

It May Not Be The Mountain Top, but Hilltop is Good Enough... Like Water for Trucks... Black, Taco Gold...

Mini-Review of Robert Lemon's *Transfusion*,
by Curly Cohen, *Southwest News*
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As soon as the music starts in Robert Lemon's documentary *Transfusion*, we see images of people working – a laborer painting a room, a landscaper maneuvering a tree onto a wheel barrow, and conveyor belts of freshly made tortillas in a family factory, and just that quick, a pleasure rushes over us. The rhythm of work feels just right. It's like we're watching the music video of *Working*, Studs Terkel's book that honors the blue-collar.

Like any good story, its message should be short, simple and clear. But it's in getting there, in the details that gives those stories weight. We can smile or be shocked with wonderful details. So when we see the various people framing "the story," it also has a pleasure all its own (wait till you hear the attack on Taco Bell!) Lemon takes his time, setting us up for what we've come to see.

This story is about Lidia Labra, who we learn spent two weeks stranded in the Arizona desert with her two toddler daughters while crossing across the border. She ends up in Columbus, Ohio and runs a taco truck in the economic desert of the east side's black community, where except for her, no one is opening businesses (though the "gentrifiers" are never far behind in a community that's been destabilized and abandoned).

She's from San Luis Potosí, Mexico. She's undocumented. She can be deported at anytime. And based on the record high number of deportations, there is cause for concern. Her sick father is in Mexico and is in need of her blood for a transfusion, but if she leaves she might not be able to return. Her father's transfusion is one of many needs in the world of economic depression.

Mrs. Labra gets a guardian angel in the form of a black civil rights lawyer and local historian who manages to connect the Underground Railroad and economic migrants, be they from the Jim Crow South or Jim Crow Mexico, and the real and immediate issue of deportation and the economic isolation of the black community.

Then we go to Mexico to meet her family and it's obvious to us that the love of food and family has been exported to Ohio. At one point, the screen is split and her sister is cooking potatoes with carrots and frying tortillas in red sauce, while Lidia is making the same speciality in her truck.

So what we're watching is a cross-cultural love affair of a woman who embraces the black community and the community that has embraced her.

It might be easy to project and stereotype tension between the black and Latino community, but what Lemon has done is discover a real and heartfelt unity, shown with a clarity we don't often see. *Transfusion* is satisfying exactly in the way that at the end of the day, we can see the growing tree that had been planted into the moist earth, or the fresh paint that covers the drywalls of "Columbus, Everywhere, USA," or the delicious meal, made with care by a good-hearted woman finding a place of belonging. Lemon's *Transfusion* is a transfusion for us, one badly needed, it's irresistible; it's an irresistible, wild and wonderful ride.