

Solito Book Review

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Weekly Contributor: Writing Scene

A memoir filled with love, family, and the desire for refuge; this week I'm reviewing the memoir I read *Solito* by Javier Zamora. It is about his journey from El Salvador to the United States of America as a nine year-old boy.

A majority of the travel was without his family; his mother and father already living in the USA and his grandpa only helping him at the beginning. He was with five other people and together, it made The Six: Patricia, Chino, Carla (Patricia's twelve year old daughter), Chele, Marcelo, and Javier. They traveled as a group on boats, in cities, on buses, and finally a desert until they were separated.

Warning: this article contains spoilers.

"We look like leaf-cutter ants in Abuelita's garden, but instead of holding bitten leaves over our heads, we carry our black backpacks" (Zamora, 105).

To Potential Readers

This book has a bit over 380 pages or so. The way Zamora writes puts us in his shoes. It would feel as though you were there, as if you were him. Of course, the lightness of his nine year-old thought process makes it easier to follow and imagine; however, it makes it hurt much more when you remember he was just nine..

Themes

When memoirs recount tragedies and traumatic experiences, offering reassurances like "it's okay. It's not real", as someone might with a work of fiction, it becomes insufficient. Here are some themes I found most important to me.

Family doesn't have to be blood.

Solito displays this theme, the way Zamora carries us through the head of a young boy, thinking of how much he wants to be held by Patricia or how he wants to play with Carla. Over time, Chino, Patricia, and Carla have adopted him into their little group. When they get fake papers, Patricia refers to Javier as her son to make it easier to explain. She began to treat him like

her actual son. When this happens, he describes it as his own little family. By the end, that is his second family. They become The Four.

Determination and hope go hand in hand.

When Zamora traveled, he was thrown into horrific situations. He traveled about 3000 miles by boat with the incapability to swim. He watches as people get sick repeatedly, the boat moving at immense speeds, having to use the bathroom, and a man almost falling off. Due to being a child, he didn't quite know how to use the bathroom, tie his shoes, or handle hunger and thirst. No matter how difficult his trial was, he kept thinking of his *Cadejo* (a spirit his grandfather told him to believe in) and the day he'd finally be reunited with his parents. Despite being deported back to Mexico twice (where their fake identities were from), he was determined to keep going, his hope still strong. And the third time had been the charm.

Final Note

I asked for this book for Christmas, first seeing it when it was sold in bookstores. I remember that September of 2022, going into the bookstore, seeing the title, reading the back, and seeing the words "El Salvador" written. Even though it took me a little while to finally read it, I'm so glad I did.

As a Salvadoran woman, I felt seen. As a Salvadoran writer, I felt understood. It was such a disappointing feeling not seeing as many Salvadoran authors; finding Javier Zamora had saved me from giving up the search. Although I was born in the United States, my grandmother was born in El Salvador and traveled by plane. She was the root of my entire family. My great grandmother traveled by foot which my mother always tells me the first memory she has of her: her legs scratched with dry blood and her clothes dirtied and worn out. *Solito* put that into perspective.

The book is filled with slang and phrases and common knowledge a Salvadoran would know. I didn't know some of these slang words, but learning about them made me feel more like myself.

I recommend this book to anyone who wants to know more about the dangerous trial of immigration... and anyone who wants to read a good, heartfelt memoir.

"I never found out what happened to Chele, or to any of the countless others who were with me. I fear they died in the Sonoran Desert. This book is for them and for every immigrant who has crossed, who has tried to, who is crossing right now, and who will keep trying" (Zamora, 381).

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