Mount Pleasant. "Most of them are very committed to school at first, but after a few years, they see some



Nelson and Co.: Nelson Marcia, left, and other Latino teenagers find some support, and camaraderie, at Options, a counseling center in Alexandria.

*"It's like you grow up
without parents. It's*



ly," said Marco Vasquez, a counselor at Ben Multicultural High School in Mount Pleasant. "Most of them are very committed to school at first, but after a few years, they see some of their dreams are not so easy to reach, a period of cynicism sets in, some get into gangs. Many have been through war and brutality at home; here they have a few more luxuries, but just as much of a struggle."

For many young Latino immigrants, the first and toughest hurdle is a reunion with parents they have not seen in a decade or more, according to the professionals who work closely with young Latinos in Washington and its suburbs.

Strangers in a Strange Land

Central Americans who came to the United States in the 1980s often left their children behind with other relatives, then waited many years to bring the children north, because they lacked the money to support them here or the legal status to send for them. As a result, teenagers may arrive in the Washington area to face fathers who are virtual strangers, mothers who have remarried and borne new children or stepparents they never have met.

Once reunited, parents and children often see little of each other because they are working day and night, and that can make them grow further apart, several counselors in the Latino community said.

"The family disintegration that started in El Salvador continues here," said the Rev. Rene Maldonado, a Salvadoran priest at Our Lady of Sorrows Church in Takoma Park. "There the youths did not see their parents, and here they don't either. Their houses become like hotels, a place they go just to sleep, not to converse."

Norman Mejia, raised in Honduras by his aunt, joined his mother in Prince George's County at 14. He did not get along with his mother, he said, and became discouraged at school because of low grades and lack of friends. He dropped out in his junior year and fell in with a group of Latino teenagers who drank heavily and sold drugs.

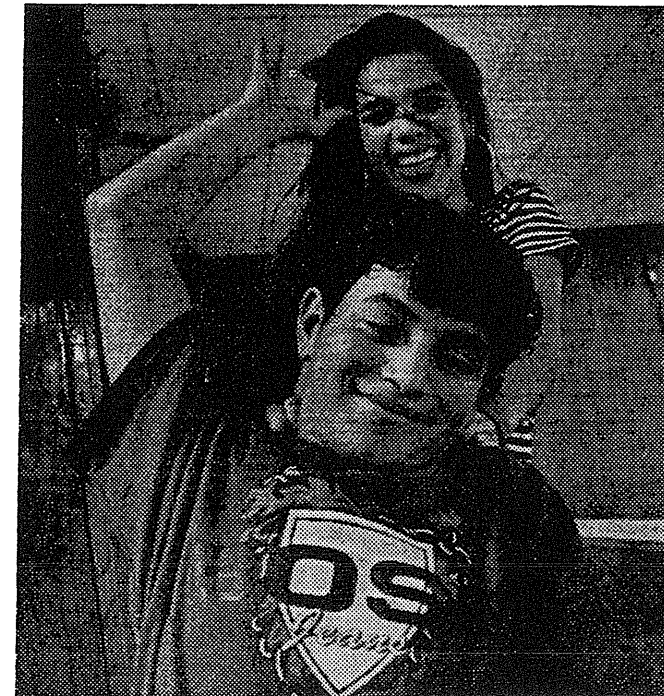
After two stays in juvenile detention, for stealing a car and possessing cocaine, Mejia has returned to high school and hopes to graduate in January. He is determined to change but worries that his run-ins with police have hurt his prospects.

"I did a lot of stupid things," said Mejia, now 19. "A lot of young guys come here here and then end up in the first thing

It's like you grow up without parents. It's not that they don't care, but they don't have time."

— Oscar Segovia, 19,
at right, after graduation

Photographs
By Juana Arias
—The Washington Post



Maritza, 15: *The Salvadoran-born sophomore dreams of college, but her options are limited by immigration laws.*

Wendy, 14: *Horsing around with a friend, Jimmy Salgado, at a bowling alley, she worries her mother when she skips classes.*

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"I did a lot of stupid things," said Mejia, now 19. "A lot of young guys come here alone, and they grab on to the first thing they see. They're in a bad economic situation, and they can't communicate with their parents. In school the other kids laugh at their English, and outside the doors are open to many vices. It's so easy to fall."

Of the more than 70 young Latino immigrants interviewed for this article, almost all expressed a deep desire to succeed, but most also spoke of being anxious and disillusioned.

"It is very difficult to adapt. No one helps you, not even other Latinos," said Oscar Martinez, an 18-year-old Salvadoran from Langley Park, who joined his mother here after a 12-year separation. Martinez, a freshman at Montgomery College, completed high school while holding down a late-night job in a pizzeria. Every day for three years, he rushed from school to his job, often riding the bus home as late as 2 a.m.

When he came to the United States four years ago, Martinez said, he did not realize how isolated he would feel in school because of his poor English or how hard he would have to work to earn money for his own needs. Above all, he was surprised at the amount of street crime.

"It was a relief to get here, but in some ways, it's worse" than El Salvador, Martinez said. "We thought it would be a paradise where everything is easy. But it was a lie."

Most of the two dozen Latino immigrant parents who were interviewed also voiced some regrets. They said they brought their children here to give them economic opportunity and, in some cases, to shield them from war. But although they expected to endure some economic hardship and language problems at first, they said they had no idea that U.S. youngsters have so much freedom and that their children would be so exposed to drugs and violence.



Wendy, 14: *Horsing around with a friend, Jimmy Salgado, at a bowling alley, she worries her mother when she skips classes.*

"My biggest fear is that they will go to the streets, find bad friends and find drugs," said Esperanza Salgado, a salesclerk who is raising four children in Alexandria and whose oldest, 14-year-old Wendy, has been skipping classes. "There are times when I wish I were back in El Salvador."

School dropout numbers provide one measure of the adjustment problems. Although school districts do not have separate figures on Latino immigrants, Latinos as a whole have a higher dropout rate than whites, blacks or Asians in D.C. public schools. The same is true in each of the five suburban school systems with a significant Latino enrollment—Montgomery, Prince George's, Fairfax and Arlington counties and the City of Alexandria.

The 1990 census found that 21.7 percent of all 16- to 19-year-old Latinos in the Washington area were not enrolled in school and did not have a high school diploma, compared with 11.8 percent for blacks and 6.3 percent for whites.

At Odds With the System

Several Latino community activists said that they are troubled by those statistics and that organizations such as churches, PTAs and youth sports leagues need to do more to reach out to Latino newcomers and break down their cultural isolation. Some also said that more public schools should provide informal settings in which teachers can talk to students individually about their academic problems.

"We are creating a generation of angry, undereducated individuals who are supposed to be tomorrow's leaders," said Carla Branch, who runs a service called Options,

which counsels Latino teenagers in the Arlandria section of Alexandria. "They don't know how the system works. They are angry at the system, and the system is angry at them."

Almost one in four Latinos in the Washington area is from El Salvador, more than from any other country, and about 13 percent of the area's Latino households live below the federal poverty level.

For some Latino youths, the pressing need to earn money for their families has become a reason to stay out of school. Rafael Franchi, a Latino member of the Fairfax County School Board, said he is disturbed to see young teenagers at a local 7-Eleven where Latino immigrants often gather in hopes of landing day-labor jobs.

"When I want to hire a gardener there, 25 or 30 people come to my car. Some of them are students, 14 or 15 years old," Franchi said. "Several have told me they don't want to go back to school."

Other youths are trying to concentrate on their studies but worry that they may not be able to afford college because of their immigration status.

Immigrants without full resident status are entitled to a public education through 12th grade but often are ineligible for college loans and scholarships, and bills recently passed by the U.S. House and Senate would impose more restrictions on such aid. From 10 percent to 15 percent of young Latino immigrants in the Washington area entered the United States illegally, immigration officials estimate. As many as 20 percent more are in legal limbo, many of them Salvadorans whose temporary resident status was revoked last month.

Maritza Villegas, 15, a Salvadoran-born

sophomore at John F. Kennedy High School in Silver Spring, is in that group. Her dream is to become a police officer or a pediatrician, but she realizes that her college options may be limited by immigration restrictions. That uncertainty and her family's limited income have given her the sense that she cannot take full advantage of the opportunity-rich society around her.

"There is so much I'd love to do, but I can't," she said with a sigh. "I would love to travel like my friends, but we can't afford it. I got a nice letter from a college summer school, but I can't go without a green card. So, I guess I'll just have to wait."

The Education Gap

Arlington school officials surveyed last year's 12th-graders and found that 26.4 percent of the Latino seniors had no further educational plans, compared with 14.4 percent of black students, 6.1 percent of Asians and 5.3 percent of whites.

At the outset, many youngsters from Latin America enter U.S. schools far behind academically. About 500 of the 2,100 Spanish-speaking students in intensive English classes in Montgomery County high schools have little or no prior schooling, according to county school officials. In Arlington and Fairfax secondary schools, officials estimate that about half the Latinos enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes are at least two academic years behind.

Parents, unfamiliar with the U.S. school system, often do not anticipate the problems their children will have in closing this gap, school officials said, and often miss the signs of trouble when they arise. Several officials said Latino parents are less likely than other

parents to contact teachers about their children's progress, partly because such contacts are seen in Latino culture as interfering in the school's affairs.

"They think that if anything goes wrong, the school will let them know," said Francisco Millet, ESL director for Fairfax schools. "They are completely shocked when we call and say their kid has been skipping classes."

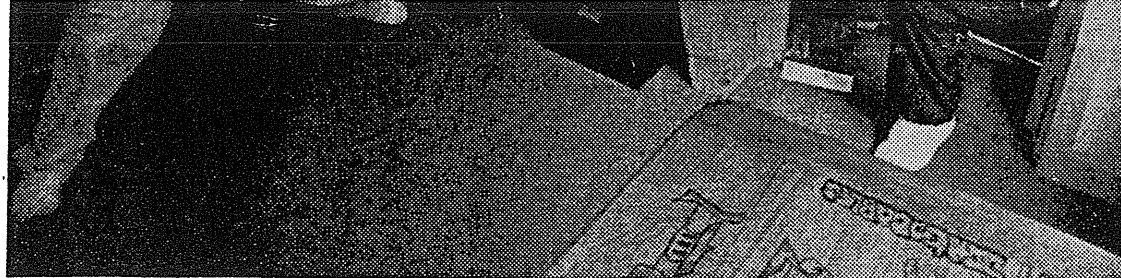
In neighborhoods with concentrations of Latino immigrants, such as Hyattsville, Adams-Morgan, Arlandria and the Culmore area of Fairfax County, some Latino youths who have stopped going to school or attend only sporadically have joined street gangs.

The gangs provide a sense of camaraderie and ethnic identity that some youths say they cannot find anywhere else. Although teenagers may join a gang for social reasons, they often become involved in crimes such as stealing cars and selling drugs, police said.

A Fairfax County probation officer who lectures to Latino students has compiled a list of 37 Latino youth gangs in the Washington area, based on information from law enforcement officials. Several schools and police departments recently have sponsored forums on youth violence for Latino parents and children.

"I gave a presentation on gang awareness, and some of the mothers cried," said Luis Hurtada, a Montgomery County police officer. "I showed them things they had seen in their homes—graffiti, colors, handkerchiefs. . . . I'm extremely worried. If there are no jobs, we're going to see Hispanic gangs spreading."

Nelson Marcia, 21, joined Locos Intocables, an Arlandria gang whose name means "Untouchable Crazyes," after dropping out of high school in his junior year. Neighborhood



Cadenas said about 65 of the 225 students in the program are Latino immigrants.

George Mason's program is one of several school and community initiatives helping young Latino immigrants in the area, although the officials and volunteers involved say their efforts are dwarfed by the number of immigrants in need. The common feature of these programs is an emphasis on providing the youths with individual attention.

At Montgomery Blair High School in Silver Spring, where 20 percent of the students are Latino, Samuel Sanchez, a Burtonsville resident, runs a voluntary Saturday tutoring program that attracts

hasn't always been easy for the Gayoso children. Olga said she still finds it hard to relate to white classmates, and Jose said teachers often were surprised when he earned good grades.

Cesar sees the future as full of possibilities. But he said many of his Latino friends are adrift because they did not get as much help as he did.

"We Hispanics, as a whole, could do so much for this country if we're given a chance to study," Cesar said. "A lot of my friends dropped out of high school, and they're working at Pizza Hut or the mall. There seems to me to be some kind of a wall, but college can break that wall."

friends would invite him to "skipping parties," he recalled, and he started missing two days of school a week, then three, before quitting classes altogether.

"When people come here, they don't want to belong in gangs, but it's either them or you have no friends," said Marcia, who arrived from El Salvador in 1989. He has been in several fights with rival Latino gangs. A few months ago, he said, a friend of his was wounded in a drive-by shooting, part of a continuing cycle of attack and retaliation.

After a recent conviction for cocaine possession, Marcia started to question the path he was taking. He has since applied for a position in a federal job training program in Pennsylvania and is studying for a high school equivalency certificate.

For Latino parents who work two or three jobs to make ends meet, the challenge of keeping unsupervised teenagers away from drugs and violence often seems overwhelming. In many cases, that task is harder because the children were raised by other relatives and are not prepared to accept their parents' authority, several counselors in the Latino community said.

chafes at the restrictions her parents have placed on her. She is not allowed to date boys until she turns 18, and she often must forgo after-school social activities.

Her mother, Ana Rosa Villegas, said she feels she has no choice but to keep a tight rein on Maritza.

"Things here are so overwhelming. I see so many girls out in the streets," said Villegas, 33, who cleans hospital rooms for a living. "I was married very young; I had to leave school; and I never had any youth. Now, thanks to God, Maritza has the chance to come here and study, to reach where I couldn't. I don't want anything to ruin that."

Oscar Segovia, the Arlington teenager who felt he had lost his bearings when his father moved out, said Latino parents are right to be wary of giving their children a lot of freedom. "Here, if you don't have something to focus on, you can get into bad trouble," he said.

After having flirted with joining the gang in his neighborhood, Segovia is deeply proud of his high school diploma—and proud that Latino friends are taking note of his graduation. That, he said, has made him feel a new responsibility to become a good role model.

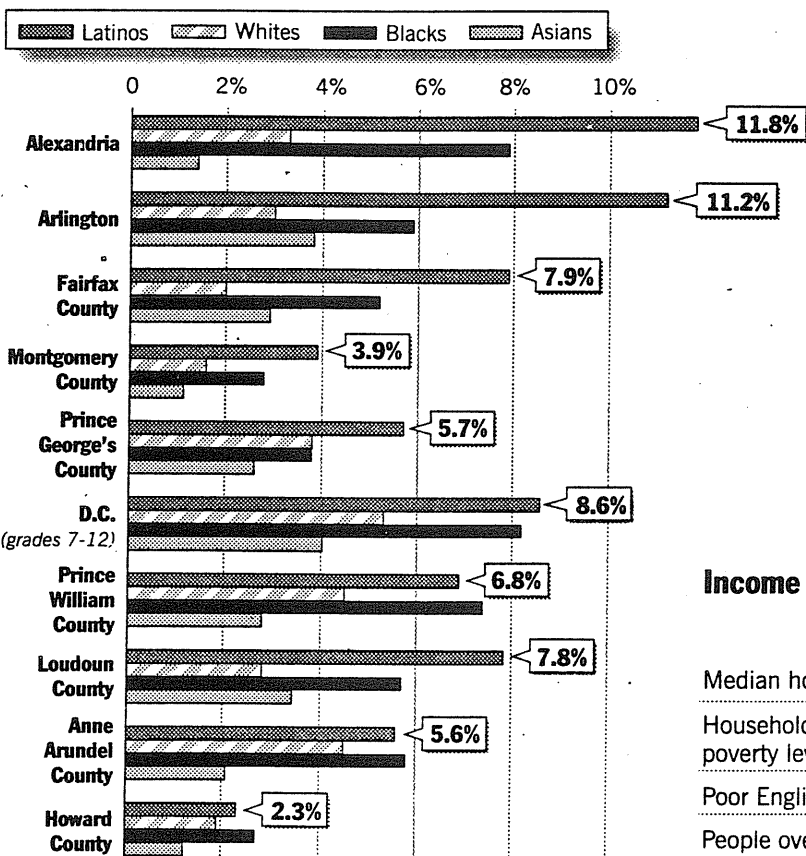
"I want to make a difference," said Segovia, whose goal is a career in computer graphics. "I want to talk to them and show them what they can become." He paused and added, "I've got a lot to do."

Staff writer Pamela Constable contributed to this report.

THE AREA'S LATINOS: A DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Public school dropout rates

Grades 9-12, 1994 (Formulas used by jurisdictions vary)



SOURCES: State and local education officials; 1990 Census Bureau data; Claritas, Inc.

Area Latino population

Jurisdiction	1994 Latino population	Share of all Latinos in area*
District of Columbia	37,931	13.2%
Anne Arundel County	7,942	2.8%
Howard County	4,590	1.6%
Montgomery County	67,680	23.6%
Prince George's County	39,324	13.7%
Alexandria	16,628	5.8%
Arlington	28,343	9.9%
Fairfax County	64,858	22.6%
Fairfax	1,383	0.5%
Falls Church	633	0.2%
Loudoun County	2,788	1.0%
Manassas	2,041	0.7%
Manassas Park	376	0.1%
Prince William County	11,895	4.2%

* Percentages do not total 100 because of rounding.

Income and education in the D.C. area

	Latino	White	Black	Asian
Median household income	\$37,618	\$52,837	\$33,568	\$46,430
Households below poverty level	13.5%	7.1%	19.2%	11.0%
Poor English skills	30.8%	1.7%	1.3%	26.2%
People over 25 with less than 9th-grade education	21.3%	3.7%	7.9%	8.1%