

SAVING THE ENCANTO CINEMA

TEXT BY JAIME ALFONSO SANDOVAL

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 **INE**
Instituto Nacional Electoral





JAIME ALFONSO SANDOVAL was born in San Luis Potosí in 1972. He studied at Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos, UNAM, and at the Escuela de Escritores, SOGEM. He has specialized in creations and content for children and young people. His professional work has spanned more than twenty-five years and ranges from journalism to television scripts for educational programs and fiction series.

He has focused part of his career in literature. He has written more than thirty works and has received, among others, the following awards: Barco de Vapor 2006, Gran Angular 1997 and 2001, organized by SM and Conaculta; Cuento, FILIJ 1998; Nacional de Literatura Infantil 2001, Castillo-Macmillan; Nacional de Novela para Jóvenes, FeNAL-Norma 2011, and the Fundación Cuatrogatos, 2020. He has been included in the IBBY Honor Roll in 2020. Several of his books were selected for the Biblioteca de Aula (SEP) and some other were chosen for The White Ravens catalog of the International Youth Library of Munich. He has been a member of the Sistema Nacional de Creadores de Arte.

Some of his books have been published in France, the Netherlands, Spain, Colombia, Chile, Peru, and Puerto Rico. He is convinced that, to create a country of readers, childhood and youth is the best time to build the habit and passion for reading.

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ENCANTO CINEMA

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SAVING THE ENCANTO CINEMA

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PRESENTATION

Saving the Encanto Cinema is a literary proposal of the **Árbol** collection, which the Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE, National Electoral Institute) makes available to children and young adults with the intention of disseminating, in a simple and entertaining way, issues of citizenship training and democratic values, while contributing to the formation of analytical, critical, and participatory readers.

As an important part of its commitment to Mexico, INE has proposed to contribute to the improvement of our quality of life as citizens, with respect to our coexistence and the exercise of democratic values.

The phenomenon of migration in our country brings us face to face with the overwhelming fact that many Mexican citizens have relatives or friend who have emigrated. Therefore, it is very important to know the legislative advances that have been made so that all Mexican citizens can exercise their right to vote, regardless of the place of residence.

Through this attractive story, with a sense of humor and the mention of traditions from our country, the author approaches children to make them aware of the fact that those who live abroad, but who were born, or have parents born in Mexico, can exercise their right to vote and there is no reason not to enjoy the prerogatives that are established for Mexican citizenship, especially with regards to their political rights.

Although this book is intended for upper elementary school students, the way in which the author addresses the topic makes it appealing to readers of any age.

The last part of the book includes the section “To Reflect and Discuss”, so that adults, family members and teachers can talk with young readers about the rights of our nationals abroad and the progress that the law has made in this area. We hope that whoever reads it will enjoy it.

1

My grandfather's name is Agustín and he has no soul. If you see him in the street, he looks like a normal old man, a bit grumpy. He walks normally, he limps a bit because of a pain in his back, but he eats, drinks water, watches TV, and talks, almost too normal for someone who, in his own words, has no soul.

“They took it away from me when I fixed my immigration status here in California,” he says. “I took a test, I signed a paper, and in a matter of seconds, I was no longer a Mexican. Back then, you couldn't have two nationalities! I was just a gringo.”

That was a long time ago, in the last century, around 1991. I wasn't even born.

“So, are you not going to speak Spanish anymore?” asked Grandmother Lulú on that sad day. “Are you also going to turn blond, or become a Native American, or what? You look the same to me.”

“It's not that, but now I need a passport to go to Mexico, as if I were a foreigner! I can't stay there for long or buy a little house in Cerritos de Camécuaro... the town where I was born!”

It was several years before the law would change and Grandpa Agustín was really very sad, and not even a good *atole* could cheer him up. They say that Grandma came up with something. She started digging through drawers, visited relatives, she went as far as Riverside and San Bernardino... and one day at dinner time, she announced:

“I just found your soul,” and she put a cookie box on the table. “Go on, take a look.”

Puzzled, Grandpa Agustín opened the box. Inside was a picture of his wedding day; another image of the town of Cerritos de Camécuaro; the recipe for *huchepos*, those tender little tamales; a film poster of Santo, who was an old-time wrestler, and another of the Almada brothers, Mexico's action film heroes. The film posters were there because my granddad used to be a *cácaro*—that's how they used to call the people who showed the films in the old movie theaters in Mexico—, before moving to California



to work in the harvest. There was one very beautiful picture showing many people in front of a building that looked like a fairy-tale castle; on the facade were altars decorated with *cempasúchil* flowers and sugar skulls. On the back of the picture, it was written: “Day of the Dead, November 1969, Encanto Cinema.” That was the very day my grandparents first met; that was the beginning of their story, of their family.

Grandpa’s eyes filled with tears.

“Well, this is like a piece of my soul,” he confessed.

“Then you’ve got something,” answered Grandma Lulú with a smile. “I’m sure it will do.”

Over time, Grandpa Agustín kept adding more items to the box, like a little key holder from Santa Clara del Cobre, a postcard of Lake Pátzcuaro, a *charamusca* mummy! I didn’t know what it was, but it looked like a melted hand. Years went by, the children grew up, and Grandpa kept working. After the harvest, he joined a vegetable packing company, where he worked at until he retired, and then became a widower (that box was very useful to Grandpa during those sad days. He would spend hours staring at each



memory). And then we arrived, the grandchildren who were born on this side of the border, in California, like my sister, Roselyn, and I—my name is Albert, by the way.

“And why do you give them gringo names?” Grandpa asked.

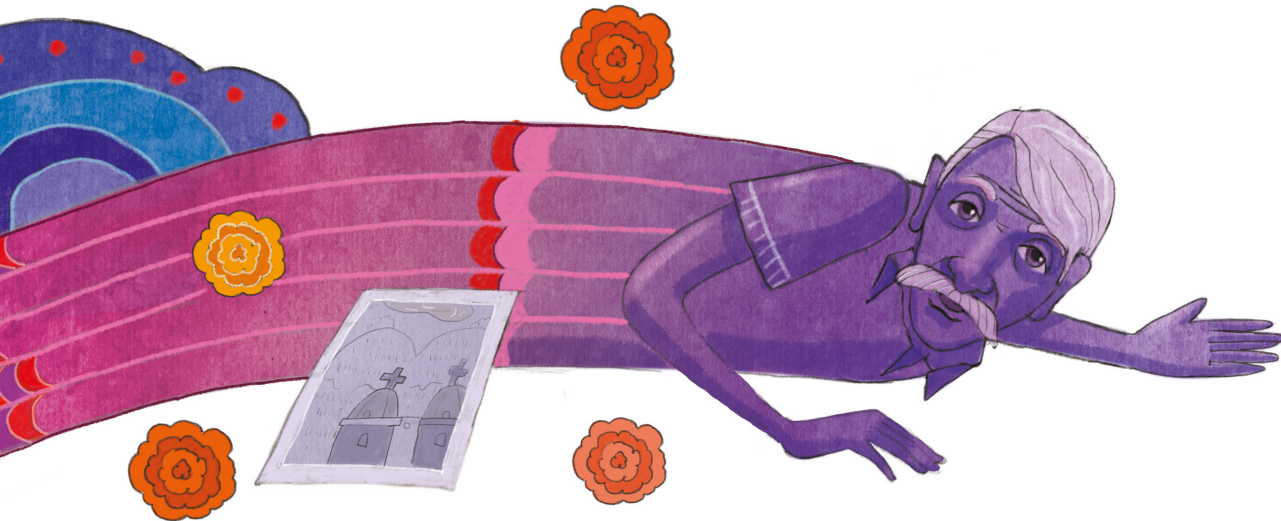
“Because I like them!” my mother explained.

Anyway, Grandpa always called us Rosita and Beto.

Grandpa learned to live without a soul—well, with the little bit of a soul he kept in ‘the Mexican box’, as we called it. It worked marvels because he turned seventy and was still in good health, he lived in our house, with the family of his eldest son, that is, my dad. He used to make a yearly trip to visit all his children though, those in California, Nevada, and, finally, Minnesota, where he visited Aunt Luli.

“It’s far away, but lovely,” Grandpa explained as he closed the suitcase. “Minnesota has lots of lakes, just like Michoacán,” he adjusted the clasp and smiled at me: “Take care of the ship for me, Captain.”

That’s what he used to tell me almost every time he went on a trip. I saluted like a sailor.





But unfortunately... the boat sank.

Let's see. I didn't do anything... well I did. I'd better explain it from the beginning. That week at school we worked on an activity called Cultural Heritage. We had to bring something to talk about the culture where our family is from. It could be anything, a Vietnamese conical hat, a colorful scarf from Nigeria, or even a piece of an Idaho potato. I always brought Pepito, my Chihuahua dog, and explained that his breed originated in Mexico. It might not have been a big deal, but Pepito is very funny! Then one day I came up with something awesome.

The day of the activity I walked to the front of the classroom and explained:

"In this box we keep a piece of my grandfather's soul." Yes, I had taken the Mexican box to school. Everyone looked at me with a mixture of confusion and curiosity.

I carefully opened it and showed every object to the class. I told them that my granddad used to work at a movie theater and was a friend of actors and wrestlers (I might have exaggerated a bit with that).

"But why do you say his soul is here?" asked my friend Charlie Zang, while he and other kids surrounded me. "It's just stuff and pictures."

"It's 21 very special things. Hey, don't touch them! If a coin or a picture gets lost, something horrible might happen to my grandfather!"

"You've asked for permission to bring this box, I guess," remarked Mr. Williams, the teacher.

"Of course, he lent it to me for a little while," I assured him quietly.

I hadn't asked for his permission yet, but I intended to do it. I would explain to Grandpa that I had taken the Mexican box from his room upon his return from Minnesota.

I got a huge applause. I was quite happy since no presentation had ever impressed the class like mine, until Charlie Zhang presented his Cultural Heritage. He put a

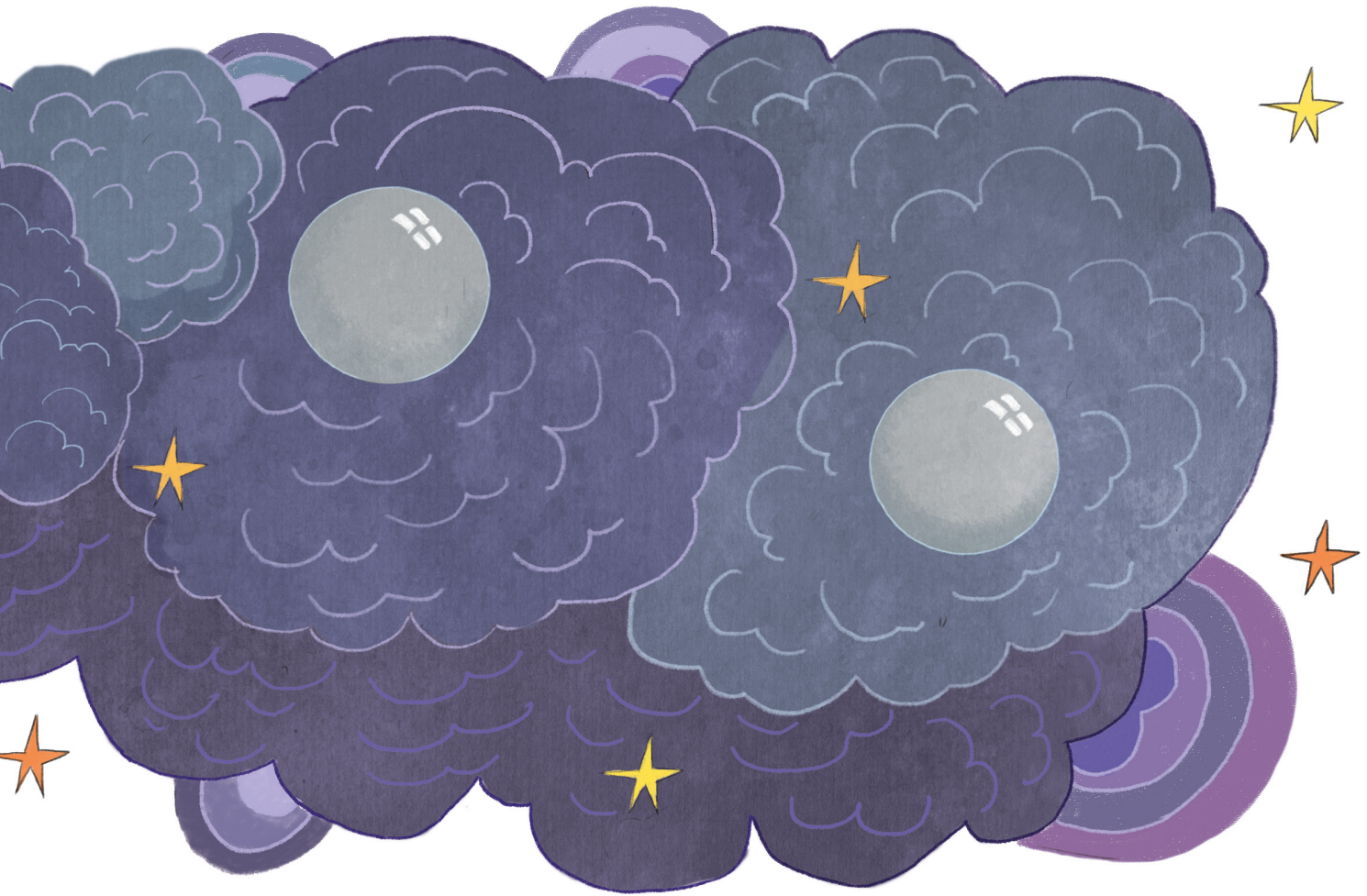


dragon-shaped torch on the desk and, from inside it, pulled out two silver spheres that produced smoke. Exclamations were heard.

“Charlie, is that thing on?” exclaimed the teacher. “You are not allowed to bring fireworks to school.”

“But they’re part of my culture,” he explained as he pulled out another sphere wrapped in foil. The smoke thickened and sparks flew.

“Put that down, Charlie. Everybody out of the classroom!” Mr. Williams ordered.



Boys and girls began to shout as they made their way to the exit. Someone sounded the alarm.

“It’s not dangerous, it’s just sparks,” said my friend.

But it only took a couple of sparks to set the garbage can on fire. Then more things happened.

“Wait, Albert, don’t go in there!” the teacher warned me.

Another spark had jumped into my place, into the Mexican box!

2

Only two things survived: a bag of coins and the casserole-shaped key holder from Santa Clara del Cobre. Everything else was either damaged or scorched: photos, postcards, posters, the little mummy... I nearly passed out!

Charlie apologized to me. He felt terrible. He probably thought that my grandfather was going to disintegrate at that very moment, just like in a film.

I quickly set up a plan. All I had to do was reassemble the 21 objects that were in the Mexican box. Everything had to be ready when Grandpa Agustín returned. It was simple!

“What are you doing?” asked my sister Roselyn when she saw me looking for old photos in the drawers at home.

“Nothing, it’s for... homework.” I hid the list.

“You look like you’ve done something wrong.” She looked at me closely.

“And you look like you enjoy gossiping,” I replied in my defense.

I tried to be more discreet. Luckily they still sold double peanut butter and chocolate chip cookies. I got a box that looked just like the old one. If I scraped the edges, it might look old. On the Internet, I found posters of very old films, the wrestler ones, as well as the ones by those tough Almada brothers. I printed everything in color, even some postcards of Pátzcuaro and the huchepos recipes. I looked up







what a *charamusca* was—it wasn't a piece of a real mummy, but a sugar candy—and made one myself. But several things were missing, including the most important one: the photo of the Encanto Cinema, the one from the Day of the Dead, 1969. The marquee was advertising the film *Macario* and underneath were my grandparents when they were young; they had been setting up the altars and that's where they met. Suddenly my cell phone rang, it was Grandpa Agustín!

“Captain Beto... how is the ship doing?” he asked.

“All good,” my voice trembled. Pepito was sniffing the bag with the burnt remains of the original Mexican box. I pushed him away. “What about you, Grandpa? Are you all right?”



“So-so, I am a bit hoarse now!” he said and then coughed. “Your aunt’s getting me some syrup...”

I can’t remember what else he said. I got scared. Grandpa had been sick, but not because of the box... or had he? I took a deep breath. I had to hurry to get everything together! I had already gone through all the drawers in the house and many sites on the Internet... I realized that I had to look directly in... Cerritos de Camécuaro. Not in person, that’s what technology is for!

I had been to that town twice and some of my relatives had laughed at my Spanish, saying I spoke like a *pocho*. But I got on well with my cousin Ramón; we used to get together to play video games online. I wrote to him telling I needed some things.

He said, “Let’s see. Wait. I don’t understand,” he replied to my message. “What do you want an old photo of your granddad for?”

“It’s for homework... *para la tarea*,” I translated. “I need that photo from the Day of the Dead, but just outside the old movie theater, the Encanto, where Grandpa used to work.”

“Ah, then you should talk to Trini,” my cousin advised. “She knows all about that theater. Hey, are you coming soon? Can you to bring me a pair of sneakers?”

I said goodbye to Ramón, not before promising I’d bring him the sneakers. My cousin did send me Trinidad Pérez’s (aka “Trini”) phone number, but never told me who she was. I sent her a few messages, five or ten... or maybe twenty. The next day the phone rang.

“Hey, who on Earth gave you my number?” I heard the annoyed voice of a very young girl. “Some Alberto keeps sending me messages.”

“It’s Albert,” I corrected.

“Oh, I’m sorry, Mr. Albert!” Her outrage went up a notch.

I explained that I was both Ramón’s cousin and the grandson of Agustín’s, the first projectionist at the Encanto Cinema.

“Are you serious?” Suddenly she didn’t seem so angry. “I’m quite sure my grandmother knew him. She worked many years at the candy shop.”

As she sounded almost friendly, I explained I needed a photo of the movie theater, one that was taken on one Day of the Dead, when it was decorated with flowers and altars.

“...And they were showing the film *Macario*,” said the girl.

“Yes! That’s the one!” I almost shouted; I had solved the problem. “May I borrow it from you?”

“I mentioned that because they always showed that film at that time of the year,” Trini clarified. “I don’t have anything myself, but in the old manager’s office at the movie theater there are lots of old posters and photos.”





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I sighed! I just needed my new friend (well, my new acquaintance) to go into that office and get me a copy. I asked her—actually, I begged her—to do just that.

“That’s not possible, the movie theater is closed,” she revealed.

“What time does it open?”

“Never,” she explained bluntly. “It has closure seals on the doors and windows. The municipality wants to pull it down; luckily they haven’t been able to do it thanks to the *plantón*.”

“Oh, it must be so big, *grandísima*...” I sometimes struggled to find words in Spanish. “Leafy?”

“What?”

“The plant.”

“Don’t you know what *plantón* means?” Trini burst out laughing. “A *plantón* is a sit-in, when a bunch of people protest about something and don’t move from one single place. Even my grandmother has stood guard. The Encanto Cinema is fully surrounded to keep the machines out. The municipality wants to tear it down to make a car park.”

“That sounds good,” I acknowledged.

“That sounds good?” Trini’s voice burst out. “There are plenty of car parks in Cerritos de Camécuaro already! Do you know what we don’t have here anymore? We don’t have buildings that are as marvelous as the Encanto Cinema. They could turn it into a local community center or a library instead... But why am I explaining this to you, if you obviously prefer cars?”

And then she hung up on me.

At dinner, my dad told us Grandpa Agustín had fallen ill in Minnesota. My aunt Luli was going to take him to the doctor. My mom was very concerned and said that hopefully he would recover in time to set up the *ofrenda de muertos*. I had to sneak half of my steak to Pepito. The news had taken my appetite away!

3

That night I woke up all scared. I dreamt that my grandfather was coming back from his trip, but he looked transparent, like water, and when he saw me he said: “Oh, Beto, you lost my Mexican box, you took it without my permission. I’ve lost a little piece of my soul!”

The next day I sent Trini lots of apologies, even some very funny sad-kitten memes, but she didn’t reply.

“Did you have a fight with your girlfriend?” I heard a voice. It was my sister, Roselyn.

“Don’t come into my room,” I warned her, visibly annoyed. “And I don’t have a girlfriend.”



“Then who was the girl you were talking to on the phone yesterday?”

Of course! She had heard me. My sister loves gossiping.

“It’s... someone from Grandpa’s town in Mexico,” I explained hastily. “I’m looking for some old photos for a school project.”

“Have you looked in the Mexican box yet?” Roselyn gave me an odd look.

“Oh, yes... but... those pictures are no good to me,” I said nervously.

“Oh, right, they’re scorched,” my sister said, as if it was nothing.

My face just paled. How could she possibly know that? Then she showed me a garbage bag with the remains of the original box.

“Pepito was playing in the kitchen with this,” she explained.

That dog! He must have taken it out from under my bed. He was the family’s greatest gossip! I was going to give an excuse, but I couldn’t take it anymore and started crying. I confessed everything to my sister: I told her about the accident at



school and how I was trying to replicate the box so that Grandpa wouldn't lack a soul. He was already sick!

“Well, I don't think he's got the flu because of you,” Roselyn commented.

“The flu!” I repeated, frightened. “What if he did?” I opened a drawer from my desk and pulled out the new box. “I've got almost everything. I'm missing a few photos and the hardest one to get: the one of the movie theater where Grandpa used to work...”

I explained about Trini, the protest, and how she took offense when I said I thought it was good that the old theater was being demolished to make a car park.

“I've already apologized to her, but she won't answer me,” I sighed.

“And have you offered to help her?” my sister asked. “That's better than a simple apology.”

It just hasn't occurred to me. I immediately sent her another message and many hours passed. I was starting to feel almost sure I wouldn't hear from Trini again, when I heard the sound of an alert.

“Can you connect tonight?” It was a message from Trini. “But on video call. I want to see your face.”

I freaked out. See me? I would have to comb my hair!





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After confirming the time at each location, we connected at about nine o'clock. Trini was a dark-haired girl, and prettier than I thought.

“You’re very young!” she said when she saw me.

“What? I think we’re the same age!” I replied. “I’ve only got to grow up, that’s what Grandpa says.”

Pepito started barking, as if wanting to say hello, and I showed him in camera. Trini loved it and showed me her cat: a reddish fur ball called Gumersindo. That worked as an icebreaker.



“Now then, how are you going to help me with the Encanto Cinema?” she went straight to the point.

“I can give some money,” was the only thing I could think of. “My dad sends money to his godmother, Jovita.”

“No, I don’t want your money,” Trini replied. “What we need are more people interested in saving the movie theater. There are only about twenty of us here.”

“Then let’s look on this side,” a voice said.

I looked around. Sure enough, it was Roselyn! So nosy! She had been overhearing us from the corridor.

“Don’t spy on me! Go to your room,” I asked her angrily. “Sorry, it’s my sister.”

But Roselyn didn’t leave; on the contrary, she came in.



“What I’m saying is that there are a lot of people here who come from Michoacán,” she continued. “There’s even an association called Loving Cerritos de Camécuaro.”

“But it is here,” I said. “What good is it?”

“Actually, quite a lot!” Roselyn replied. “Even though they live outside, they’re still part of the town. From here they’ve cooperated to refurbish the Cerritos parish. Also, if they were born in Mexico, they can vote in Mexican elections even living on this side. I heard that the Consulate is already planning that. I think they’ll even be able to vote on the internet.”

“But all of those are important things, aren’t they?” Trini said thoughtfully. I don’t think they’d vote to save an old movie theater.

“Well, maybe not vote,” my sister acknowledged. “But we can collect signatures. The opinion of the people from this side is just as important as the opinion of the people from Cerritos de Camécuaro. But it’s up to you... it’s just an idea.”

“Please forgive Roselyn,” I said to my new friend. “She’s a tiny bit nosy.”

“No no, I love it. You’re super smart!” Trini said to my sister.

Even Pepito started barking. Great, that’s just what I needed! Now everyone admired Roselyn!



That weekend we all got into action. Trini would be in charge of collecting signatures in Cerritos, while my sister and I would do the same here in the US.

“We’ve got a lot of people to visit,” Roselyn said reviewing her notes. “I wish we had enough time and money to go to several states.”

“Look, I did this to make our work easier,” I said, and then opened the laptop and showed a page that said *Saving the Encanto Cinema*, where I explained in both English and Spanish that they wanted to demolish it. “Here people can leave comments and signatures to save it, no matter where they are. All we have to do is publicize the website.”

“Did you come up with that?” Roselyn looked at me kind of incredulously.

“Of course, I’m not that useless! My two neurons work just fine.”

We knew that many people from Cerritos visited Aunt Carmen’s grocery shop, we headed there to stick up some flyers.

“It’s a good thing they’re going to make a car park,” said Aunt Carmen when she heard about it. “Then I can stay near the market when I go to town.”

“But your Cerritos house is just three streets away from the market,” my sister recalled.

“I think they should make a shopping mall,” said her son, Johnny. “I don’t like that movie theater at all!”

“Do you know the Encanto Cinema?” I asked in surprise.

“No, but I love shopping malls!” he explained.

We were off to a bad start. That afternoon, there were only three signatures on the website, but they didn’t leave an email address to verify, so they were not good, and to



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top it all off, my dad told us that Grandpa had been hospitalized in Minnesota. He was still in bad shape.

I felt like crying. I felt all of it was my fault. What if we didn't even get ten signatures? What was I going to tell Trini?

"Don't worry, we're just getting started," my sister reminded me. "It's a matter of time."

That was the problem, we had no time! That night I dreamt I went to Cerritos de Camécuaro and sneaked into the Encanto Cinema. I found the former manager's office, but the walls were collapsing. They were tearing down the movie theater! An alert on my mobile phone woke me up. It was morning already. The message was from Trini, who was very happy because she had collected eighty-three signatures. She wanted to know how we were doing and why we had taken down the signature-collecting website.

I ran to check on the computer and then my sister arrived. She had noticed the same issue.

"Why did *Saving the Encanto Cinema* disappear? You told me you were good at this."

"I don't know what happened. I'm sending a report."

I was so nervous that Roselyn stopped nagging me and sat down next to me.

"It's going to be all right," she patted me in the back.

"Do you think so?"

"Well, it could also go wrong," she acknowledged quite candidly. "The good thing about all this is that you and I are finally getting along, we're not fighting anymore."

"We still fight."

"Well, but we're doing it to save a movie theater and help your girlfriend."

"She's not my girlfriend!" I clarified.

My sister smiled to show me she was only joking and ruffled my hair. I acknowledged she was right about the last part. I liked her better.

About an hour later, I got an email from the page where I had opened the signature-collecting website. They apologized for what had happened and then mentioned something very strange. They said that, due to the traffic, the site had crashed momentarily, but they had already uploaded the *Saving the Cinema Encanto* website again and recovered all the data.

“There are 4,625 signatures and counting!” my sister read in astonishment. It says people have signed from California, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Brooklyn...”

“The Loving Cerritos de Camécuaro people must’ve sent the page address to all of their contacts.”

But the best thing was the people’s comments: “They can’t tear it down! That’s where I used to go to the matinee with my little siblings. It was the best time of our lives.” “The Encanto Cinema is just beautiful. We had our high school graduation ceremony there. We felt like we were in a castle.” “My grandma always took me to watch films by Cantinflas, her favourite comedian. Oh, how I miss her!” “My older brother took me there to watch *Hasta el viento tiene miedo*... I didn’t sleep that night, ha-ha.” “In elementary school we used to show Santo and Blue Demon films to raise money. What a wonderful time!” “Those salt and butter chickpeas from the Encanto Cinema... I’ve never tried anything nearly as delicious.” And so the anecdotes and comments went on, one memory after another.

In total, 9,038 signatures were collected, but the most important thing was that many people found out that the old Encanto Cinema was going to be demolished and wanted to save it. And they all had the exact same idea my sister had: “How can we help?”



6

“**W**hat you did was truly incredible!” said Trini in a video call. We all were there, even Pepito and Gumersindo.

“Have they finally decided not to demolish the theater?” Roselyn asked happily.

“No. They’re still going to do it,” Trini confessed.

My sister and I just froze. “What?”

“But not all of it,” Trini said smiling. “They’re keeping the facade, the ticket offices, the staircase, and a part of the seats area. Only part of it will be turned into a car park. A board of trustees is being formed with people from here and there. The plan is to put up a community center and a Cerritos de Camécuaro-themed museum.”

“But a museum about what exactly?” I asked in surprise.

“I don’t know, but a lot of people are sending very funny pictures of the town, of what it was like ten, twenty, or seventy years ago.”

“So can you get into the movie theater now?” I jumped up. “I need to you to find the photo!”

“Yep, the one from the Day of the Dead. I will look for it,” Trini assured.

Then we heard the sound of little claws. It was Pepito, who was trying to break the Mexican box (the new one!) to take out the *charamusca* candy. I took it from him. I couldn’t lower my guard for a minute! My mission wasn’t over yet.

Two weeks later, Grandpa Agustín arrived from Minnesota. He looked a little thinner. I ran to hug him.

“Ahoy, Captain!” He smiled. “I just docked, safe and sound.”

“Really? You’ve been very sick!”

“We old men are fragile,” he sighed. “That cold from the North hit me hard.”

“Or maybe it was my fault,” I revealed, and Grandpa looked at me in confusion. I gulped: it was the moment of truth.

I went to my room to get the Mexican box, which I had just repaired from Pepito’s scratches.



“I’m so very sorry, Grandpa, but I lost the box... I know it was very important to you.”

“And what is this?” Grandpa opened the lid.

“A replica.” I explained that I had taken the original box to the Cultural Heritage school project, where it burnt down. I told him about all the problems I had had to get what was inside, how hard it had been to make the *charamuscas*, not to mention to find the photos.

Then Grandpa burst out laughing, truly amused.

“Aren’t you mad at me?” I exclaimed. “There was a little piece of your soul in there!”

“That was just a way of putting it. That’s how I felt when I lost my Mexican nationality when I fixed my papers here. Luckily in 1998 the law changed and I was Mexican again. Both nationalities at the same time! Once I even voted by mail. I even have a passport.”

“Can you travel to Mexico?”

“Of course, every time I want to, and stay in town a little... or a lot. But this is also my home. When I miss people over there, I can call them, or I can look at the treasures in my box... Grandpa looked at the posters, the *charamusca*, the postcard.

“Unbelievable! Have you done all this? You sure have been busy. Hey, Beto... why did you confess? You could have fooled me... I might have never realized it.”

“You were going to notice anyway, something’s missing,” I sighed. “Do you remember the Day of the Dead photo? The one from when you first met Grandma?”

I took out an envelope with photographs, I had printed out the files Trini sent me. There were pictures from other years’ Day of the Dead, and from Christmas and Three Kings Day, all with people outside the Encanto Cinema. Grandpa ran his fingers over them, trembling, and his eyes watered.





MUSEO
DE
CERRITOS DE CAMÉCUARO

“These photos were in an old office, but they didn’t find the picture of Grandma and you,” I sighed in defeat. “It was such a thorough search for nothing!”

“Let’s see... boy. Wait.” Grandpa wiped a tear away. “Are you the one who was asking for signatures on a page to save the movie theater?”

“Did you know that?”

“Well, my acquaintances didn’t talk about anything else. You know, what you did is truly incredible.”

“It wasn’t just me. It was Trini and her protest. And also Roselyn, she came up with the idea; she said that the opinion of the people who live here also counts when deciding things in Mexico.”

“Then I must congratulate everyone. What you all did is historic.”

“It’s no big deal either,” I shrugged. “They’re only going to save a bit of the theater; they’re going to put up a community center and a museum with photos.”

“No, Albert, it’s not going to be just a museum,” Grandpa’s eyes sparkled with excitement. The Encanto Cinema is going to be like a big, huge Mexican box for everyone. A place to keep memories. I don’t know about you, but I think that’s great.

I thought about it for a moment and... well, yes, that was great. I was starting to feel very important when Grandpa handed me a broom and a rag.

“This is for you to clean my room,” he explained. “I’m sorry, but I have to punish you for taking my Mexican box without permission. Son, you don’t do that! But if you hurry, I’ll make my famous rice pudding for you later. And we must hurry, it’s time already to set up the altar we dedicate to Grandmother.”

I picked up the broom and smiled: Grandpa sure had a lot of Mexican soul still in him!

TO REFLECT AND DISCUSS



Extraterritorial Vote

To make this story meaningful we would like to invite adults, such as teachers and family members, to join the readers and enjoy the story, to dialogue, and to reflect on the reality that is presented here and that, although on a small scale, we show through this narrative.

Through the story of Grandpa Agustín, the case of a family that is now in its third generation in the United States, we find the importance of the topic for our democracy: the recognition of the rights of Mexican citizens living abroad.

Years went by, the children grew up, and Grandpa kept working. After the harvest, he joined a vegetable packing company, where he worked at until he retired... And then we arrived, the grandchildren who were born on this side of the border, in California...

The reality experienced by thousands of migrants who were born in Mexico shows a strong rootedness and survival of cultural ties. It's like a "piece of my soul," says Grandpa Agustín:

Puzzled, Grandpa Agustín opened the box. Inside was a picture of his wedding day; another image of the town of Cerritos de Camécuaro; the recipe for *huchepos*...; a film poster of Santo...

Over time Grandpa Agustín kept adding more items to the box, like a little key holder from Santa Clara del Cobre, a postcard of Lake Pátzcuaro, a *charamusca* mummy! I didn't know what it was, but it looked like a melted hand.



In addition to the box of souvenirs, Grandpa seems to have a landscape stuck in his heart:

“Minnesota has lots of lakes, just like Michoacán.”

Emigrating already implies a pilgrimage in the struggle for the recognition of rights in the country of destination, which has its parallelism with the recognition of rights in the country of origin; that is, of rights as Mexicans. Thus, before the extraterritorial vote became possible for those who are Mexican nationals, there was a process known as “citizen reconstitution” by which the obligation for people who had emigrated to give up their Mexican citizenship when acquiring another nationality was canceled.

“They took it away from me when I fixed my immigration status here in California,” he says. “I took a test, I signed a paper, and in a matter of seconds, I was no longer a Mexican. Back then, you couldn’t have two nationalities! I was just a gringo.”

That was a long time ago, in the last century, around 1991. I wasn’t even born.

“So, are you not going to speak Spanish anymore?” Asked Grandmother Lulú on that sad day. “Are you also going to turn blond, or become a Native American, or what? You look the same to me.”

“It’s not that, but now I need a passport to go to Mexico, as if I were a foreigner! I can’t stay there for long or buy a little house in Cerritos de Camécuaro ... the town where I was born!”

It was several years before the law would change and Grandpa Agustín was really very sad, and not even a good *atole* could cheer him up. They say that Grandma came up



with something. She started digging through drawers, visited relatives, she went as far as Riverside and San Bernardino... and one day...

Eventually, Mexican legislation legally opened the possibility of having two or more nationalities in 1996 and was implemented in 1998. Those who were born in Mexico no longer lost their citizenship rights upon acquiring another: “No Mexican by birth may be deprived of his or her nationality,” states Article 37 of our Carta Magna. This was clearly intended primarily for Mexicans in the United States.

“Even though they live outside, they’re still part of the town.”

The restitution of nationality has clearly been an act of justice for families like the one in this story, that somehow retain a sense of belonging that makes them not only contribute in a very important way to the economic life of the localities, as is very often the case, but also commit themselves to events that occur in their places of origin. That is why Trini, in Michoacán, agrees with Albert, who lives in California, to work for a common goal. A goal that seems trivial but is highly symbolic: to save the town’s movie theater.

“Now then, how are you going to help me with the Encanto Cinema?” she went straight to the point.

“I can give some money,” was the only thing I could think of. “My dad sends money to his godmother, Jovita.”

“No, I don’t want your money,” Trini replied. “What we need are more people interested in saving the movie theater. There are only about twenty of us here.”

“Then let’s look on this side,” a voice said.



The highest level of recognition of the affective bond and identity interest, beyond borders, is to give those who emigrated the possibility of being part of the decision-making process. This is the opinion of Roselyn, granddaughter of Agustín, when she gets involved with her brother Albert in the defense of the Cinema Encanto:

“Well, maybe not vote,” my sister acknowledged. “But we can collect signatures. The opinion of the people from this side is just as important as the opinion of the people from Cerritos de Camécuaro...”

Although it is true that legislative modifications to allow for extraterritorial voting were a reality in other countries since the 1950s, in Mexico they did not take place until 2005, the year in which the nominal registry of voters abroad was opened. This right was activated for the first time for the 2006 presidential elections. Registered citizens received the ballot by mail and returned it with their vote. Shortly thereafter, the state of Michoacán offered the possibility of extraterritorial suffrage for the election of governor, when the state Congress modified the electoral code of the entity by adding a robust article “On the vote of the people of Michoacán abroad,” opening the possibility for the citizens of Michoacán of participating by mail.

This is how Grandpa Agustín remembers it:

Luckily in 1998 the law changed, and I was a Mexican again. Both nationalities at the same time! Once I even voted by mail. I even have a passport.”

“Can you travel to Mexico?”

“Of course, every time I want to, and stay in town a little... or a lot. But this is also my home. When I miss people over there, I can call them, or I can look at the treasures in my box...”



Roselyn, as a young Mexican born in the United States is interested and informed about the rights of her fellow Mexicans:

Also, if they were born in Mexico, they can vote in Mexican elections even living on this side. I heard that the Consulate is already planning that. I think they'll even be able to vote on the internet."

According to the 2010 census, the United States recognized 11 million Mexican who emigrated, and 8 million more descendants of Mexican born there: a total of 19 million. The story we present here tells of a broad network of families from, for example, Michoacán, one of the states with the largest migrant population in the United States. For this reason, when Albert and Roselyn undertook the campaign to collect signatures to stop the demolition of the Encanto Cinema, they got a very a large response.

"There are 4,625 signatures and counting!" my sister read in astonishment. It says people have signed from California, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Brooklyn..."

"The Loving Cerritos de Camécuaro people must've sent the page address to all of their contacts."

Undoubtedly, the communities of Mexicans abroad, particularly in the United States, develop nuances in their cultural links with the forms of social and political organization in our country. But beyond these dynamics, the Mexican State has the obligations to provide these communities with options to participate in elections. Currently, measures are being



implemented so that in the next federal election it will be possible to vote in person in certain consulates, or to vote through internet platforms. The effort that the Instituto Nacional Electoral (National Electoral Institute) is leading with this objective is to make a reality this right that is enshrined in our Constitution and in the laws that derive from it.

“What I’m saying is that there are a lot of people here who come from Michoacán,” she continued. “There’s even an association called Loving Cerritos de Camécuaro.”

“But it is here,” I said. “What good is it?”

“Actually, quite a lot!” Roselyn replied. “Even though they live outside, they’re still part of the town. From here they’ve cooperated to refurbish the Cerritos parish. Also, if they were born in Mexico, they can vote in Mexican elections...”

We want this story about Mexicans, whose life circumstances have led them to live outside the country, to raise awareness among our children, as part of their civic educations aimed at strengthening our democracy, so that they may see that our fellow citizens who are outside the national territory also make up our Mexico and, therefore, have rights that must be respected.



SAVING THE ENCANTO CINEMA

The Bembo Std font family was used.



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Beto has lost something very valuable to his grandfather Agustín, who lives in the United States. His sister and a friend help him to recover it, and at the same time they call other people—who also live outside of Mexico—to exercise their rights and express their opinion to rescue the famous Encanto Cinema, which is about to disappear in Michoacán, Mexico.

This volume is part of the **Árbol** collection, which aims to contribute to the civic culture of children and young people through engaging stories that encourage reflection and participation in society.