

A Beer a Year Doesn't Hurt

Translated from "Una chela al año no hace daño"

By
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An educational story to help farmworkers fight isolation and its possible effects, such as alcoholism, depression and stress.

2013
Edited in 2014

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2014 SAF Theater Group participants with co-directors Raul Gamez and Laxmi Haynes (seated).

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Scripts

Cast of Characters

Juan: Farmworker/Anita's father/Sandra's husband; leaving for the United States to work in the fields for the first time.

Pancho: Farmworker/older man in a camp; drinks a lot, has not been home to see his family in many years.

Pedro: Younger farmworker; doesn't like drinking too much because his father was an alcoholic and abusive. He loves to draw.

El Cuate: Farmworker/bus driver; older man who drinks occasionally.

Anita: Juan's daughter; elementary school student.

Sandra: Juan's wife

Yoga: Health outreach worker/college student intern; hobby is practicing yoga.

Salsa: Health outreach worker/college student intern; hobby is dancing.

ACT I: THE FAREWELL

PROPS: Chair, guitar, backpack, clothes to be packed. Image of Saint Toribio de Romo, drink can.

Juan is a father from the state of Jalisco, Mexico. He is about to cross the border for the first time. Sandra packs Juan's belongings. Anita enters and plays with her dolls. She sits on the chair.

(Music: Mojado by Ricardo Arjona; or Hermoso Cariño by Vicente Fernández)

ANITA

Daddy, is it really necessary for you to go up North?

JUAN

Yes, my girl. The way things are here, we can't make ends meet with what I earn as a construction worker.

ANITA

But Daddy, I can work or sell candy.

JUAN

No, my girl. I want you to study and better yourself.

ANITA

Daddy, but I'm going to miss you so much!

JUAN

I know, I'm also going to miss you very much. But I'm going to call you every weekend and we're going to write each other.

SANDRA

Let's not get sad. This is only a temporary goodbye and we'll be together again soon.

JUAN

And with the money I make you'll be able to continue studying. The coyote that is taking me is good. There's nothing to worry about. Besides, you know me, I don't like to party or drink.

SANDRA

Yes, old man. But you'll be there alone... with no one to cook or clean for you. How are you going to do it alone?

JUAN

Little lady, it's the United Es-ta-tes; it's not like here. There you have stores, laundromats and everything close by. You'll see!

SANDRA

Well, may our Lady of Guadalupe and Saint Toribio, the protector of immigrants, protect you and take care of you. (Sandra gives Juan her blessing and gives him an image of Saint Toribio de Romo, the patron saint of immigrants.)

ANITA

Yes, Daddy. You need to take care of yourself. Write me often and send me photos. I hope to go there one day.

SANDRA

Why don't you sing us that song that we like so much? Juan, sing one of your favorite songs.

(The song Mojado plays for 1.5 minutes. The stage is set up during the fast part of the song.)

SANDRA

Old man, Doña Marta wants to send this letter to Don Panchito.

ACT 2: THE CRUDE REALITY

PROPS: 2 chairs, letter for Pancho, 2 cans of beer

Juan arrives at a camp in a rural area of North Carolina. He sees a farmhouse. El Cuate, who is the bus driver, gets out of the bus and tells everyone to be careful stepping down.

Juan and El Cuate enter simulating bus noises. Pancho is offstage. El Cuate exits the stage and Pancho enters.

EL CUATE

We're here, bro. Here's your palace!

(Juan steps out of the bus looking confused. He doesn't believe that the place where he's arrived is where he will live.)

JUAN

I swear this is not what they said it would be like. I think the shack in my ranch is nicer than this. At least it was near the bus stop.

(Pancho comes out and says hello. He is Juan's acquaintance who arrived earlier. He has a beer in his hand.)

PANCHO

Welcome, my friends! Finally, Juanito dared to come and earn some green!

JUAN

Yeah. You know, things are not going that well in Mexico. You don't make enough to even buy tortillas.

PANCHO

Well, everything is not rosy here either. This is no palace.

JUAN

Well, as long as there is work. That's what matters and what we came for. Isn't it?

PANCHO

Just forget about it for now. I bet you're tired after the trip. Come, have a beer and relax.

JUAN

No, Don Pancho. A glass of water would be better. I'm very thirsty.

PANCHO

There's nothing better for thirst than a cold one. Plus, we need to celebrate that you got here in one piece. This way you relax and tell me how everything is in our hometown.

JUAN

Ok, Don. But only one. I don't like to drink a lot. And I have to rest for my first day of work tomorrow.

(They talk while drinking a beer.)

JUAN

It's been years since you've been back to our hometown. Don't you want to go back?

PANCHO

I want to, but I can't. Things change, people change, and as you get old you go back and can't get used to it.

JUAN

But your family misses you and needs you.

PANCHO

They're older and they can fend for themselves.

JUAN

But your wife is still waiting for you. She always talks about you coming back soon. She sent you this.

(Juan gives the letter to Don Pancho. He takes the letter and pretends to open it but decides to put it away and finish his beer. It's obvious that getting the letter affected him emotionally.)

PANCHO

Well, yes. I'll go back again some day.

JUAN

Don Pancho, don't lose hope. If we fought hard to get here and make it, going back is the easy part.

PANCHO

Have another cold one and let's stop talking about sad things. It is what it is and things are not going to change. Life is better with a beer.

ACT 3: LIVELY SUNDAY

Months later, all the workers at the camp are resting after work. Some play soccer, some are talking, and some are drinking. The announcer shows a sign that says "3 months later."

PROPS: 3 chairs, soccer ball, box with beer, cellphone, sign that says "3 months later," easel, Pedro's pre-made drawings for his girlfriend

SCENE 1

JUAN

How time flies! I've been here three months already.

EL CUATE

Don Pancho, bring some cold ones so we can relax. The heat was a witch today.

PANCHO

You know it, Cuate. There's no better medicine for stress than a cold brewski!

(Pancho enters the kitchen and takes out the beer.)

PEDRO

Enough already! You drink beer like it's water. What is your liver like if the only thing you drink is alcohol?

EL CUATE

Don't be a party-poop, man. Plus, we're only drinking one!

(Pancho walks in with the beer.)

PANCHO

Here it is, Cuate. Pedro and Juan, c'mon. Have one with us. Let's hang out for a while.

JUAN

No, I'll pass. I'll go write a letter to my family instead.

EL CUATE

Juan, dude! You're always full of excuses. C'mon! Don't spoil the party. One beer is not going to do you any harm. It will even inspire you. You'll see how well you'll write. I write my best letters after drinking a beer.

PEDRO

But here you drink for every little thing. You drink to relax, you drink to sleep, you drink if you're thirsty, and you drink when you're angry! If you were only that good at drinking water!

EL CUATE

And what else is there to do here? Go to the movies?

PANCHO

There's nothing else. Plus, what's it to you if we drink? It's not like you are buying our beer. Live and let live!

JUAN

Don't get mad, Don. Pedro is only joking.

PANCHO

Nobody is mad here. I'm just saying that if drinking a beer makes me feel good, who am I hurting?

PEDRO

Panchito, they say that alcohol can change people's personalities. Don't get mad; you'll get wrinkles!

PANCHO

I'm not mad. Look!

(Pancho smiles mockingly to show he's not mad.)

PEDRO

Yep, you convinced me. With that Colgate smile I can tell how happy you are!

JUAN

You keep messing around. I'm going to try to call my daughter and wife.

(Juan walks away and tries to make a call on his cell phone. He moves his cell every which way trying to find somewhere he can get a signal.)

JUAN

Hello. Can you hear me? My baby girl, are you there? Hello!

(Juan is frustrated. He throws the phone on the ground and returns to his friends.)

PEDRO

What happened, Juan? How is the family?

JUAN

This damn phone doesn't work. It's been three weeks that I haven't been able to make a call. And I promised my daughter that I'd call every weekend. How frustrating!

PANCHO

You'll see that soon enough you'll be able to talk to your family. Don't get frustrated.

JUAN

It's no use. I'll try again tomorrow.

EL CUATE

Don't get down, Juan. Try again tomorrow. Go ahead, have one so you can get over your anger.

PEDRO

I'm telling you, you solve everything with beer. Instead, why don't you tell him to play soccer or exercise to clear his mind?

JUAN

While you decide if it's this or that, I'll go ahead and drink it. Not being able to talk to my family is a big deal and I don't know what to do. I think one beer will help me relax, just today.

PEDRO

No, Juan. That's how you start. Look at El Cuate and Don Pancho. They say only one and they've had three.

JUAN

I'm only having one today. I'm frustrated and I feel trapped in this camp. If I can't talk with my family here, I'm gonna go crazy.

EL CUATE

Juan, don't you know that if we weren't all crazy, we'd just go insane. And we have had three, but we worked hard for them this week.

PEDRO

You said the same thing yesterday. You're big boys and you know what you're doing.

PANCHO

Look, Pedro. I understand what you're saying but we have no other choice. You're young and I'm happy that you don't drink, but we don't have a problem.

PEDRO

I'm not saying you're alcoholics, but that's how you start.

EL CUATE

Pedrito, this is a Sunday to relax and watch the World Cup.

PEDRO

Quit your daydreaming. We know Brazil is going to win.



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EL CUATE

You're over the line, Pedro. You were doing great with your advice. But now it turns out you're pulling for Brazil? You were convincing me with the part about not drinking so much, but how can I listen to a sellout?

PEDRO

Take it easy, Don. Take it easy!

EL CUATE

Let's see, Pedro. If Brazil wins, I'll stop drinking for a week. And if they lose, you'll buy us a 24-pack of Corona!

PEDRO

You got it! I have faith in my team.

PANCHO

Get ready to lose, Pedrito!

PEDRO

We'll see! For now, I'll go work on some drawings for mi amorcito.

(Pedro goes to the easel and pretends to draw for his girlfriend.)

PANCHO

I think you just sharpen your pencil and don't draw anything.

PEDRO

What? That's how it is?

PANCHO

I'm just saying!

PEDRO

Drawing helps me pass the time. I draw things I'm thinking about. I draw the scenery, then I send them to my girlfriend. That way I also share what I'm going through here.

(Pedro takes out a piece of paper from his pocket and unfolds a drawing.)

JUAN

That's good you share things with your girlfriend.

PEDRO

Yeah, I miss her a lot.

JUAN

I miss my guitar. How I wish I could've brought it.

PEDRO

Don't get down; you'll get one soon.

PANCHO

One's a painter and the other a singer. It's like a circus!

JUAN

Don't be bitter, Don. We're only trying to pass the time and amuse ourselves with something positive.

PANCHO

I'm not dissing you; I'm just sayin'. Cheers to you!

EL CUATE

You paint and play; we'll drink!

(They keep chatting for a bit while the next scene is set up.)

SCENE 2: OUTREACH

(The workers are sitting around talking about the soccer game and their workday.)

PANCHO

We deserve the beer you owe us after this workday, Pedrito!

PEDRO

You don't miss anything, Don. Now you have a good memory.

EL CUATE

Remember that the people from the clinic come today and they're bringing us dinner.

PANCHO

So I need to shower so I look decent. What if I find the second love of my life?

PEDRO

Keep dreaming, Don. That won't harm you. And try not to drink today so you can pay attention to what they have to say.

EL CUATE

Alcohol doesn't affect me! Just the opposite. I'll have one so I can be more alert!

(In the distance you can see a van. It's the college students who are presenting information about drinking and alcoholism.)

SCENE 3: OUTREACH 2.0

(The young people arrive and introduce themselves to the workers. They explain what they will talk about. Here is an opportunity for the workers to answer some questions. Salsa hands out vegetables. The workers look at them and think it's funny, but they eat them anyway.)

PROPS: fake veggies, "4/Day, 14/Week sign," 40 oz. beer bottle, soccer ball, guitar

YOGA

Good afternoon, my name is Yoga. I'm here with my teammates to talk to you. We brought food that hopefully you'll like!

SALSA

Yes. Thank you for allowing us to talk to you this afternoon. I'm Salsa and today we'll talk about a very interesting topic for our community. We hope that you'll participate.

YOGA

We'll be talking about how alcohol can affect our community and our work. We'll also show you alternatives to have fun and how to overcome some feelings that may lead to drinking alcohol.

PANCHO

(Pancho whispers and elbows Pedro.)

This seems like entrapment. Damn it, Pedro. You must have planned all this.

PEDRO

No, I had nothing to do with this.

YOGA

Can anyone tell me why we drink?

PANCHO

Well, 'cause we're thirsty!

SALSA

Well, yes. But my friend Yoga means, why do we drink alcohol?

JUAN

We have an expert in the topic.

PEDRO

Panchito, they're talking to you!

PANCHO

I drink because I like it. Water doesn't have any taste!

YOGA

And do you think drinking is bad?

PEDRO

It can be bad if you drink without self-control and you don't think about the consequences.

JUAN

Some people also drink to relax.

PEDRO

Others because of boredom!

(Yoga and Salsa try to get other workers to participate and give suggestions.)

YOGA

You're a very smart group. Now we're going to tell you the number of beers that could be one too many.

PANCHO

I just drink one of these each day after work. I don't think that's bad!

(Pancho shows a 40 oz. bottle.)

YOGA

Well, a regular drink is a 12-ounce beer with no more than 5% alcohol. The drink you are holding is 40 ounces, which is equal to about three regular beers.

(Show 12 oz. vs. 40 oz.)

SALSA

Having four regular drinks at a time or more than 14 a week puts you at a greater risk of having problems with alcohol.

(Salsa shows the sign: "4/Day, 14/Week".)

PANCHO

Like, what kind of problems?

YOGA

There's a greater chance of becoming getting hooked on alcohol and putting your health and your loved ones' health at risk.

SALSA

Yes, you're at a higher risk of developing liver cancer. Also, if you drive drunk, you not only put yourselves at risk but also others who are driving on the highway.

(An actor can act out the health risks.)

YOGA

Any amount of alcohol can have bad consequences. For example, if you have ever gotten a DUI, if you get violent when you drink, etc.

PEDRO

Drinking and driving is serious stuff.

PANCHO

That's right. I drink a cold one every day and I take it very seriously!

JUAN

Don't mess around, Don. Doesn't it make you think a little bit?

PANCHO

What is there to think about?

YOGA

Drinking alcohol doesn't just affect you as an individual, it also affects people around you.

PEDRO

(Pedro stands center stage and shares his childhood reflections)

One of the reasons why I don't like to drink is my experience with my father. Once, when he was drunk, he even hit my mom and we couldn't do anything. He always felt bad after doing it and promised not to do it again, but the promise didn't last long.

YOGA

That can be a common behavior. Many people who drink too much alcohol can be violent toward their loved ones. If someone is violent when drinking, it's time to look for help.

SALSA

But it may not only affect your personal life.

YOGA

Well, yes, you are strong workers! I imagine all of you enjoy taking it easy. If you drink a lot after a long day at work, it will be more difficult for you to rest and you'll be dehydrated the next day.

SALSA

Which can make you more prone to heat stroke.

YOGA

Well, let's hope that nobody will be in that situation!

JUAN

I doubt it. But here we are isolated and far away from the city. There are no telephones nearby and there's no cell signal. What else is there to do? Even though we are tough and we don't want to, there are times when there is no other way to deal with our loneliness.

PANCHO

It's also part of our culture. When our soccer team wins, that's how we celebrate. Unless you're like Pedro, whose team always loses.

PEDRO

Yes, but it's not just a way to celebrate, we also turn to alcohol to relax. It's a way to get away from our problems and get over our loneliness.

YOGA

That's why I practice yoga. If you want, I'll show you a bit of yoga.

PANCHO

And what do you eat with that?

YOGA

Oh, what a jokester! Yoga is a discipline that combines physical, spiritual, and mental practice with the goal of reaching a permanent state of peace and relaxation!

JUAN

Isn't that when people twist and bend themselves into weird positions?

(Juan twists in awkward positions)

SALSA

At first glance, that's what it seems like. But the benefits go beyond a simple stretch! Yoga, why don't you show us?

(Yoga gets ready and shows basic yoga poses, focusing on breathing, meditation, and stretching. Yoga goes center stage and the workers line up behind her and stretch. Encourage the audience to do the same.)

PANCHO

I'll stick with soccer. What if I can't get out of one of those weird positions!

YOGA

Perfect, it doesn't matter what you decide to do if it's something good for you. Will you show us some soccer moves?

PANCHO

Sure! Who has a ball?

(Juan throws the ball to Pancho.)

JUAN

Here is the one we use for pick-up games.

PANCHO

Ok, so here's the ball. To play you have to use your feet.

(Kicks the ball.)

Ok, I'm tired!

PEDRO

Have a seat, Don. We don't want you to fall apart!

SALSA

Soccer is a good way to deal with stress, frustration, depression, and loneliness. In the end, it's not only a distraction. It's also a good way to clear your mind. And exercise helps you stay healthy.

YOGA

Playing soccer is good for you and it doesn't have to involve drinking. What do you like to do, Salsa?

SALSA

I'll show you what I like to do. But I need a partner!

(Music playing. Salsa starts to dance.)

YOGA

What other activities do you do in order to feel better? Activities that don't involve drinking.

PEDRO

One of the things I do is draw. I'm not very good at writing but I have fun drawing. And I can express my feelings. It's also a good way for my honey to see where I am.

YOGA

Do you have some drawings you can show us?

(Pedro shows the audience his drawings.)

JUAN

When I was in Mexico I played the guitar, but I don't have one here.

YOGA

There are many benefits to finding alternatives to deal with stress. For example, who wants to live a long life? Be happier? Stay young? Save money?

SALSA

Also, did you know that intimacy can improve if you don't drink alcohol? Are you paying attention now?

YOGA

Salsa!

SALSA

I didn't make it up! There's research.

PANCHO

No, no, no. Don't joke about intimacy. That's serious stuff!

PEDRO

Without intimacy and without beer, that's a boring life. Don, think about it!

PANCHO

Yeah, we should think about it. Juan, play a song for us!

YOGA

Yes, Juan. We have a guitar right here. Play and sing for us!

(Juan plays a song.)

SALSA

Bravo! Well, what do you think? There are different ways to deal with stress, fatigue, and anger.

PEDRO

Plus, everything you just showed us could save us cash that we spend on beer.

YOGA

Right, it's good to look at the positive side of things. Nothing in excess; everything in moderation.

SALSA

Remember, more than 4 at a time or 14 a week can affect your work and how you perform in bed. Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions?

PANCHO

Thank you for coming! Come visit us again.

PEDRO

Juan, before I forget. This came for you.

JUAN

Ah, it's a letter from my daughter.

(Juan opens the letter and starts to read it. Anita enters and reads the letter with him.)

JUAN

Dear Papi...



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ANITA

I miss you so much! How are you? What's it like up North? Do you live in a big house? Do you have a lot of friends? I do! At school I have a lot of friends. Except for this one mean girl they call la Chiva. She's so annoying and she always causes drama. But I tell her if she keeps it up, she's gonna get it. My teacher says that if I keep doing well in school I can be whatever I want to be when I grow up. And Mami was able to buy me a pair of new shoes and the new school uniform with the money you sent! Well, I hope that you're doing ok. Keep writing and take lots of pictures! Take care of yourself, Papi. I love you from the bottom of my heart. Your daughter, Anita

PANCHO

I missed out on my kids' childhoods. Let's see, Pedrín. I don't know how to write or draw. How about I tell you what to draw and I'll send it to my family?

Maybe the saying is true: a beer a year doesn't hurt.

The End

