



THE GUATEMALA STORY: MOMENTS OF GRACE

It was New Year's Eve day 1993 in the tiny village of Itzapa, Guatemala. Paco, a small seven-year-old Mayan boy with huge brown eyes, was rehearsing the magic act I had shown him. It was a simple trick: a small black box; open the drawer, no money inside. Turn the box over. Open the drawer again. A dollar bill appeared!

Only Paco never knew how the magic worked. You had to turn the box slowly and feel a ball drop inside that would trigger a trap door. But Paco had no patience for such things. He just kept turning the box around and around fast as he could and sometimes, the dollar bill appeared and sometimes it didn't. But when it did, Paco was as amazed, as surprised as anyone else.

We were rehearsing for the big New Year's Eve show that night. All the while Paco shouted his version of the words I had taught him, "Abracadaper! Daper! Daper!"

I had arrived in Guatemala five days earlier, two days after Christmas. I was traveling with my own sons, Terry and Preston, who were twenty-one and twenty-three at the time. I was there to do writing for the Christian Foundation for Children and Aging to let people know how to sponsor children in Guatemala and in the other countries where CFCA had projects.

Now my sons are mine of the heart not of the womb. They came into my life when they were five and seven years old. Over the years, we planned several vacations hoping to create family togetherness. But like most families, I remember spending the bulk of those car trips shouting into the back seat, "Don't... Stop it. I said 'Down.' Well, stay away from him then. Do I have to come back there?"

But in Guatemala, we were traveling together as adults - well, semi-adults. When kids are in their late teens and early twenties their adulthood keeps making appearances, then sliding back into hiding. I kept waiting for that magical day when I could unequivocally say, "Yes, they are truly adults!"

I wanted this trip to be inspirational for my sons. We grew up so differently. I came of age during 1960s idealism. My sons grew up after the multiple assassinations of the late sixties and then the Watergate scandal. They seemed to exhibit a kind of cynicism I saw in so many young people their age, an attitude that seemed to say, "Everything is all screwed up. Nothing we do matters. You might as well look out for yourself." As a child of the sixties, I was worried about them and our future.

I grew up wanting to give away all my possessions and join the Peace Corps. My oldest son, Terry, grew up to sell Amway products. His goal: to be a millionaire by thirty. He never jumped onto the whole conservative political bandwagon. Amway was simply a practical way to make more money. My kids entered the workforce just as all the downsizing and cutbacks in corporate America were going into effect. I wanted to combat some of their disillusionment: take them to Guatemala, introduce them to people who believed in and worked for social change so that maybe they would come to see that they, too, could make a difference.

We landed at the Guatemala City Airport and were met by Father Pancho, a round teddy bear of a man for whom the phrase "smiling eyes" was invented. With him was Bob, an American, a tall, unassuming sliver of a man and President of CFCA. And there was Martin, our driver, a small-framed man, a head or two shorter than me like most of the Mayan Indians. Martin's two children always traveled with him -- Paco, the soon-to-be New Year's Eve magician, and Lesley of the perfect braid.

Lesley was a dangerous child. Lesley was false advertising for what it's really like to raise children. If you spent half a day with nine-year-old Lesley, you would find yourself thinking things

such, "Maybe we should have more. Yeah, more children. That'd be fun!"

Lesley and I took to each other right away, and with Lesley on my lap we drove out of smog-filled Guatemala City and up into the mountains. All along the roadside, Mayan people walked next to our van carrying large baskets on their heads. In Guatemala, the Mayan Indians are still the great majority, sixty-four percent of the population. Many still wear their traditional dress. So the first thing you notice about the people is the color of their outfits with beautiful weaving and embroidery. I kept oohing and aahing, pointing out the window and looking at my kids wanting them to love this country and this adventure before I knew if I even did.

Then we started up a road so steep that when I looked out the front window of the van, I was looking at clouds. Then we heard ka-tunk! Ka-tunk, ka-tunk, ka-tunka, tunka, tunkaaaaaaa. Dead. Nothing. We were stalled. Since we were at such a precarious angle, Bob suggested we all get out of the van. I like mechanical things and so I walked around front to see what was up. There was Martin balancing on the front bumper, leaning into the large, open mouth of the van looking like Jonah being swallowed by the whale. Martin reached back his hand and told Paco and Lesley to get something from the tool chest. I stood there and watched Paco hand his father... scotch tape!

Martin fiddled with the tape and then called to Paco, "Mas! Mas!" Something more, something stronger. And I was thinking, "You bet something stronger!"

Then, I watched Lesley hand her father...masking tape! I must have been standing there with my mouth hanging wide open because Martin took one look at me and started to laugh, then shrugged and said, "In Guatemala, we make do with what we have."

I smiled and turned to leave, thinking my own little axiom, "What you don't know won't hurt you."

I walked around to the side of the van next to the rocky edge of the road. Bob was standing there, staring out across a gulch. "Look at those guys farming," he said and pointed. I looked out and in the distance I saw men hanging by ropes off a cliff like toy action figures dangling from strings.

"Farming?" I said. "With ropes?"

I'd known about the Mayan people losing their land to the Spaniards hundreds of years before. But Bob told me about what folks in Guatemala called "the second conquest." He told me how American, German and other foreign companies had bought up or were given huge tracks of the choice land for fruit, coffee, sugar, cattle and hardwood. He told me that the people lost their homes, had to move, and were pushed up into the rocky mountaintops.

Bob said that the people still worked for the plantation owners because "it was the only game in town." He said the people were paid next to nothing for working six days a week, that it wasn't enough to feed their families. So the workers tried to grow a little extra in between the rocks around their homes. Maybe they could find a little patch of earth to push in a seed for a tomato plant or squash vine.

I looked again and I could see the men with their hand trowels working the dirt between the rocks on the side of the cliff. If I had spotted them at all, I would have thought they were mining or something.

And then, Bob told me that if the people did manage to grow something to eat they couldn't always cook it because there was no firewood for their stoves. And later that week I would understand what he meant because we'd take day trips driving through gorgeous, green mountains and five-story high waterfalls, *National Geographic* kinds of views. Then we'd cross over to the other side of the mountain and - voom! - it'd be a complete desert, barren, nothing growing at all, not because of any weather patterns but because the entire area had been deforested, all

the teak and mahogany sent up to the United States.

"Down here," Bob said. "Firewood is something to kill over. People can spend five, six hours a day searching for wood." And then, he pointed to another ridge in the distance where the sun was setting. I saw a line of people, silhouettes bent over with bundles of branches piled high on their backs, looking like ants carrying home large crumbs of food.

Va-ha-rooooo! I didn't know how and I did not want to know how, but Martin had gotten the engine to turn over. Martin and the kids had worked a little magic of their own. About twenty minutes later, we arrived at the Itzapa complex: Father Pancho's Church, the rectory, a school, the CFCA office and the dormitory where we'd be sleeping, all built around a garden courtyard and enclosed by a high fence.

Bob gave us a brief itinerary of our next few weeks including the talent show, the planned entertainment of songs, stories and speeches for New Year's Eve. Then he suggested we rest or get acquainted with the place before dinner.

I wandered out back and found four young Mayan nuns from the convent and orphanage down the hill bent over a wood burning stove making tortillas and giggling. I mean giggling. They were only tiny girls, seventeen, eighteen years old. Next to them, I felt like a giant, a very old giant. I do remember when nuns were considerably older than I was.

Then I looked out through the chain link fence to our neighbors' homes. Up and down on all the surrounding hills as far as I could see, there were rows and rows of houses made of wood, concrete blocks or corrugated tin. I heard goats bleating and sure enough there were goats in the streets and donkeys and horses too. And in the yard where I stood, a rooster ate grain and a turkey ran circles around me! I pointed to the turkey and laughed, trying to explain to the nuns in my pigeon Spanish that I was used to wildlife of a very different kind in Chicago. The nuns' giggling stopped. "*Cuidado!*" they said. "Watch out! The turkey bites!" They gestured to show me that the turkey would take a piece of my arm or leg.

About an hour later I was eating a dinner of rice and beans and sweet coconut milk. I sat next to a visiting priest from El Salvador and someone from Nicaragua. Across from me sat a woman who was a doctor in Germany. So I was listening to people speaking in English and German and Spanish and the nuns giggling in their native Q'echi language and I felt like Margaret Mead.

We introduced ourselves and for some reason, the nuns had trouble pronouncing my name. Susan. Sue. Easy enough, I thought. I tried my nickname "Super" or "Supe" but that threw them into total hysterics. Then the nun who was the head of the convent, the Mother Superior who ran the Itzapa orphanage down the hill, came up with "Su-zeeee" which for some reason everyone could say.

Mother Superior was a tiny, elderly, fireball of a woman. The years had left a road map of wrinkles across her skin. If you were to title that map, it would be called "Land of the Wise," so much wisdom in that face. She gestured down to the end of the table where Terry and Preston sat and raised a questioning eyebrow. I said, "Oh, yes, those are my boys."

She exclaimed, "Ah! Hijos grande!" Large sons. Big sons.

I proudly responded, "Yes. They are."

Then she looked right at me and asked, "Where's the husband?"

I said, "We're divorced."

Mother Superior slapped her chest and gasped for air as if she had known us personally and the news shocked her. She started gesturing wildly up, down, out back. I thought she was

warning me about the turkey but, no, she was warning me about men. "Cuidado, Suzeeeee!" Be careful.

"Here, Sister?" I sputtered. "Oh, no, no. I did not come down here for..."

Never mind, she waved. "Suzeeeee, you stick with God. Stick with God. Stick with God."

It's kind of reassuring to know that Catholic guilt has no geographic boundaries.

That first night in Itzapa was freezing! Here I'd packed for Guatemala in the winter - shorts and tank tops that would have been fine down on the plantations or in the resort areas. But up in the mountains, it was cold and damp. I was assigned to a large dorm room with my kids. It was a large room, a cot against each wall and an adjoining bathroom that we shared with the priest from El Salvador who was staying in the next room. My sons had lived in their own apartments for a couple of years so I got to tuck my kids into bed for the first time in years! I put five quilts on each of them.

We laid in the dark and talked about our lives. And then, about the divorce in ways we just hadn't been able to back home. All the time we talked we heard Boom! Boom! Boom! Firecrackers. During the holidays down in Guatemala, it's non-stop fireworks which most of the time means the kids have just wrapped some newspaper around gunpowder and lit it. Preston reached out from his mound of covers and grabbed the flashlight and our English/Spanish dictionary. "How do you suppose you say 'firecracker' in Spanish?" he asked. He couldn't find the word so we decided to call them "Grande boom-booms." We laughed and reminisced until I didn't hear my son's voices or the grande boom-booms anymore.

Until... I was awakened by "Oh, Jeeze! Mom! Mom! Help!" It was Terry my oldest. "Mom! Help! I'm covered in soap!"

We had slept in the sweats we had traveled in, the only warm clothes we had. Terry had tried to sleep, but couldn't stand sleeping in the clothes he had been in all day. So he'd gotten up to take a shower and change. He'd wet his body, lathered up and then, the water cut out.

Now I did not want to get out of my bed. I could feel the cold air floating across my forehead. But I remembered seeing the nuns in the backyard bend down to a black box on the ground, reach in and turn something. I thought maybe it was a water spigot and maybe they turned the water off at night. So I pulled back the covers, touched my feet to the ice-cold floor and groaned because we will do things for our children we would never ordinarily do.

I walked across the dark, unfamiliar courtyard all the time wishing to hell I had never taught my son hygiene! A village with no electricity is *dark* at night. And every five seconds, I heard - Boom! Boom! Boom! Still with the fireworks in the middle of the night! I thought, "This is just great. The military could come in here. We could be surrounded by soldiers and never know it." Then I realized that the thing I was really scared of was...the turkey. I could hear that sucker running around but I couldn't see him. Here I was, Ms. Adventure, come thousands of miles to war-torn Guatemala to discover that what I was really afraid of was a killer turkey!

I found the black box, squatted in front of it, and then thought, "Now, wait a minute. What might be in there? A rat? A snake? More wildlife?" Finally I screwed up my courage and jabbed my hand all the way in. It was metal. I turned. Whoooosh. Water. We will do things for our children we would never ordinarily do. I told Terry I'd give him five minutes. I waited. Then I had to put my hand back in the box to turn the water off.

By the time I was back in the room, Terry was already in bed. "Thanks, Mom!" he called and hopped back into bed. I drifted back to sleep when I was awakened again by someone in deep, deep intestinal distress. I thought, "Oh, man, one of the kids is already sick."

I pulled back the covers once again and put feet to cold floor. In the pitch dark, I searched in my suitcase for the *Pepto Bismol*, found it and started toward the bathroom door, calling, "Sweetheart, Sweetheart, why don't you try some of this? Sweetheart, reach out the door. This'll make you feel better, Sweetheart."

Then I turned around, my eyes having grown accustomed to the dark and saw two huge lumps in the beds where my sons should have been and realized that I'd been calling, "Sweetheart, Sweetheart" to the visiting priest from El Salvador! The next day I told Bob of my embarrassment and he said, "Ah, that's okay. Even if Father did understand you; he probably hasn't been called 'Sweetheart' in years!"

Anyway, somehow, we survived our first night in Guatemala.

Day Two, our first field trip. I sat up front in the van with Bob and asked him why so many nuns and priests had been killed in Central America. I told him how we read articles from time to time in the newspapers. Why did the military go after priests and nuns? Had the press exaggerated? Was it all true? He took a moment to answer then quietly said, "A lot of my friends have been killed."

He explained the basic social fabric of Guatemala to me. He told me that Guatemala was ruled in a pyramid structure. At the top were the few who owned everything because they were given the land years ago. Next you had the military whose job it was to protect the landowners. Then and only then, you had the government and the legal system. So the military, he told me, was really above the law. One law that got ignored a lot is kids weren't supposed to be drafted until they were eighteen. But if there was a short supply of manpower, the army would just round up the young Mayan boys. The nuns and priests did not like these kidnappings.

He told me about a nun friend who had had several eighth grade students kidnapped. She marched down to the garrison and made such a raucous that they released the boys. The next day the students were on a picnic, a kind of school outing. The army waited in the bushes to take their revenge. They opened fire, started shooting. The nuns were trying to get the kids out of range of fire, but there was a river they had to cross. Some of the little kids couldn't swim. Bob's friend took off her bra to use it like a rope. She'd bring three, four kids across at a time that way. She saved a lot of kids that day, but she herself was killed.

Day Three. We drove even higher into the mountains where our first sighting of the village we were to visit was a windmill all shot up, looking like a tin can used for target practice. The villagers sang songs for us, fed us tamales and sent us home with large baskets of colorful vegetables, even though they had little to eat themselves. I found out on the way home the cause for the shot up windmill. The Christmas before, the army had come in shooting, looking for a rebel they said. To make sure they got the right man at this village and a nearby one, 22 of the fathers were killed.

Day Four. Instead of a field trip, we went down the hill to work on the addition to the Itzapa orphanage. We were joined by fathers from the neighboring mountain villages, some of whom had walked seven hours through the night to get there. The men had come to work on the orphanage their one day off, knowing full well that one day their own children might live there.

Day Five. We visited with the Teacher-Training School that CFCA helps to fund. The school administrators described how pictures of students hang over each the classroom. We thought, "Ah, the graduating classes." And that's true, but these are pictures of the graduating teachers who have already been killed. Teaching Mayan Indians to be self-sufficient, whether it's to read or to repair cars is just too threatening to the status quo.

This was only Day Five. I like to think I'm not all that naive. It wasn't as if I thought my sons and I would head south and it'd be the Cleavers do Guatemala. However, you can read about these things, but to stand where people's spouses or parents had been massacred, to sit in people's homes and to hear their stories...

Day Six. The 31st. New Year's Eve morning. Every day when I came out of my dorm room, Lesley was waiting for me in the courtyard. This particular day, Lesley was waiting for me with a present. Lesley had drawn a picture of the church cat. The church cat was pregnant and overdue and Lesley had done a nice job of catching those nuances. I put my arm around her and asked, "Lesley, what do you want to be when you grow up?" thinking she would say an artist or something.

Instead she said, "A teacher."

I thought of all those photos of the graduating teachers and I burst into tears. I had no idea of how really upset I was till that moment. I took her in my arms and said, "No, Lesley, no seas una maestra." No, Lesley, don't be a teacher. They kill teachers here.

How do you change things? This has always been a dilemma for me. I have a friend who if you were an out-of-town visitor to Chicago the first thing he'd show you is the jail at 26th and California. Then he'd go around pointing, pointing, pointing to every example of urban blight he could get his hands on as if it were disloyal not to be constantly miserable and talking about all the injustices and atrocities in the world.

Not that on my tour it'd be everything's right with America. It's just that I thought his approach to social change couldn't work if for no other reason than he's not much fun to be around.

But after several days in Guatemala, I started thinking he was right. How could you *not* talk about the atrocities? I wanted to go on every talk show back in the States and make people hear. It seemed absurd to talk about anything else. I wanted to talk about it and I wanted to know - did any of the few bits of activism I did back home make any difference? Could *anything* make a difference? I needed to understand. I knew I was losing it. I was in need of some wisdom. I went to find Mother Superior.

She was down the hill, cooking lunch, a big fry pan of rice and beans for the men who were working on the addition to the orphanage that day. I sat in her kitchen. "Help me understand," I asked her and I told her all that was in my heart.

She said, "But, Suzeeeee, the future is very bright for these children. The cease-fires last longer. They spend more time in school. In school, I see them change. They come to us having been raped or seeing their parents killed right before their eyes and they can hardly talk. Now a year, two years later, they are singing in the choir, reading liturgy in front of the whole congregation. Reading, Suzeeeee! Reading!"

I said, "Yes, I worked as teacher, Sister. I saw huge changes in individual student's self-confidence. But how do you get at what's causing the injustice, the whole way things are set up down here? Bob told us about his nun friend in the river. And it's like all the people are in the river. And you do so much to keep them from drowning. But, sometimes, I want to walk down shore and see who's pushing everyone in.

"And it's those few who own everything. They're crazy people, Sister. They push the people in. The people scream, 'Help! Help! We can't swim.' And those in power, those on the shore, say, 'Well, we can't swim either but you don't hear us complaining about it.'

"They don't get it. None of us do. We divorce ourselves from each other. We convince ourselves that somehow those in the river must have brought it on themselves so we can live with it.

We say, 'Dumb Indians. Drunken Indians. That's just the way it is.'

"Sister, I kept thinking that I wanted something for my kids on this trip. But now I know I want something for myself. I'm running out of hope."

"But, Suzee, we *are* doing something about the causes."

"What?" I asked and as soon as I heard the tone in my voice, I felt so ignorant. Here was Mother Superior and the nuns devoting their lives to these people and I'm challenging them?

But Mother Superior didn't miss a beat, kept right on stirring the beans and said, "We're preparing the people to turn the pyramid around, changing slave mentality to people who can run a democracy."

"Then what should we do about our country, Sister? Since we did so much to put the people at the top into power? Is our only choice like the bumper sticker says, 'Love it or leave it'?"

"Oh, Suzeeeee, noooo!" she said. "You love her! Love your country! *And* you stay put and make your government behave. You tell your people, 'Less beef, less wood.'" And then she said something that translates roughly into "Teach your people the adventure of downward mobility."

I had to think about that. Then she put her spatula down, came over and gently rested her hands on my shoulders. "Suzeeeee," she said, "we do what we do. We get up early. We go to bed late. The rest is in God's hands."

She'd given me much to consider. I walked out of the kitchen, lost in thought, not quite sure where I was or where I was going, when I bumped into my own kids who were on their way to buy the young nuns some beer. They had discovered that the young nuns liked to have a beer once in awhile so off we went!

The typical evening routine was that the nuns started dinner and then we'd go to six o'clock Mass. We'd come back from Mass and they'd finish dinner while we set the table or whatever else we could do to help. So that night we were standing around talking as they started cooking up the rice and beans. We were all drinking a beer, laughing, having a good old time when Father Pancho walked in. That teddy bear face hardened and all the smile drained out of his eyes. He stared at us for what seemed like an eternity, then, finally he spoke. "After Mass is okay," he said, "not before." He turned and walked out.

We stood there speechless. From the look on the nuns' faces you could tell they were in shock. But my kids were the most upset. The cynical, disillusioned ones, right? They started talking nervously, "Maybe we should go after him and apologize. We should tell him it was our fault, our idea, not theirs."

But I...I was delighted! It made me feel young. It had been so *long* since I'd gotten in trouble with a priest. I looked at the nuns. *I* giggled and took one last swig.

That night was New Year's Eve. After Mass, we helped the nuns hang crepe paper from the ceiling. They put out special napkins and served rice and beans. We're told that the Eskimos have scores of names for the various textures of snow. Well, in Guatemala, they could have thousands of names for all the kinds of beans they serve. Soupy beans. Mushy beans. Beans they could use to build the orphanage! Only that night, the nuns came out with an extra treat, a platter of *Pavo*. Turkey.

I said to the nuns, "THE turkey?"

They nodded.

"Oooh," I said. "Cuidado, turkey, here I come!" It tasted delicious!

That night, we had extra guests join us for dinner: parishioners, more of the nuns and children from the orphanage down the hill, plus friends of CFCA from Guatemala City including a Guatemalan couple who were psychologists. The pair came to work with torture victims in the village and the orphans who went through especially tough times over the holidays without their parents.

When this couple walked in, I couldn't believe it. I said, "Terry, look! They have Amway T-shirts on!" Yes, I'd taken my kids thousands of miles away from their insular lives to the remote mountains of Guatemala to have dinner with two of the finest Amway salespeople in all of Central America! After the entertainment that night, my son who only spoke English and this couple who only spoke Spanish, spent hours searching through the English/Spanish dictionary to say things such as, "I hope you make it to Emerald level." "I hope that you go Pearl."

I looked at the Guatemalan Amway salespeople and thought, "Oh, what the heck! It's not like I'm anti-business or something. Maybe Amway fits in down here." And then, I started laughing at myself and all those judgments that go on in our heads. Rich/poor. Good/bad. Politically correct/incorrect. I laughed at myself until I felt this palatable shift inside my very being. And I wonder: Is it grace or stupidity when hope is rekindled, those times when heaviness lifts from your heart and you don't even know why?

Grace or whatever the reason, I stood in that room and suddenly I felt open to anything because... because my kids looked happy. They were with me, safe for the moment, and happy. And because the Church cat had had her kittens and they'd taken up residence in the manger underneath the Christmas tree. The mother cat kicked out Joseph and Mary and moved right in. And because, when the entertainment began, this Amway salesman/psychologist-to-torture-victims turned to his wife and sang her the most beautiful love song, acappella and straight from the heart.

And then, I heard "Suzeeee, story. Suzeeee." So I told some stories and the rest of the show was great with speeches and songs and, of course, Paco's magic act and so much laughter. I never knew you could laugh so much without understanding half of what was being said.

After the show, the nuns put on music and Mother Superior called to me, "Suzeeee, fox? Fox?" Mother Superior wanted to dance the Fox Trot. Up in those high mountains, the electrical surges were uneven to say the least, so sometimes, we had music and sometimes, the music slowed to a garbled drone. But I opened my arms to Mother Superior, shrugged and said, "Ah, Sister, in Guatemala we make do with what we have!"

So I bent down to Mother Superior and we were dancing cheek to cheek. I looked over and saw Paco dancing with Bob, Lesley dancing with my sons and the Guatemalan couple dancing slow no matter the kind of music. The young Mayan nuns stood in the corner taking in the whole scene and giggling.

Then Mother Superior squeezed my hand and whispered. "Ah, Suzeeee! There is so much love in this house."

And that, I realized is what I wanted for my sons, for me, for all of us: To *feel* all the love in the house. To love our country enough to criticize her when we needed to, right to the roots, and yet, to enjoy all the good things this country and this life has to offer. So for that night, I had no grand plan on how to change things. For that night, we danced - the fox trot, the waltz, and the hokey pokey too!

When the evening finally ended, when it was time to bring the nuns and the children back down the hill, I got in the van with Bob and Mother Superior and watched my sons get into the back of the pickup truck ahead of us with the children from the orphanage. I saw and heard my kids instructing the children on safety.

"No. Uh-uh. I said, 'Down.' Watch your hands. No, uh-uh. No grande boom-booms in the

truck. Do I have to come over there?"

Mother Superior looked ahead and laughed and said something I didn't understand. Bob translated. "Small changes," he said, "but eternal friendships."

I don't know how things change. A little pointing. A little song. A little cynicism. A whole lot of magic and love. One thing I did know, however, as I looked at all those children ahead of me - they are who we do it for because we will do things for our children, we would never otherwise do. And because we need them. They are the ones who know how to go on believing without understanding.

And in one moment, as we made our way down that hill in pitch darkness, the headlights of our van caught the back of the pickup truck and lit it up like a stage. For a moment I saw this picture of perfect community: all those kids finally settled down and snuggled under my sons' arms. The grande hijos, in their own way, in their own time, my sons, the adults, protecting the children. And right in the middle of them, was Paco still clutching that little black box.

Oh, you should have seen him that night! He was the hit of the talent show! "Abracadaper. Daper! Daper! Daper!"

I thought of Paco that night and many nights since. Paco up there in front of all those people, not understanding how or why the magic worked, just knowing that if we'll keep doing what we're doing, sometimes...the magic happens.

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