

HOLA!

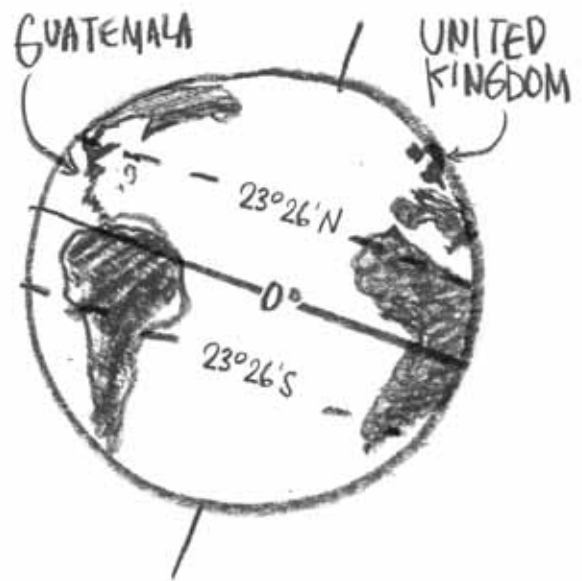


Elena Arevalo Melville

My name is Elena and I am the author of **Umbrella**, a book about community and the magic of sharing and empathy, which takes place in a park in a summer's day. **Would you like me to share with you some of my favourite summer holiday memories?**

Well, you will never guess what? When I was a child I had no summer holidays, in fact **I had no summers at all!**

That is because I grew up in Guatemala, a small and very beautiful country in the **tropics** in Central America. In the tropics there are no four seasons: no summer, no autumn, no winter and no spring. In Guatemala there is a dry season and a rainy season, and it's mostly consistently warm. It is referred to as "**Land of Eternal Spring**" but leaves never spring back from plants as they never fell off them in the first place! The grass goes brown in the dry season and gets green and bright again every rainy season; and when it rains, it really rains. Ordinary umbrellas come in handy then!



The school year isn't from September to July, but from January to October.

The big school holiday period in Guatemala is the Christmas holiday which lasts three months!

For me, those months were particularly eternal as I had no siblings and I missed the buzz and playmates from school.

That first scene in **Umbrella** when Clara has no one to play with was very often how I felt during my school holidays.



That's why my happiest school holidays memories were when my dearest cousins who lived abroad came to visit. I had no brothers nor sisters, but I did have 27 cousins!

My cousin Isa and I were very, very close, and for a long time during our childhood she lived abroad. I missed her terribly!

We used to correspond via letters and we would count the days down to her visits. She used to stay at our grandparents house where my mum would bring me to stay the whole day. We used to get up to all kinds of mischief and **imagination** was always central to our playtime.



We were always plotting something. Often it would involve making something we wanted to sell to passers by so we could buy some ice-cream. I don't remember EVER selling anything we made, but I do remember lots of walks to *POPS*, the local ice cream place. We always asked for the same ice cream: *capuchino de fresa*, which was a single scoop strawberry **ice-cream** covered with a thin crust of chocolate. Yummi!

We often ate our ice-cream slowly to see whose treat would outlast the other one. Ice cream would be dripping down our arms, reason enough to not let us back into the house until both ice creams were truly finished.

Another reason to leave us out in the garden is that we got a reputation for being **a bit naughty**, like the time we created a creature out of flour which we then forgot in the utility room and it stank the place down, or the time when we raided our Abuela's christmas chocolate stash. The peak of our naughtiness came a bit later and it involved hiding Isa's passport inside some ancient ledger books that were destined to be destroyed in the hope this meant she would never have to leave again. It didn't quite work out like that, not before some high drama in the Mexican-Guatemalan border. Although it seemed like a great idea at the time, it really wasn't. Even if we wanted to forget this, no one in our family will let us. We can laugh about it now!

Nowadays, I'm the one who lives abroad and I still miss my cousin but now we have technology to keep us together. I get to share with her the beauty of the seasons and we can plot our further adventures.

The world is bigger and smaller than you think!

Have a fabulous summer, enjoy every bit of your ice creams and whatever you do, bring your imagination into it, and keep your hands off your passports!



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