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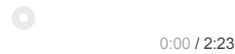
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Pulitzer-winning journalist Jose Antonio Vargas' immigration film documents the undocumented

DOCUMENTED Official Movie Trailer



BY STEVE ROTHHAUS
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The hardest part about being an undocumented youth is not spending the rest of your life cleaning toilets or waiting tables. It's perhaps never hugging your mother again.

"It's like we don't know each other. It's really hard," Pulitzer-winning journalist Jose Antonio Vargas tells his Filipino mom in a Skype conversation — their first talk in more than 20 years — recorded for his new film



Young Jose Antonio Vargas in the Philippines with mother Emelie Salinas.

Documented, which premieres in South Florida Friday night at [O Cinema Miami Shores at Miami Theater Center](#).

Mother and grown child both sob. "It's like you're not the son I used to have. The son that used to tell me, 'Ma, I love you,'" Emelie Salinas tells him from the Philippines.

"I'm really, really sorry," says Vargas, 33, a former Washington Post reporter who came out as undocumented in a 2011 New York Times magazine article he wrote.

"It's OK. I understand you, son. I'm always worrying about you."

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"Yeah, I know," Vargas tells her. "We will see each other soon. And I love you, very, very much."

Salinas and Vargas won't see each other soon. She can't come to America and if he returns to Manila, he might not be allowed back in the U.S.

Vargas, who shared a [Pulitzer Prize for reporting on the Virginia Tech shootings in 2007](#), is on a 13-city tour with his film, which airs later this year on CNN. He will be at the O Cinema screenings on Friday and Saturday to answer audience questions.



"As an undocumented person, I'm in a unique position to report on the issue, and to talk about how we're directly impacted by this," Vargas said this week from his home in New York.

Vargas' grandparents smuggled him into California at age 12 in 1993. He didn't learn his immigration status until four years later, when he sought a driver's license.

"I went to the DMV like any 16-year-old. I didn't tell my grandparents. I just went. I showed the woman in the booth my green card and my school ID. She flipped the green card around twice, she looks at me and she says, 'This is fake. Don't come back here again,' he tells a high school class in *Documented*.

He raced home on his bicycle and told his grandfather. "The first thing he said was, 'What are you doing showing that to people?' The first thing. The second thing, 'You're not supposed to be here.'"

Vargas never told anyone else about his immigration status. He lied to get a job at The San Francisco Chronicle. He graduated in 2004 from San Francisco State University. Immediately after, The Washington Post hired him. In 2009, he joined Huffington Post and two years later wrote the New York Times piece.

"It's my artistic act of civil disobedience," Vargas said of his [Define American](#) media campaign on behalf of the nation's estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants.

Vargas' story is not uncommon, said immigration activist Felipe Sousa-Rodriguez, 28, who was born Felipe Sousa-Matos in Brazil and grew up as undocumented in Miami.

Both Vargas and Sousa-Rodriguez are gay and came out as teenagers.

"The cost of coming out was really high for me. I was afraid of getting kicked out and I was afraid of the police all the time," said Sousa-Rodriguez, who moved to Tampa and is co-director of [GetEQUAL](#), an LGBT advocacy group. "I was told all I could dream about was to become a warehouse worker, which I did. I cleaned toilets even though I was an honors student. I cleaned houses. I did everything an undocumented person does. All types of work that people can pay you under the table."

Sousa-Rodriguez and Gaby Pacheco gained national prominence when they and others walked in 2010 from Miami to Washington to lobby for passage of the DREAM Act and other immigration reform. Both Sousa-Rodriguez and Pacheco are featured in *Documented*.

After graduating from Dr. Michael M. Krop Senior High in Northeast Miami-Dade County, Sousa-Rodriguez attended Miami Dade College and

through June 22 in Fort Lauderdale

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St. Thomas University. He graduated with a business degree in 2012.

"I always wanted to go to college to make my mother proud. I always had this very clear thing about my mom, that she had made huge sacrifices for me and I need to make her proud," he said. "She still lives in Brazil. She never came to live in the United States. It's hard to get visas to come to the U.S. I just grew up without her. I haven't seen her. Thirteen years. We talk on the phone. She doesn't know how to use the Internet."

Diego Sánchez, 23, is luckier than Vargas and Sousa-Rodriguez. He immigrated to Fort Lauderdale at age 7 from Argentina with his immediate family, all undocumented at the time.

"When I think of Jose's story, I think of my story," said Sanchez, now co-director of [The Bridge Project](#), a Washington-based immigration group.

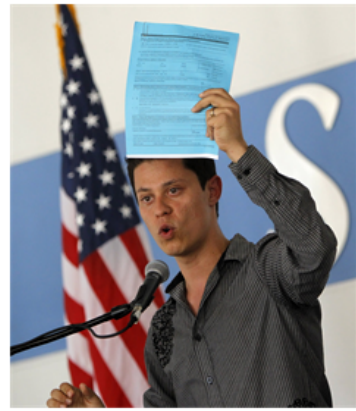
"In my case, I'm privileged to have my mom with me and I can't put myself in his shoes, being without his mom for so many years," said Sanchez, who has seen Vargas' film. "He has mixed emotions, mixed feelings about his mom. He was mad that she sent him here. I know now that he understands: That's what a mother is willing to do for the future of her child. The fact that he hasn't been able to hug his mother for 20 years, it got me bawling, to be honest."

Sanchez's mother, Alejandra Saucedo, 44, is a co-founder of DREAMers Moms, a national organization presenting Friday's screening of *Documented*.

"In Argentina, it's not easy to live," said Saucedo, who helped put Diego through St. Thomas University by cleaning houses and baking empanadas at home. "We don't have pay. We don't have work. We don't have jobs. We don't have a future. I'm very sorry to say that, but it's true. In this country, right now, I'm feeling very motivated. I can see many parents, especially mothers, who came out from the shadows."

IF YOU GO

Documented will be screened 7 p.m. Friday, 6 and 8 p.m. Saturday and Sunday at O Cinema Miami Shores at Miami Theater Center, 9806 NE Second Ave. Filmmaker Jose Antonio Vargas will attend the Friday and Saturday screenings. General admission \$11.00; student and seniors \$9.50; members \$7.50. www.o-cinema.org/event/documented




Felipe Sousa-Rodriguez at Miami Dade College in 2012. Emily Michot / Miami Herald File.



Diego Sánchez celebrates his 2012 graduation from St. Thomas University with sister Antonella Sanchez, father Luis Sanchez, mother Alejandra Saucedo and sister Daiana Sanchez.

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