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LATINA IS VICTIM OF HOT-WATER CURSE

By Patricia Guadalupe

While watching a news report about our beleaguered attorney general Alberto Gonzáles, I had one of those *omigawd!* moments that stopped me in my tracks.

It answered the question that has plagued me from girlhood. Why can't I be famous — one of those Hispanics whose triumphs and travails the press loves to write about?

As I settled on my couch and popped open a bottle of a snooty imported beer, the TV analyst was commenting on Alberto's resilience and reconstructing his rise to political stardom. He quoted President Bush's own words when he first introduced Gonzáles to the nation: "He grew up in a two-bedroom house in Texas with his parents and seven siblings. His mother and dad, Pablo and María, were migrant workers who never finished elementary school..."

I think the analyst also mentioned that the Gonzáles household had a dirt floor and no hot water, but it's possible that I heard that somewhere else. Like when Alberto appeared on NBC's "Meet the Press" or ABC's "Good Morning America."

That's when it hit me. My barrier to success in life comes down to this simple fact: I am a Hispanic who grew up with hot water.

I admit it. Not only did I have plenty of hot water, I — *gasp* — had MY OWN ROOM! I didn't have to sleep on the floor on a mattress soiled by an infant sibling. It was canopy bed from Macy's with a matching dresser. And a matching mirror, a little rug, a radio, a record player, and sometimes a TV.

Don't hold this against me, please — it wasn't my fault — but cable TV, too.

I wasn't even the first in my family to go to college. My mother has a business degree, not something too many women did back in the '50s. To make matters worse, my father never once hit my mother or us kids. And he wore a suit and tie to work. No one ever called the police for any kind of fracas at home.

In fact, we **were** the police. My grandfather was in law enforcement in Puerto Rico. So were a ton of uncles and cousins. And last time I checked, there are at least half a dozen lawyers and a couple of judges claiming to be in my family.

I am practically in tears. Surely something, someone in my family tree, can qualify me as one of those up-from-the-*barrio* Hispanics like Gonzáles whom the press never tires of talking about. Didn't an uncle or somebody actually go to jail? How could a Puerto Rican family not have a jailbird?

I place a call to *mami*, the family ad hoc historian, and ask.

"Well," she says after a very long pause, "you remember your *tío* Jacinto and all the schemes he was involved in?" Rumor had it that he collected both a disability check for himself and a death benefit check for his daughters from Social Security, all while working full-time, very much alive, as a night watchman, or *wachimen*, as my aunt would call it, at a factory in The Bronx.

I can hardly contain myself. I'll put *tío* Jacinto on my résumé.

But then, the deflating news. "You know, *mi'ja*," my mother cautions, "he never went to jail. They could never prove anything." In fact, she tells me, just in case

the FBI is recording our little chat, it could all have been *un cuento*, a story, he invented to spice things up a bit. *¡Ay Dios!*

Is there a club or a recovery group I can join to help me deal with my ordinary middle-class experience growing up Latina devoid of poverty or such other hurdles frequently attributed to us Latinas by the media such as unwanted pregnancies, high school dropouts, tattooed *gangstas* and drunken, absent fathers?

Can you forgive me for not living the stereotype?

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