



...and the earth did not swallow him

A Film From **Espinosa Productions**

AWARD WINNING FILM COMBINES TRAGEDY AND HUMOR TO CHRONICLE THE LIFE OF A FAMILY OF LATINO MIGRANT WORKERS

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One of American Playhouse's Final Production

Like many boys coming-of-age in 1952, Marco Gonzalez is trying to find his place in the world. He is having trouble in school, his brother is fighting in Korea and his family is struggling to earn a decent living. But unlike other boys, Marco's journey of self-discovery takes place amid a backdrop of prejudice and injustice while his family follows the crops from Texas to Minnesota.

...and the earth did not swallow him, and American Playhouse presentation, opens hearts and minds as it examines the experiences of a young migrant worker boy.

The award-winning movie, which has screened internationally during the past year, is KPBS, San Diego's first feature film. It is the creation of Writer/Director Severo Perez, an independent filmmaker, and KPBS Playwright/Producer Paul Espinosa, a major contributor of programs about Chicano and U.S.-Mexican topics for national public television.

...and the earth did not swallow him is an adaptation of the Tomás Rivera novel of the same name, *...y no se lo tragó la tierra*, which has become a modern Chicano classic since first released in 1971. Like young Marcos, the film's main character, Rivera began life as a migrant worker, following the crops and working in the fields as a child. He went on to graduate from college, receive a Ph.D. and become the highest ranking Chicano in higher education as the chancellor of the University of California, Riverside.

The novel and film's title come from a key scene in which Marcos, angry that his prayers for help in healing his sick father have gone unanswered, curses God in order to invoke the devil. Although his mother warns about talking against God's will, Marcos discovers that the devil does not appear and the earth does not swallow him. He learns that his act of sacrilege does not bring divine retribution, and that he has control over his destiny.

Say Filmmakers Espinosa and Perez, "The film's theme of survival in the face of odds is universal, despite the very specific story being told about Latino and his migrant worker family. I think viewers across the country, both Latino and others, will embrace the film. Most Americans have little direct contact with migrants, and the contact they do have doesn't enable them to look into the world of people who are experiencing many of the same conditions today that the film depicts in the '50s."

...and the earth did not swallow him focuses on the boyhood memories of 12-year-old Marcos, whose coming-of-age is fraught with loss of innocence and tragedy as he witnesses bigotry and fraud, illness and theft, murder and suicide. These experiences lead him to spiritual crisis as he begins to question his faith.



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The film opens with Marcos sitting under a neighbor's house in South Texas town of Crystal City. He is daydreaming, trying to remember the events of last year. The memories of the cruelties he experienced contrast with the thoughts of his family's quiet dignity, work ethic and spirituality. Two themes flavor Marcos' memories: the senseless truculence humans inflict on one another, and the power of religion in his community. His memories are powerfully depicted throughout the film.

Dedicated to providing an education for their son, Marcos' parents leave him with seemingly good-hearted neighbors in Minnesota while they follow the crops south. Marcos' time with the couple -- who are in fact dangerous and cruel -- includes little school, as he is expelled after standing up to the bigotry of a class bully. Finding no help from the local priest, Marcos is pressed into servitude by the couple, exposed to prostitution, and made an accessory to murder when the woman robs and kills a man she has lured into her bed.

On a blistering day, a 10-year-old boy leaves the field to drink from a ditch as water for the workers has run out. Catching him at the trough, the foreman aims a rifle over the child's head to scare him back to work. But the boy moves and he is hit by a bullet. The screams of the boy's father are intermingled with the foreman's cries that "it was an accident." Later, as Marcos leaves the boy's funeral, he is transfixed by the sign above the cemetery entrance, "No me olviden." "Don't forget me."

One of the most poignant memories centers on the family's anguish over the eldest son, Julian, who is missing in action in Korea. Marcos' faith in God and humanity is tested when a traveling peddler offering portrait services swindles the family out of \$25 and their only photograph of Julian. Marcos' mother, Florentina, is haunted by her missing son and nightly weeps and pleads with God to return her child.

"*Dios, Jesucristo, santo de mi corazón,*" she prays. "This is the third Sunday I come to beg you to bring me word of my son. I haven't heard from him in five months. Protect him. Don't let a bullet pierce his heart... The night before he left, I held him in my arms and he was crying. He was afraid. And I could feel his heart beating. Virgen de Guadalupe, you bring me back his heart...Here... you take my heart. You take it out. But not his."

Says Marcos, "For a long time we never spoke of my brother... It was as if he had left to go to the store and he would be home at any moment."

...and the earth did not swallow him has been widely acclaimed, winning "Best of the Festival" honors at the Santa Barbara and Minneapolis International Film Festivals, Best Feature awards at the San Antonio CineFestival and San Diego Filmmakers Showcase, Jury Award-Artistic Achievement by the Director at the Cairo International Film Festival and Jury Award at Chile's Viña del Mar Festival.

...and the earth did not swallow him is a production of KPBS, San Diego and Severo Perez Films, with major funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities and additional support from American Playhouse, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Texas Committee for the Humanities, the California Council for the Humanities and the National Latino Communications Center.