

JOSE VALDEZ: LA VIDA EN VALOR

An excerpt from the one-act play, by Jeff LaGreca

Commissioned by Valdez Elementary School • Denver, Colorado

PAPA LUIS, narrating

At that moment, a Panzer Tank, came crashing through the trees, taking the patrol off guard!

Lights shift to Sarge and the soldiers on the battlefield.

SARGE

Fall back! Ya gotta fall back.

PAPA LUIS

You have to understand. A Panzer tank. THE Panzer tank was the most feared tank in all of the German army. It was superior compared to any of the Allied force tanks.

As Papa Luis describes it, we see a huge shadow of the tank fall across the stage like a giant creature.

PAPA LUIS

But Jose F. Valdez, stood his ground against the impenetrable goliath. He opened fire again and again against the raging metal beast.

VALDEZ shooting

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

PAPA LUIS

While the others ran. Jose stood. While the others took cover. Jose attacked.

SARGE

Valdeez! Get outa' there!

PAPA LUIS

But Jose Valdez would not yield and eventually, his constant barrage made the tank withdraw.

SOLDIERS — the soldiers cheer as the looming shadow withdraws.

PACCIO

Geez... the “F.” is for Ferocious!

SOLDIERS (cheering)

FEROCIOUS! FEROCIOUS! *etc.*

Scene shifts to a FLASHBACK, the farmland in Gubernador, NM. Jose is feverishly hammering at a fence post, driving the wood down into the ground. His sister, MANUELA calls out to him. Underneath, folkloric guitar music plays.

MANUELA

Hey Ferocious! FEROCIOUS! You’re going to drive a hole to China!
Hey take a break, Feroz. *(She offers him iced tea.)* Mama’s awake. She wants to see you before you go.

JOSE F. VALDEZ

Is she still mad at me?

MANUELA

She could never stay mad at you. You’re her oldest son, her favorite.

JOSE F. VALDEZ

I wish she could understand. I had to enlist.

MANUELA

You should have just told her before you joined up. You didn’t have to go all the way to Utah. *(pause)* Why are you going?

JOSE F. VALDEZ

Lots of reasons, Manuela. I have to. The situation is bad. We have to stop the Germans.

MANUELA

But why? Why fight when the people in our own community don’t treat us as one of them.

JOSE F. VALDEZ

I know. But maybe this is a chance to change that. Maybe it’s a chance to honor my family and my country.

MANUELA

Jose, we were born here and yet we are treated as aliens. Outsiders.

JOSE F. VALDEZ

Manuela, when I was at the recruiting station, I was standing with some of the other guys. An officer came through and everyone stood at attention. It was cold and I had my hands in my pockets. And I remember, the officer said to me, “American soldiers stand at attention, they never keep their hands in their pockets.” I was dumbfounded because nobody had ever called me an American before!

MANUELA

(sighs, then smiles) I will never understand you. Always sticking your neck out for everybody else. *(a beat, teasing)* Mr. America — we’ll bring you home wrapped in a flag!

There is a LOUD EXPLOSION and we are brought back into the present and the heat of battle.