

# From the screenplay, "For the People" by Tom Prouty



**Wellstone & Roberto**

**Roberto Gomez Hernandez** was raised on politics in San Salvador. His mother, an attorney, and his father, an architect, are the founders of the Christian Democratic Party.

Antonio's childhood friend is Jose Napoleon Duarte. By the time he is sixteen, Roberto organizes a street demonstration against the military and the ruling oligarchy. 100,000 student demonstrators turn out. Violence ensues. Fearing for his life, Antonio's parents send him to California to live with an aunt.

Duarte goes on to be educated at Notre Dame in the U.S. In 1964, when the newly formed Christian Democrats needed a candidate to run for mayor of San Salvador, they draft Duarte. Later, he becomes president.

By 1980, conditions in the war torn country have deteriorated enough to cause world wide concern. The Congress of the United States is demanding that the abuse by the Salvadoran military be stopped, threatening to cut off all US foreign aid. In order for President Duarte to identify the source of the abuse, an undercover investigation will be needed. Duarte knows he has to

choose someone he can trust to be appointed as the head of an American subsidiary corporation, doing business with the Salvadoran government. The president contacts his old friend, Roberto, still living in California, serving El Salvador as Vice Consul. Against the wishes of his family and friends, Roberto accepts president Duarte's dangerous assignment.

From his new position in El Salvador, Roberto observes the dealings of the Salvadoran and United States militaries, the "guerillas" fighting against them, the death squads as well as the drug cartels operating between both countries. After ten a month investigation, Roberto takes his report to his president. Unfortunately, Duarte has by now been corrupted. His own military has tortured him, cutting off two of his fingers, nearly cut out his right eye and telling him to keep quiet or he and his entire family will be eliminated. Duarte tells Roberto that they can't go public with his report until after the upcoming election. Roberto, however, is determined to hold the press conference he and Duarte had agreed to ten months earlier. Roberto schedules press conferences with the local press for the next morning and the international press that afternoon. Roberto never makes it to the afternoon press conference. Immediately after his morning speech, he is arrested, beaten and taken to police headquarters. He is asked to sign a document, disavowing the comments he had made to the press. Knowing that his report was factual and that his effort had been "For the People", Roberto shakes his head "no". Immediately thereafter begins eighteen days of repeated torture, followed by a year and a half in solitary confinement, then another year and a half in the most notorious prison in El Salvador.

In time, Roberto is able to be taken out of the country and given exile in a village in Mexico. His hostess, Rena, is a former doctor from El Salvador. Her husband is a Mexican general. It is during these days that Roberto learns that his wife and two children have been raped, tortured, dismembered and killed.



***Roberto's Wife***

enters the home and finds Rena hanging by the neck from the chandelier, dead. A note on the table says "You are next".

Roberto panics. He knows he has to get to the United States and testify to Congress in order to be of help to his country. He returns to Mexico City where he has a friend working for the government. In privacy, he pleads with his friend to help him get into the United States. The friend, on seeing Roberto's determination agrees to help, saying "You have been a prisoner in your country, and now I would have you be a prisoner in mine."

That night, Roberto is driven to the desert. The friend gives him a map and Roberto steps out into the night. After three days of tortured walking, he is found by a Department of Natural Resources researcher working in the desert of Arizona. The American takes him a short distance to where the American rescue group has been looking for him. From here, he is taken to a hospital in Tucson where he is given medical care. Thereafter, he is flown to Minneapolis, Minnesota, hosted by the Center for the Victims of Torture.

In the following months, Senator Paul Wellstone befriends Roberto, eventually taking him to Washington, DC to testify before committees of the House of Representatives, the Senate and the United Nations Truth Commission. A member of Senator Wellstone's staff subsequently has said that Roberto's testimony has had more to do with the improvement in U.S. Foreign policy regarding human rights than any other person in recent history.

Roberto continues to search for ways to help his countrymen. In desperation, he seeks the assistance of the American Embassy in Mexico City. Personnel at the Embassy agree to give him a hearing. After three days of interrogation, Roberto is told that the Embassy has good news – that they are going to be able to help him get back into the United States where, years ago, he had become an American citizen. He must, however, first sign a document disavowing what he had said in his press conference and promising to never disclose the details of his report to the press. Roberto objects, saying that his statements were true. He demands to know why he is now being asked to recant his statement. He is told "it is because your testimony could end the career of Ronald Reagan". Roberto is shocked and distraught. After all he has been through, how can he now be denied justice. Dejectedly, he tells the Embassy personnel that he cannot agree to deny the truth. He leaves the

Embassy and Mexico City. Upon returning to the village, Roberto



***Roberto's Son***