



To Hold a Flower Tenderly...

- *brother John*

THE NORMALLY QUIET AND PEACEFUL PRIORY GROUNDS were swirling with activity with an enthusiastic gathering of friends from far and near when the Refugee Caravan drove up the hill of Priory Lane some thirty years ago on a wintery March 24th day. The arrival of a helicopter bearing a CBS TV crew added to the novel sounds and sights customary in the tranquil monastic atmosphere.

Brother Mark opened the door to the red van that carried Elena and Felipe Ixcot and their five young children on the last leg of the perilous journey to Sanctuary from their homeland in Guatemala. From Chicago to Weston, their journey had been public. News media focused the eyes of North America on the plight of the persecuted Maya people fleeing from their country to find refuge in the United States.

The community of Benedictine brothers stood with open arms to welcome the refugee family. Brother Mark plucked the first little child from the van and gently placed her in my arms. Each of the five children found a warm welcome in the arms of awe-struck brothers. In the confusion and crushing excitement of the surrounding crowd, the sensation was one of a gift of peace—a sense of blessing bestowed freely and lavishly on the whole Weston Priory community.

As I began walking with the flowing procession of brothers and friends toward the front door of the priory, I realized that little Juanita who was nestled quietly in my arms, was gazing with rapt attention at a small flower—a daisy—that someone had placed in her hands. There was not an expression of unease or discomfort at being in the arms of this perfect stranger clad in monastic robes or the swirling crowd of foreign speaking people pressing so close by or the eager photographers and reporters competing for photos or a word from the brothers.

This lovely child, absorbed in the beauty of the peaceful flower, gave no sign of fear, anxiety or protest. Not a tremble or a whimper. The child and the flower were as one. The communication was one of trust and faith;

and that communication became a communion of promise: hold the flower tenderly and it will blossom!

Perhaps the experience of the Weston Priory brothers becoming the 100th Sanctuary in the National Sanctuary Movement can best be described as ‘holding a flower tenderly’. The presence of Felipe and Elena and their family was both gift and challenge for the community to grow in faith and trust – to open arms wide in a deeper communion. The gift of the refugee family’s presence in the priory has flowered in the blossoming lives of each member of the precious family.

Thirty years later, we celebrate and behold the promise in that blossoming. Felipe and Elena are now at home in Guatemala with their devoted son, Julio, who runs the family farm. They continue to serve and inspire their Maya people in the cause of justice and peace. They fearlessly speak out in their visits to the United States and at home in Guatemala as representatives of the International Maya League.

Marta, Alicia, Juanita and Maya have graduated from college and, together with their family, have become U.S. citizens. With their life partners they are engaged in professional life, working either directly or indirectly for the welfare, rights, and hopes of immigrants and refugees.

We can become one with a flower if we will but hold it tenderly – and it will blossom. That is a promise! ■



Flower of Beauty

- brother Augustine

Flower of beauty
Speaks, full of mystery,
To quiet a child’s heart.