

A Perfect Day

By Elisabeth Miller

On a gorgeous September Sunday afternoon, the baby fell asleep in her arms, sucking her thumb, as they swung gently in the multi-colored hammock which hung from the big tree in the back yard overlooking Mashpaug Pond at the house on the south side of Providence, as Mama made guacamole and chirmol and Papi grilled the meat and tortillas, enough to feed the extended family, the endless cousins and countless friends.

She never felt growing up that life would be lived in a continuous state of suspension, like the tubes of chemicals mixed in science class, always waiting for the next hand to come along and shake things up. She never felt that way until she began to live among the Guatemalans, until Primo had his stroke and she got sick. Before that, her concept of life was that it is a progression, a fairly straight road to be traveled from birth to death, life moving forward and getting better with every step, progressing even if there were a few obstacles and setbacks and detours to be overcome along the way.

Now she knew differently, that you have to learn to enjoy the moments of tranquility between the periods of volatility in life, always waiting for when things settle down into a nice routine for a while and you can begin to feel that you have at least *some* control over the way things are, even after you have learned that even that is only an illusion.

Life among the Guatemalans was a lot like living inside one of the telenovelas on Univision, with a huge cast of characters acting in a story which is a bit too dramatic and melodramatic, a bit too emotional and physical, with a bit too much pain and suffering, ominous with the feeling of danger always looming. It was all more than a bit beyond the world as seen and experienced by the TV viewer who stays with NBC and CBS.

Guatemalans grow up on shaky ground, literally and figuratively, and it has made them appreciate the ability to stay calm even as they live surrounded by a constant swirl of people, chaos and activity. For Guatemalans, to be tranquilo is always a positive thing.

If this story were to end on that Sunday, it would be a happy ending, very Hollywood, with the baby swinging gently in the colorful hammock, the dark gray Toyota Landcruiser in the driveway, the bright sun gleaming off the newly

painted cream and forest green garage, the gray and red cement patio that Papi had designed and built, the fresh green grass, the view of the sparkling blue water, a family of white swans swimming by. And a family of hard-working immigrants cooking out and living out the American dream.

And then there she was, the one American whose dreams never quite looked like this, and whose straight-road life never should have gotten to this place, because this is no Hollywood movie.

They all live everyday aware that this life they have created together is not stable or secure, and much of it is not as it seems. It has been more than a year now since Papi received the letter with his departure date. He turned white when he read it. Mama was pregnant and he had a baby due two months after the US government was telling him he had to leave the country, his case for a visa denied by the court.

On this perfect day, none of that matters. Everyone is working, and everyone is fine. For the rest of it, they can go on pretending that all of that is just fine too. Tranquilo.