

Diary of a Farm Worker

Elda M. Siqueiros

NOTE: This is a work of fiction where the author uses some elements from her own experience, especially her English class.



Spring



I am here, I made it: just me and my hopes and dreams. Hunger, gangs, and suffering—I left them behind.

From day one, I find a job as a farm worker. I am a strong young man, able to do the hard work. I have always had an inquiring mind. My father always says I have sparkling eyes and determination, and I was born ready.

Farm work is hard work, poorly paid and physically exhausting. But they offer food and a place to sleep, so I don't think twice. The farm reminds me of my town. Children work with their parents in the field. It's a big community. I meet a family. They help me when I cut my hand. They clean my wounds and feed me too. They have a son my age, Luis, and a young daughter, who asks a lot of questions.

My "roomies" drink and smoke all night, talking of better days. The reason they drink is to forget. Memories are painful. I join them, but alcohol is a vice I don't want in my life. I can't afford to spend money on it, or worse, get fired for not being productive enough in the fields. Many workers have been fired for that reason. They are now living in the streets, with no work to do and an addiction to maintain.

I hear about someone committing a felony. I

pray that he isn't a farm worker. If he only knew the consequences of his actions for him and for all of us. People judge us for our appearance, accent, and broken English. They think we are bad people. But most of us come here to escape the gangs and the drug cartels. We come here to work very hard and to send money to our families.

There's a lemon tree that I like to lie under. I rest and think of better days. I imagine my family, sitting together and eating a modest but warm meal. They are in Mexico. They don't have much, but at least they have each other.



Summer

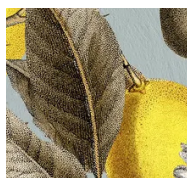
I come back home! All my family and friends are reunited. Even Cheeto, my old dog, is here. My mother kisses my eyes and blesses me. She is so happy to see me in one piece. Everyone looks much older than the last time I saw them. They say the same of me. They receive me with a warm meal. I feel happy for the first time in years. But the happiness is short. It doesn't feel like home anymore. Have they changed? Or am I the one who changed? How ironic it is: I don't belong here, and I don't belong there.

I think of that lemon tree, the one that listens to my misfortunes without judging, lets me lie down in its roots, and sees me crying and comforts me until I fall asleep. The lemon tree is the

one who sees my tiredness and hard work. I left the lemon tree behind to come home to Mexico. The scent of other blossoms reminds me of it. Why am I thinking of that tree? Is it being taken care of? Is someone watering it? Do the lemons still taste extremely sour?

It is like that lemon tree is calling me back.

Autumn



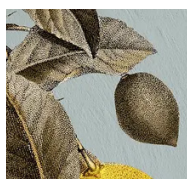
There is a new *capataz* (foreman) at the farm. They say he is a good person. He installed a little school in the field, and he brought a teacher. He wants everyone to learn English. I saw Luis there and

his sister Maria. She is so grown up now, but she still asks a lot of questions.

Classes are a relief; we have the time to talk about ourselves. Our stories are similar. I didn't see that the person next to me also was in need of compassion and not judgment. Now I can understand why they drink. I understand their anger and frustration. I wish I knew this earlier, so I could help those who got fired. If I had listened a little more, perhaps they wouldn't have lost their jobs and fallen into addiction.

Things are getting better now. The hard work is still hard. I finished my English courses, and the *capataz* encouraged me to study an administrative career. He has faith in me. He promoted me to be a supervisor, and I am studying at a community college after work. I also have been spending time with Maria. We sit under my lemon tree to practice English. Time flies when I am with her. She is beautiful, smart, and sings like an angel. She sees me with tenderness and compassion.

Winter



Seasons come and seasons go. I now own a piece of land in this generous country. The hard work has paid off. I still come every day after work to see how my lemon tree is growing. It was my witness

and companion in those difficult times.

At the end, I could taste the perfect balance of sweetness and sour in my lemons. Now I know that to grow a healthy tree, you need more than sun and rain. You also need the sweat from hard work and many tears of pain and joy.

My beloved Maria is joining me in the garden. We have had 25 years of this adventure together. I am grateful for our life. Our children come to dinner. They have grown up and become honest, kind adults and professionals. We are so proud of them. They look at me with love and respect.

When I was about to say the blessing before dinner, a young girl grabbed my arm, calling me "Grandpa!" I looked down to see who it was. Oh, my beautiful little Flower! I saw her eyes, the same eyes that I saw long ago in the mirror, sparkling and full of curiosity, compassion, and tenderness. She is so smart; she insists on knowing the name of my first dog.

I was an unknown immigrant who decided to leave everything behind to accomplish his dream of living with dignity in the land of the free. I have learned "for everything there is a season" and a time for everything. My dream has come true.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What is the role of the lemon tree in this story?
2. Explain how the author uses the metaphor of seasons to describe the farm worker's life.
3. The quote at the end of the article is from the Bible. Look it up and read the complete verse. Discuss.

Elda M. Siqueiros was born and raised in Mexico. She is married, is the proud mother of two daughters, has a career in marketing, and is an active volunteer in her community. She just finished a semester in English Language Acquisition for Adults (ELAA) in Nogales, Arizona, where she learned to write and speak without fear of judgement. This is a work of fiction.

