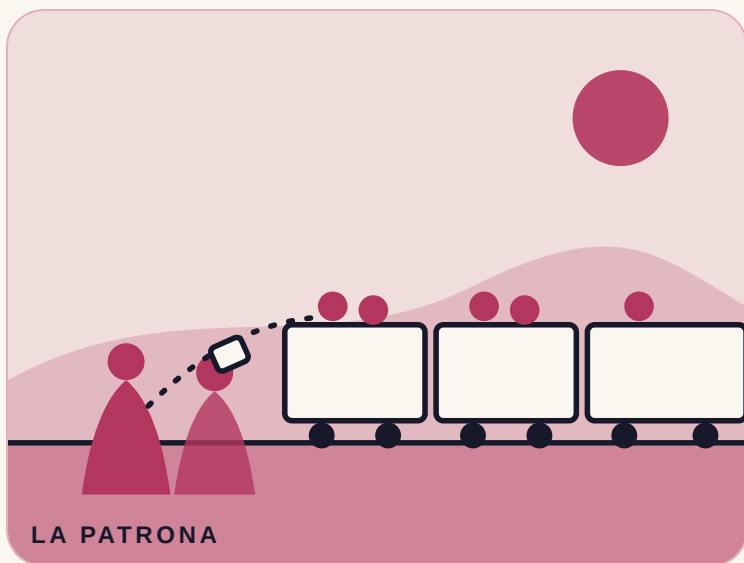




MEXICO

The women who feed a moving train

In 1995, women in a Mexican village tossed bread to hungry strangers on a train. They kept going.

WHERE La Patrona, Veracruz

WHO Las Patronas, a group of women in the village of La Patrona

WHEN 1995 to 2026

4 min read

The story

La Patrona is a small village in Veracruz, Mexico. Sugar cane grows around it. Freight trains pass through, and many carry people on the roof.

The riders are migrants. Most come from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. They head north, and many hope to reach the United States. The trains have a name: La Bestia, which means “the Beast.”

February 1995

One day in February 1995, sisters from the Romero family went to buy bread and milk. They waited at the crossing for a train to pass. Men on the roof called out that they were hungry.

More cars went by, and more voices called. The sisters threw the bread and the milk.

At home, they told their mother, Leonila. The family met and decided to do it again. The next day they threw about 30 bags of food. They did not know about the dangers on the trains. They just saw hungry people.

A kitchen by the tracks

At first, each woman cooked at home. Others joined, and neighbors gave food. The family gave land for a shared kitchen.

Not everyone helped. Some people put obstacles in their way. Some husbands told their wives to stay home. A few women stayed, and they kept going.

When a train whistle sounds, someone shouts, “Viene tren!” That means “The train is coming!” The women run to the tracks with boxes of food and wheelbarrows of water. They stand close and hold out their arms. In about two minutes, it is over.

While God gives me life, and migration continues to exist, I believe I will be here helping.

NORMA ROMERO, TO IN THESE TIMES, 2012

1995

the year it began

~20

women in the group,

2026

31 years

and still going

More than food

The work grew. The women built a small clinic and a house where migrants can rest.

One day, a young man begged for help for his sick fiancée. Norma was afraid the police might arrest her. She drove the girl to a hospital anyway. Three places refused to treat her. At last Norma took her home, and a nurse helped.

A week later, the young woman was well. She and her fiancé got back on the train.

Times have changed. In 2014, Mexico began a program called Frontera Sur. At the group's 20th anniversary in 2015, only one migrant rode the train past them.

Reports differ on how many ride today. Norma says they will keep helping, because migrants look for other ways to the border.

Thirty-one years on, about 20 women still carry food to the tracks.

How it unfolded

- **1995** Sisters throw bread to hungry men on a train.
- **2012** Fifteen women run a kitchen, a clinic and a rest house.
- **2014** Mexico begins the Frontera Sur program.
- **2015** At their 20th year, only one migrant rides past.
- **2016** A Veracruz university announces a Medal of Merit for them.
- **2026** About 20 women still bring food to the tracks.

CHAPTER TWO

What makes it special

Nobody planned this. It began with a bag of groceries and a few hungry shouts. A habit grew into a kitchen, a rota and a public cause.

It is not a cure. One member, Julia Ramírez, says she wishes migrants had jobs at home, so no one had to leave.

OUR TAKE

Kindness became a system: a kitchen, a rota and a route to the tracks.

CHAPTER THREE

What we can learn

1 Act on what you see

The sisters did not know the dangers. They saw hunger and threw the bread.

Try this: Pick one small need you noticed this week, and do one small thing about it.

2 Start with what you have

They began with bread and milk, then rice, beans and tortillas.

Try this: List what you already own, such as an hour or a skill, and offer it to one person.

3 Make it a routine

They fed people nearly every day, with a rota in the kitchen.

Try this: Pick one repeat time each week for one small act of help.

4 Let others join

A family became a group, and shops and schools gave food.

Try this: Ask one person to join something you now do alone.

ONE THOUGHT TO TAKE AWAY

Help with what is in your hands.

Sources

In These Times

[The Patrons of Veracruz](#)

Comboni Missionaries

[Mexico: Solidarity Without Borders](#)

VICE

[These Women Are Feeding Central American Immigrants Atop a Speeding Train](#)

BELatina

[Meet Las Patronas, the Mexican Women Who Have Fed Migrants From a Moving Train](#)

Fact-check note: Sources differ on how it began. In These Times names two sisters, Bernarda and Rosa, at the crossing. Comboni quotes Norma as a third sister, with Rosa throwing the bread. Vice says Norma gave the groceries away. The story says only 'sisters from the Romero family'. The first day was about 30 bags (Comboni, BELatina) or 25 lunches (Vice). Group size is 15 (2012), 14 (2015) and about 20 (2026). Daily meal counts vary a lot, so none is used. After Frontera Sur, Vice saw one migrant on a train (2015), Comboni says train travel is forbidden, and BELatina (2026) says thousands still ride. The fiancée story is Norma's own account. Lines marked "Our take" are interpretation. Everything else comes from the sources above.