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Illegal entrant who saved boy in desert thought of his own children

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PHOENIX — An illegal immigrant who rescued a 9-year-old boy from the southern Arizona desert said Wednesday he was thinking of his own four children when he halted his two-day walk from Mexico to help the boy.

Manuel Jesus Cordova Soberanes told The Associated Press that he never could have left the boy to continue his journey, even though he was just eight hours from reaching Tucson.

"I am a father of four children. For that, I stayed," Cordova said in Spanish from his home in Magdalena de Kino in the Mexican state of Sonora. "I never could have left him. Never."

If he had left, authorities say it could have meant death for the boy, 9-year-old Christopher Buztheitner, who had an injured leg, was dressed in shorts despite the desert cold and had just lost his mother in a car crash.

Christopher and his mother, 45-year-old Dawn Alice Tomko, had been in the area camping, Santa Cruz County Sheriff Tony Estrada said.

He said Tomko was driving on a U.S. Forest Service road in a remote area just north of the Mexican border when she lost control of her van on a curve on Thanksgiving Day. The van vaulted off a cliff into a canyon and landed 300 feet from the road.

Cordova, a 26-year-old bricklayer who was hoping to find work in Arizona, said he was two days into his walk when he spotted Christopher, who had a dog with him and held a side mirror from the van. One of his legs also was scratched up and discolored.

The two could not communicate because Christopher only speaks English and Cordova only speaks Spanish. But Cordova said the boy took him to the canyon's edge and showed him the accident.

The two would spend the next 14 hours together before a group of hunters found them and called for help. U.S. Border Patrol agents took Cordova into custody, and Christopher was flown to a hospital in Tucson.

Christopher was reunited with family over the weekend and Cordova was taken back to Mexico.

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