

“The rain at first was soft.”

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“Poor, Poor, Pitiful Me”

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Fifteen minutes after waking up, life spiraled into a pity party. It was my own fault. Over coffee, I compared bills to bank balance. I fretted about hard times some family members are experiencing. Acute crises can be faced. Today’s chronic troubles grind away at you like a systemic cancer. Worse, I turned on the national news. I shouldn’t have, especially since we must fly to anti-vaccine DeSantis land to visit a loved one in a nursing home. We will wear our masks proudly. Next came political news announcing debates among Democrats, followed by the snide Machiavellian games played by those formerly called Republicans. Amazingly, I now admire a Cheney. She loves the Constitution. Then journalist Ashley Parker documented how, unless we change course, the current uncivil brand of politics will, state by state, board by board, voting booth by voting booth, corrode the USA into becoming autocratic Turkey or fascist Hungary. Do you really want the January 6 minority mob and their accomplices in charge? Just remember how they redecorated the Capitol. Democrats can be embarrassing. Trump’s gangster party would make Rasputin blush. When did men forget to be men?

I should have stayed in bed. Poor, poor, pitiful me. Pull up the covers. Hope all this nonsense goes away. Then the memory of Rafael spoke to me. Self-pity, friend, is lazy. A lifetime ago, Rafael had invited two of us to join him for church and dinner at his home in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

Rafael moved to Tegucigalpa for opportunity. He began working for his cousin. Five Lempira a day, learning the cement trade, basic construction, carpentry, even how to install electrical wiring.

One Sunday a young woman visited his church in Colonia Kennedy with her friend. He noticed her. He had seen her around the Colonia before. She took care of a family's children. She must have noticed him too. He played guitar during worship services. She invited him to attend her church, El Cordero de Dios, and play there. Rafael got permission from his pastor to visit El Cordero. He began attending often. He doesn't play now, others do.

Maria Augustina and Rafael Gutierrez married. He was sixteen years old. They moved to the hilly Colonia Estados Unidos and, over the next years, rented four different homes. His first born son, Olvin Maurisio Gutierrez entered the world two years after they married. Two years later they welcomed a baby daughter into their home, Kelin Griselda Gutierrez. A few years after she was born he began working for a church development non-profit. His pastor at El Cordero de Dios, Ephraim Amador, also worked for it. Their church was committed to ministry with the poor.

Maria and Rafael saved 5,000 Lempira and were finally able to purchase a plot of land from the municipal government. On that plot he and his brother built his own home. Their third child, Jonathan Rafael Gutierrez was a year old infant when Hurricane Mitch destroyed their home.

"It was dark," Rafael remembered, "so dark it never stopped." He was doing electrical and block work out of town but decided to go home. It’s hard to make cement when it rains. The rain was coming soon. No work when it rains. They were expecting rain. Rain came. The sky got even darker. The rain at first was soft. No one thought it would be as big as it was.

The river began flooding. Mud began sliding down the hills, filling homes, undermining walls. The rain began dissolving the adobe homes. The school and church became evacuation centers. Ephraim organized the church members. Two homes nearby were about to collapse. They went to help save what they could. They began bringing beds on their backs in the rain. While Rafael was helping his neighbors, his home went down. A child neighbor came running to tell him. Rafael laughed when he told this.

The front room of his house was made of wood, the back room was made of adobe. The house above came crashing down on his house. Maria Augustina held her children in her arms as the living room walls fell to the outside. The other wall fell on top of the fence. They stayed there until the rain stopped. Rafael hung plastic for walls. They pulled their mattresses together. They slept under the plastic.

During the long night Maria was crying. She was worried. Rafael looked at her, held her, and said, "It is not a problem. We will put ourselves to work."