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**La Americana**

Directed and produced by Nicholas Bruckman. People's Television, 2008. See <http://www.la-americana.com>

## In brief

### Film **Paying the price for care**

Carmen Rojas left Bolivia in 2000. The USA denied her a visa, but she decided to enter the country anyway. Hidden in an aperture behind the back seat of a car, she was smuggled into the country where she finds, "I'm always in a hurry". She's a cleaner and dog-washer, a nanny and home-help. She needs the money for her daughter Carla, who remained in Bolivia with Carmen's mother. When she was 7 years old, Carla was hit by a bus. She lost the use of her legs and requires lifelong specialised care.

The first half of *La Americana* observes Carmen's exhausting New York routine. In the background the heated debate over immigration plays out, with neither side gaining much ground. The film then picks

up the story in 2007. Carmen has returned to Bolivia. Carla is now 15 years old; she has a broken hip—it seems that a heavy-handed chiropractor is to blame. There's more bad news: there's a risk that Carla's other hip will break. Her knee is permanently bent. The recommended schedule of physical therapy will cost at least US\$25 a week, a daunting amount given Carmen's low income. Hydrotherapy is more still, and Carla needs surgery to cure a bedsore. Then there are the taxi cabs to transport the wheelchair-bound girl.

Unfortunately, director Nicholas Bruckman does not subject Bolivia to the same kind of analysis as he does the USA. It's a frustrating omission: a few facts and figures

about the Bolivian economy and health-care provision would have helped contextualise this family's plight. Instead, the audience is expected to assume that the country's defining characteristic is unmitigated poverty.

Still, it's a moving and thought-provoking documentary. We leave Carmen as she prepares to return to the USA. Carla's condition is degenerative, and there's no way her mother can accumulate enough money in Bolivia to pay for treatment. "I can spend all my money on food, or I can spend it on her therapy" Carmen points out "there's not much room for a choice".

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