

Manuelo

Manuelo lived in a village in high in the Sierra Mountains. It was a life that was in harmony with nature and the seasons and a happy village to live in, everyone worked hard by day, and by night, they enjoyed sitting around the fire, telling stories.

Manuelo worked as a shepherd. He spent the days tending his flock and allowing his mind to wander and wonder with the clouds. In the evenings, he would entertain the villagers with his tales. Everyone loved listening to Manuelo's stories.

Occasionally, whilst out on the pastures, he would meet people from the village far away on the other side of the mountain. He had heard of the village but never been there. One thing he noticed though, they always seemed so miserable. So one day, when one of the faraway shepherds was taking his flock down to the market, he struck up conversation and asked him: "Why do you always look so sad when you pass through here?"

"We work hard by day" he replied "and life is tough, there's never quite enough food to go around and the evenings, especially in winter, are so dark and miserable, we go straight to bed. What is there to be happy about? We feel very isolated and nobody cares about us."

"That's funny" Manuelo thought to himself "we too work hard and, at certain times of the year, go to bed feeling a little hungry, but we are never that unhappy, perhaps we are united by a love of story-telling."

And so a germ of an idea took hold and grew... perhaps he should make the journey across the mountains and teach them how to tell stories. After a while, he decided to tell his brother Filippo his plan....

"Don't be stupid Manuelo" his brother responded "you might be good at telling stories in our village but not to that bunch of *picaros perezosos*. Besides, what will your friends and family say."

Manuelo returned to his flock, perhaps Filippo was right, perhaps it was a stupid idea.

But ideas have this habit of not going away, especially good ideas, and this particular one kept on coming back to him.

One day, whilst at the village well, he met a wise woman from the village. Manuelo had always respected her views and so he decided to ask her for her advice.

She listened attentively to his plans and when he had finished talking and there was no more to say, she replied very simply....

"Manuelo, how many people will *not* benefit, if you keep your idea to yourself?"

After a long day in the field, he decided on the way home that he would tell his parents his plan, although he was more than a little uneasy about it, given his brothers advice.

“Mama, Papa, I have this idea that I must travel to the village on the other side of the mountain and teach them story-telling, they need to have something to lighten their lives.”

He expected his parents to be angry but they simply responded...

“Hijo, subemos. Tiene nuestra bendición” (Son, we know. You have our blessing).

And so later that week, after arranging for his reluctant brother to look after his flock, he set out on the journey across the mountains.

Towards the end of the first day an unseasonable storm blew in on the *Tramuntana*, the fierce, cold north wind. It started to snow and Manuelo took refuge in a cave. He felt lonely, cold and miserable and started to doubt the wisdom of his idea. “What am I doing? Why am I here?” he thought, “my brother was right all along.”

The following morning it had stopped snowing but it was cold and grey. Manuelo’s mood had not lightened and he was unsure of the way forward. Perhaps he would have to return home.

It was then he heard a voice in the distance “Manuelo, Manuelo”. He looked from the cave but could see no-one. “Manuelo, Manuelo” the voice came closer and he realised that it was Filippo. At first he kept quiet, thinking that Filippo would persuade him to come home (he might easily have been persuaded at that stage).

But he realised his brother had obviously come to help. “Filippo, I’m over here.”

“I’m glad you are well Manuelo, I was worried about you in the storm.”

“Yes, I am glad to see you too Filippo but I guess you’ve come to take me home?”

“No Manuelo, I’ve come to show you the way”

“But I thought you were against me going, you said it was a stupid idea!”

“I did, but then I remembered a story our Grandfather told us. We all have a special talent and we deny both ourselves, and the world, if we do not follow it. Yours, Manuelo, is story-telling and I was jealous of you. And mine, well I know these mountains better than anyone. Now pack your things and let’s get going, before we catch our deaths of cold!”

And the stories they told on their adventure.... well that’s another story!

Mike Palk. August 2010.