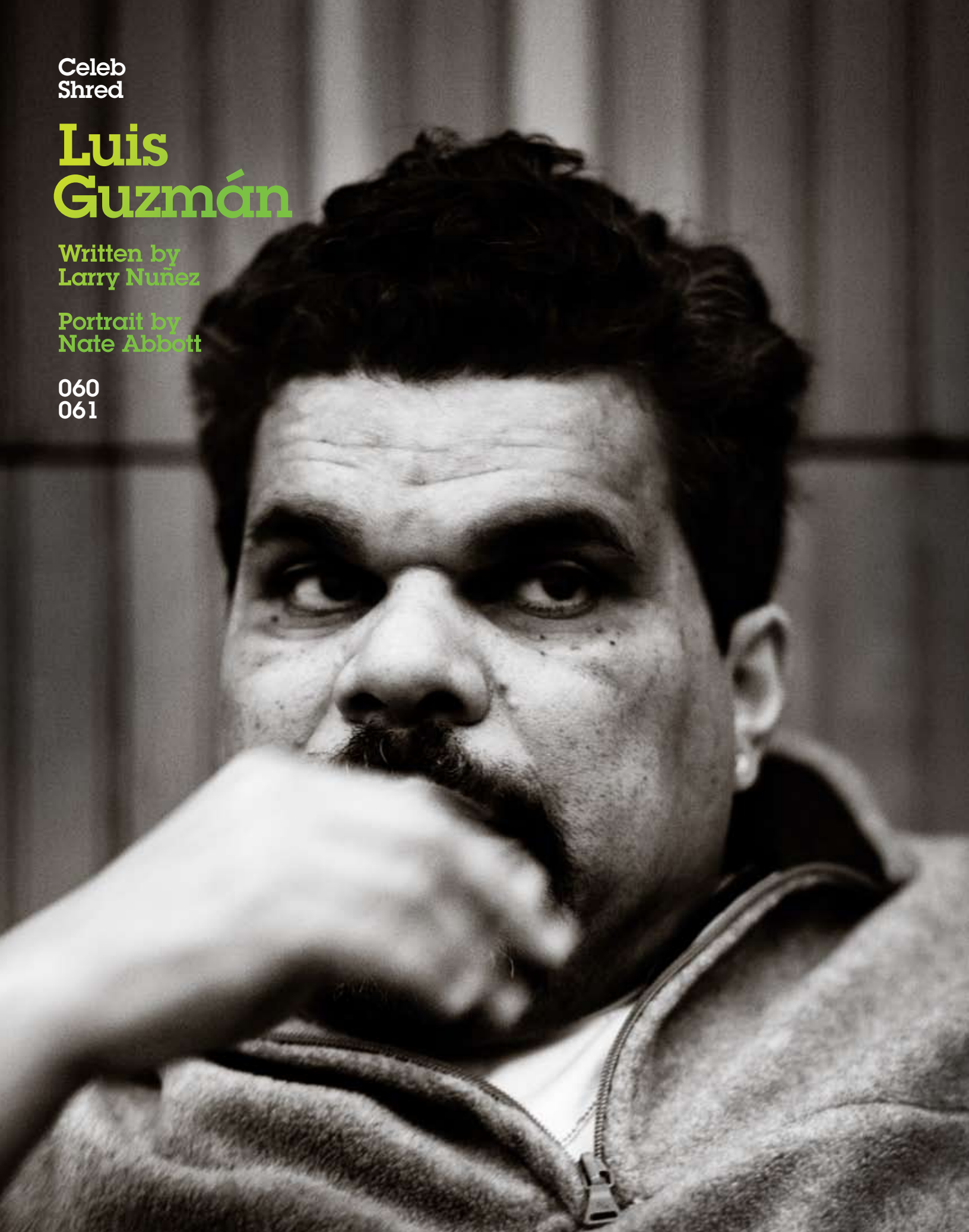


Luis Guzmán

Written by
Larry Nuñez

Portrait by
Nate Abbott

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Admit it: When you've seen him on screen, you, like everyone else, have wished to be like Luis Guzmán at one point or another. You've thought, "Man, if I was like that guy, nobody would mess with me." One of our favorite don't-take-no-shit-from-nobody character actors just plain looks like a badass. His stocky physique and menacing glare are enough to have even the toughest guys running for the exit. But that's all just acting, right?

The truth is, Luis Guzmán is far from similar to the characters he often plays in the movies. In reality, he's a kind, compassionate individual...more concerned with keeping kids out of trouble than throwing someone off the pier. He's a family man, married and raising his five children in the quiet backwoods of New England. But his story is the classic American Dream of succeeding because of *who you are*, as opposed to just what you do or who you know.

To those who don't know this side of the distinctive-looking New York native, it would come as a surprise to see him at Burton's 2008 U.S. Open in Stratton, just a short drive away from his home in upstate Vermont. Burlington's hometown heroes and friendly neighbors invited Mr. Guzmán and his family to attend the contest and check out some snowboarding up close and personal, and luckily, one of the hardest-working actors in the business just happened to be in between gigs that weekend.

You're one of the last guys anyone would expect to see at the U.S. Open. How'd your relationship with Burton bring you to this thing?

Well, this is my first time; I'm always on the road. I almost didn't make it this year either, but I got to finish my film in time. I met the people from Burton out in L.A., and I met Jake [Burton] at his party last year. We hit it off, so now I'm on the advisory board for the CHILL Program, the program for inner city young people. I just think it's a great story, you know? Burton and Jake, and how he put it all together working in a barn, making these little boards by himself and, you know, how it all blew up for him.

How does a working Hollywood actor end up living in Vermont?

Well first, to burst your bubble, I'm from New York, I don't live in L.A. I used to come to Vermont as a teenager, man. I adopted four kids, four beautiful children. I had one of my own...and my wife Angelita and I kinda said, "Yeah, we don't want to raise our kids in the city." I came into some money and bought a little house in Vermont and the rest is history.

Where in the city did you grow up?

Lower East Side, downtown, baby. And you know, the neighborhood has changed a lot but it's still a great place and you still have a sense of community down there. I love the Lower East Side, but I love being in Vermont and raising my kids here. I can't complain, man.

So you're Puerto Rican then? All my life. I was born in Puerto Rico, and my mother brought me here when I was 15 minutes old. And I lived in New York pretty much all my life. We've been here in Vermont now for 13 years permanently. Winters are a bitch sometimes, but you have days like this, man, and it's great. But like I said, I think it's a great place to raise kids and have a family, and you know...I get my kids passes for the mountains. Saturday and Sunday, that's their playground.

Have you been snowboarding yourself yet?

Jake and I have made a deal that he is going to put me on the board. Jake told me, "Don't trust nobody, trust me." So Jake and I, we got a date. But every time I wanna go on a snowboard, dude, I'm somewhere. Like I said, I just came in yesterday for this—I've been on the road and stuff. I'm pretty much in demand so it's hard.

You do seem to be in every movie ever made. Is it hard to find time to spend time with your family at events like this?

I try my best to find ways of making it happen. I usually try to come home on the weekends to spend time with the family. I was in San Diego at this time last year shooting "John From Cincinnati;" then I spent three months in New York shooting a movie with Channing Tatum and Terrence Howard. I was in L.A. for two weeks at the beginning of the year doing something with Jim Carey; then I bounced to Chicago and just did six weeks on a movie with John Leguizamo, Alfred Molina, Debra Messing, Freddy Rodriguez and Jay Hernandez. It's about Humboldt Park, which is the Puerto Rican neighborhood of Chicago. And it's about a Puerto Rican family getting together for Christmas. I play this guy Johnny, who's like this 48-year old cousin that likes hanging out with...I don't know, 20-year olds? He's like the Papi Chulo, you know. But I think my character was the comic relief of the movie.

From *Carlito's Way* to *Traffic* and movies like that, you're pretty notorious for playing either a gangster-type character or a cop. How much of your personal background goes into those roles and how much is just good acting? I'll put it to you this way bro. I grew up on the Lower East Side. And I grew with a lot of different characters...many

kinds of people. I've been in a lot, a lot of situations. So I kinda make my life a part of everything I do. I could do a movie next week and I could be you. I just know it's a matter of asking questions and how you go about it, you know. Like you...with the pad [referring to my Field Notes notebook]. I just pretty much put myself into every situation. I don't try to *act* like I'm interviewing somebody; I actually interview somebody. I think a lot of people make the mistake of acting, and to me...what I do is put myself into that situation. Give it a reality.

So how did you get into acting?

I was a social worker, in New York, in the Lower East Side. And two kids didn't show up for my program one day, and I went out into the street looking for them. I ran into a buddy of mine who I hadn't seen in three years, and he said, "Yo bro, I'm writing for this TV show, and we're coming to New York to film. Why don't you go and see if you can get a part? So I went, got the part...and I had no clue what I was doing. No clue. I ended up co-starring in the two-hour season premiere of "Miami Vice." All I wanted to get out of it was enough money to buy a used car, so I could drive to the beach on the weekends. Look, I never aspired to be an actor. I just wanted to hang out—I loved what I was doing, I loved working with young people, trying to be a good influence on their lives and stuff like that.

What age was that?

I was 29 years old when I got into acting. That's how it started for me. I used to do little bit parts here and there, but I stayed being a social worker for five or six years after that. Cause I loved my job, and I wasn't too sure about the acting thing because it was such a fluke. So I would get different parts here and there, but I was looking at it as just subsidizing my social worker salary. You know what I'm saying? Then I kinda got burnt out, I said, "I'm gonna take that leap." And here I am. I just went for it, and I was really happy about it and one thing led to another. I think my second movie was *Crocodile Dundee 2*. I got a trip to Australia out of it, you know? But it was a great experience. And now...man, I've worked with just about everybody.

You really have worked with some of the best in the business. Are there any memorable roles or people that you've worked with that stand out in your mind?

I loved this movie I did many years ago called *Q & A* with Nick Nolte and Timothy Hutton. I loved my role in *Carlito's Way* with Al Pacino; I loved *The Limey* with Terrance Stamp and Peter Fonda and all those cats. Hands down, *Boogie Nights*; *Magnolia* was great; *Punch-Drunk Love*, you know. *Traffic* was awesome. I mean, if you ask me what my favorite movie is... I got like twelve. You know what I'm saying?

It's not like one is better than the other but they are special in their own way.

Exactly.

You mentioned Humboldt Park [now titled *Nothing Like The Holidays*]. What are some other projects that you have coming up?

Well next week I start working on *The Taking of Pelham 123*, which is a remake of that movie. It was a movie that was done in the seventies about these cats that highjack a New York City subway train, hold it hostage, get the ransom, embarrass the city and they almost get away. So Tony Scott is directing it, Denzel Washington, John Travolta, John Turturro...and I'm the guy that drives the train. Watch out. So for now, I'm just enjoying the weekend, and more than anything, I'm just happy that I was able to bring my family down and share this with them. This don't mean nothing if I came down here by myself. 🍻

Check out Luis in *Nothing Like The Holidays*, opening in November and next summer in *The Taking of Pelham 123*.