

Routine

Me gusta lavar la ropa. I like doing the laundry.
Me ayuda a pasar el día. It helps me get through the day.

Guatemalan woman in a shelter after hurricane Mitch
devastated her country.
November, 1998

She takes
the paper cup full of water
to her lips,

savors the liquid's coolness
as her tongue slowly
awakes to the clean taste.

To her back, she hears the morning
breeze. The change of clothing
she washed earlier
flaps on the clothesline.

Tomorrow, she'll go through
it again: One pail of water
to wash the family clothes.

Then she'll hang them
on the clothesline stretching between
a surviving tree and the building

housing the displaced families.
Task accomplished, she'll walk
to the line

of orange and red
plastic barrels and ask for
a glass of water.

She'll drink it in small
sips, feeling the tingling
sensation on her tongue

sending a wake up call
to the rest of the body.
For now, only her hands

respond. The change of clothes
needs to be dry by the
following morning.

As her hands
scrub blouses and skirts,
shirts and pants

she studies the
river's water slowly
receding.