

Stranger in my Own Country

By Antonio Duran - 1926

My first adventure away from home, to seek a better way of life, came when I went to the village of Embudo at the age of twelve (1926). I came from Penasco, which is a village north of Dixon. I had the good fortune of coming in contact with people who changed my way of thinking.

The Presbyterian Church had a school, church and hospital in this village. These were the center of life for the surrounding mountain villages. I give most of the credit for the changes in my life to my dear teacher, Miss Sutherland, who was a missionary teacher from the State of Indiana. She came to teach and convert the people in the mountain villages of New Mexico. She had the welfare of the church and school in her heart. To the people of Embudo she was not only a teacher, but a Good Samaritan with great influence in the life of the community. She had a program and a plan for the needs of the people with whom she counseled. Because of her vast background and knowledge she accomplished much with these people whose life was different than hers.

My people were isolated in the mountain villages. There were few roads leading to the big cities and civilization. These people were thirsty for knowledge and wisdom and those who took advantage of it profited by it and those who did not, fell by the wayside. The harvest was there for the people to reap—the school, hospital and church were gifts from heaven because these missionaries labored without expecting a reward. In many cases the missionaries spent their whole lives among my people.

The people of the area contributed very little to the existence of these institutions—we paid 35 cents a month to go to school. Many of us did not pay this amount; instead we rendered our services in exchange for the tuition. I would carry wood into the schoolrooms every evening to pay for my tuition.