

Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer: Undocumented Vignettes from a Pre-American Life

Alberto Ledesma

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What is it like to live in America as an undocumented immigrant? Alberto Ledesma shares his own story of struggle and, eventually, US citizenship in his collection of graphic vignettes, *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer*.

Although Ledesma's story has a happy ending largely because of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, through which he and his family gained amnesty, his experiences still inform the current debate.

Ledesma, who went on to become a university professor and administrator, writes short narratives about the paranoia and stress of living with the constant threat of deportation—experienced not just by him but by his family and countless others. He repeatedly refers to himself as “the perpetually smiling, self-effacing immigrant Cantinflas, who deflected insults as if they were the most natural and innocent wisps of autumn air.”

Ledesma’s art is not in the style of panel-to-panel storytelling but rather of single drawings with text that together encapsulate an idea—like a political cartoon, but with a more serious approach. He addresses the emotions of, and obstacles to, undocumented immigrants achieving their dreams. His portraits are mostly realistic, though they sometimes utilize famous cartoon figures, including Winnie-the-Pooh, Mr. Magoo, and Wile E. Coyote.

Ledesma acknowledges that many people do not view the undocumented experience as a valid aspect of American life, but he makes a passionate case for the opposite viewpoint. *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer* is an eye-opening glimpse into a mostly hidden way of life.

PETER DABBENE (September/October 2017)

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