

## **My Life Story**



**Sara Lucrecia Fajardo Calderon**



**Ruth Penaherrera-Norton, Storykeeper**

## Acknowledgement

As we near the consummation of the Ethnic Life Stories Project, there is a flood of memories going back to the concept of the endeavor. The awareness was there that the project would lead to golden treasures. But I never imagined the treasures would overflow the storehouse. With every Story Teller, every Story Keeper, every visionary, every contributor, every reader, the influence and impact of the project has multiplied in riches. The growth continues to spill onward. As its outreach progresses, "boundaries" will continue to move forward into the lives of countless witnesses.

Very few of us are "Native Americans." People from around the world, who came seeking freedom and a new life for themselves and their families, have built up our country and communities. We are all individuals, the product of both our genetic makeup and our environment. We are indeed a nation of diversity.

Many of us are far removed from our ancestors who left behind the familiar to learn a new language, new customs, new political and social relationships. We take our status as Americans for granted. We sometimes forget to welcome the newcomer. We bypass the opportunity to ask about their origins and their own journey of courage.

But, wouldn't it be sad if we all spoke the same language, ate the same food, and there was no cultural diversity.

This project has left me with a tremendous debt of gratitude for so many. The almost overwhelming task the Story Keeper has, and the many hours of work and frustration to bring forth a story to be printed. I salute you.

To the Story Tellers, thank you for letting us share in your heart and soul. It is my prayer that some or many of the stories will influence many young persons to another level, to be enmeshed in the pursuit of learning of other cultures that make up our community and the world.

This has, indeed, been a project of "Many" for the Community. Thanks to the following who have played a role in helping to achieve the goal. The list is practically endless, first names only. You know who you are and what you did . . . sincere thanks to each of you:

Caroline, Charity, Charlotte, Bob, Dana, De Ann, Ed, Eric, Erman, Jim, Joha Oke, John K, John M, June, Kay, Kendall, Maria, Mark, Michelle, Myra, Norma, Pat, Rachel, Rob, Starr, Susan, Valerie, and special recognition to Jim Coombs, SMSU, Map Department.

Jim Mauldin  
Coordinator  
Ethnic Life Stories  
'01 '02 '03

**The Ethnic Life Stories Project....**

*...giving the Springfield community a window to its diversity through the life stories of ethnic elders.*

Liewe Se Storie Afrikaanse	Afrikaanse (2)
ÖSÖ GAY HÄY WÖ TAN	Apache
قصص من الحياة	Arabic (2)
Ga-no-du Ka-ne-he-lv-s-gi	Cherokee
自傳	Chinese (2)
Life Stories	English (5)
Histoires De Ma Vie	French (2)
Lebensgeschichten	German
סיפור חיים	Hebrew
Mayer rah-Khaan Knee-Hindi	Hindi
生きてきた道	Japanese
나의 살아온 이야기	Korean
DZĪVES STĀSTS	Latvian
ജീവിത കഥകൾ	Malayalam
OPOWIESC z ŻYCIA	Polish
Imanawangtanan Wawanaycasjas	Quechua
Povestea Vie Ţii Mele	Romanian
Жизненные истории	Russian
Historia De La Vida	Spanish (8)
പ്രവാസി ജീവിതം	Thai
Kuwento Ng Aking Buhay	Tagalog
CHUY-N [©  Tj	Vietnamese
געשיחטע פון מאיין לעבען	Yiddish

# Birthplaces of the Storytellers

2001 2002 2003

Yohannan Abraham  
Pathanamthitta, Kerala, India

Janet Akaike - Toste  
Kofu, Japan

Tony Albuquerque  
Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Martha Baker  
San Antonio, Texas

Grace Ballenger  
Shanghai, China

Ruth L.V. Burgess  
Poona (Pune), India

Sara Fajardo Calderon  
Guatemala City, Guatemala

Olga Codutti  
Rosario, Santa Fe, Argentina

Claudine Arend Cox  
Boulay, France

Adalyn Cravens  
Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

Taj Farouki  
Wadi-Hunayn, Palestine

Malca Flasterstein  
Holon, Israel

Edgar Galinanes  
Mayaguez, Puerto Rico

Reynaldo Gumucio  
Cochabamba, Bolivia

John Hernandez  
San Antonio, Texas

Yung Hwang  
Okjong, Kyungnam, Korea

Madge (Jackie) King  
London, England

Edward P. Ksara  
Tangier, Morocco

Hyman Lotven  
Kapulah, Russia

Regina Lotven  
Nancy, France

Sterling Macer  
Mason City, Iowa

Gwendolyn Marshall  
Jackson, Mississippi

Maria Michalczyk-Lillich  
Sandomierz, Poland

Edith F.L. Middleton  
Glasgow, Scotland

Loan Vu Nigh  
Thai Binh, Vietnam

Jorge Padron  
Pedro Betancourt-Matanza, Cuba

Ruth Penaherrera-Norton  
Archidona, Ecuador

Eric Pervunkhin  
Moscow, Russia

Ioana Popescu  
Bucharest, Romania

Josefina S. Raborar  
Manila, Philippines

Juan Salazar  
Tuman, Peru

Eligio Sanchez  
Mexico City, Mexico

Tong Trithara  
Audhaya, Thailand

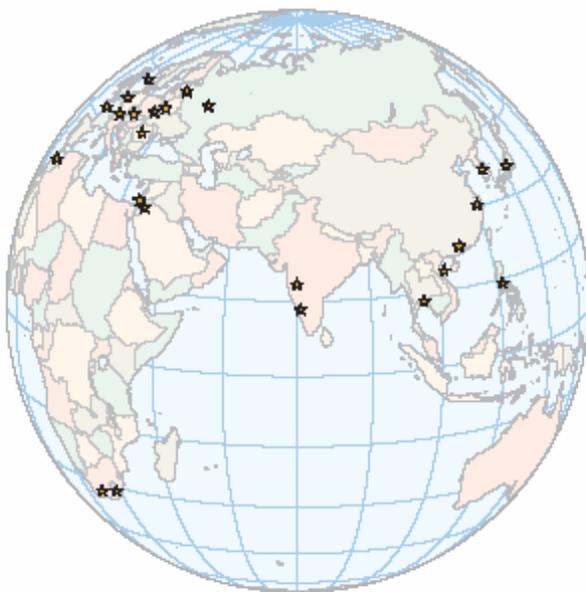
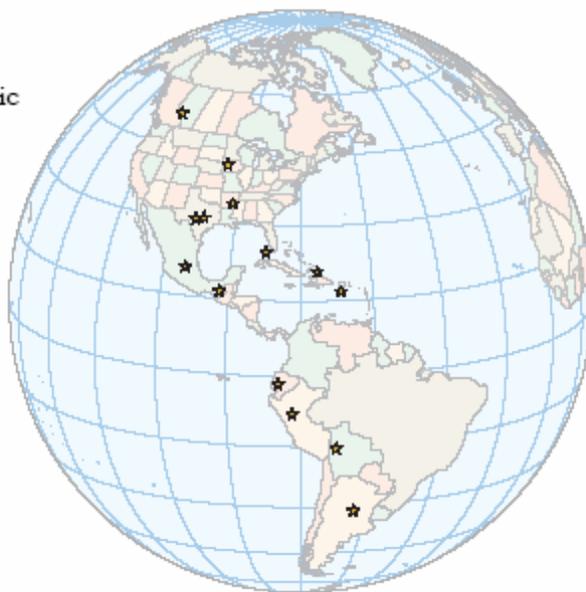
Cyril Vermooten  
Beaufort West, South Africa

Joy Vermooten  
Nqaberie (Natal), South Africa

Ilga Vise  
Riga, Latvia

Hiltrud M. Webber  
Domnau, Germany

Tobby Yen  
Chung (Zhongshan), China



Sara Fajardo Calderon  
Zapaca, Guatemala



## DEDICATION

- To: God for giving me many blessings, for guiding me in the right path, and for giving me his immense love.
- To: My mother, Candida de Fajardo, for instilling in me and my brothers love and respect for our fellow men always.
- To: My father, Jose Fajardo Morales, for giving me and my brothers a home filled with virtues, dignity and moral values, and for setting a good example so that we can become good human beings like he is.
- To: My husband, Roger Calderon, for being my life complement and supporting me as a friend and husband.
- To: My daughters, Jennifer and Michelle, for being my source of inspiration and the impelling source of my efforts.
- To: Mr. Jim Mauldin, for helping me and my family to share our culture with all of you.
- To: Professor Ruth Peñaherrera-Norton, my story keeper, for her time and dedication in translating, typing, and completing my story.

## CHAPTER 1: FAMILY HISTORY

My full name is Sara Lucrecia Fajardo Calderon. My name has not been Americanized, I have kept it the same as it was before. The custom in Guatemala required that a married woman use the preposition *de* and the surname of her husband. However, I use only Sara Fajardo unless I need to use the complete name. My parents called me Lucky for Lucrecia. The name Sara is a biblical name. It means Princess, in Cycle 16, and Sara was the wife of Abraham. Lucrecia means Light in Latin, in Cycle 4, and it is the name of Santa Lucia who was a virgin.

My parents were very religious. They are Roman Catholic. My mother had an aunt who passed away when she was very little. Her name was Sara Leticia, and my mother decided to name me Sara after her.



*Family*

I was born on November 28, 1963. I lived in Guatemala until 1987 when I came to this country. I was born in the hospital. In Guatemala when a baby is born, the expectant mother's family is very happy. My grandparents and my father were in the hospital with my mother. I am the second child in the family. There were no unusual circumstances surrounding my birth. But something interesting happened to my mother. When they

brought me to her bed, she did not know what side of the bed they had put me on and when she was looking for me, she fell off the bed.

I was born in Zapaca, a small town in Guatemala. There were about twenty-five thousand people in town. I lived about twenty-five minutes from Zapaca in a town called Tecelutan, Zacapa. In Zacapa there were five hospitals, an army headquarters, two orphanages, two or three nursing homes, banks and schools. There were four or five Roman Catholic churches. Most of the people are Roman Catholic.

### *My homeland*

The climate in Guatemala is moderate. The Eastern region is hot; coffee grows there. In the South, there is cotton, cacao, and cardamon. Also there are some oil fields, and many banana plantations. Guatemala is the name of the country and Guatemala City is its capital. Guatemala City. The country covers an area of 42,042 square miles. The highest elevation is Volcan Tajumulco 13,845 feet and the lowest point is sea level. Rio Michatoya and Rio de los Esclavos are two important rivers in Guatemala. Lago Amatitlan is a big and interesting lake. The monetary unit is the Quetzal.

My native language is Spanish. Spanish is only one of the twenty-four languages spoken in Guatemala. There are twenty-one Mayan languages such as the **Maya, Q'epchi**, and **Cucuman; Castilian**, a European language; **Xinka**, Mexican, and **Garifuna**, an Afroamerican language. Spanish is the official language of Guatemala.

There are many Indigenous groups. They all have their unique typical clothes which are very expensive. They cost about 200 or 200 **quetzales**. The typical clothes are handmade and woven in their own traditional looms. They have elaborate designs such as flowers and birds. The weavers are very creative and do not use any pictures for their designs. They have their unique designs in their heads and the designs have been passed down from one generation to the next.

In Guatemala there are about five thousand or six thousand people who graduate with different degrees such as: teaching, medicine, nursing, accounting, and other. The problem in Guatemala City is that there are no jobs. About 95% of the people in Guatemala go to school for at least 14 or 18 years depending on their economic situation. There is no specific age to quit school.

There are different social classes in Guatemala. The word **ladino** is a term used for a person whose ethnic background is European and Indigenous. This term is widely used in Central America. I am proud of Rigoberta Menchu. She has worked for the Indigenous people.

Some of the sounds I remember when I was growing up in Guatemala are the chirping of birds, and the sound of frogs. The smells I remember are associated with mangoes, coconut, **maranon**, and other fruit. We always had fresh fruit at home. My father would get up early and pick some fruit for us. One special fruit is the **maranon**. We used it to

make a “**refresco**.” This fruit is yellow, orange, or red. The seed is edible. I liked the “**alcatraz**” flower. My mother would pick this flower because my grandmother liked it. I also liked “**girasol**”, “**tulipanes**” and “**lluvia**,” a white flower.

### *My parents and brothers*

My father’s name is Juan Jose Fajardo Morales. He was born in Progreso, Gustatoya, Guatemala on September 17, 1936. He was the second child in his family. He went to school until he was 14 years old. He did not finish school because his father died and he needed to help his mother. When he was 19 years old he started working as a mechanic; then he learned to drive a trailer and did this for forty-five years in Central America. He transported gas and crude oil from one refinery to another one. He did this for 20 years. Then he started working for a construction company. There he would transport all kinds of materials to different places in the capital. Finally, he helped build different sport parks in Guatemala. Now he is working at home.

### *Father*

My father was probably twenty-five years old when I was born. My mother’s name is Candida Susana Escobar de Fajardo. She was born on August 11, 1948, in Rio Hondo, Zacapa, Guatemala. She did not like to use **de Fajardo**, except when she had to. She used to say: “When I need it, I use it.” My mother would work at home and at the small business my parents had. They sold appliances and furniture. They did have a store where they got the orders and delivered the merchandise. They did this for thirty years and still continue working under the name of “Comercial Los Traviesos.”



### *Mother*

I think my mother was 18 or 19 years old when she married my father. In Guatemala, it was common for a 13 or 14 year-old girl to quit school and get married. My mother says that this has changed and girls have better opportunities and do not have to get married at an earlier age. There is a five or six-year difference in ages between my mother and father. My father is from Progreso, Guastatoya, and my mother is from Rio Hondo, Zacapa. My father said that he used to live in Progreso and when his grandfather died they moved to Teculután. My mother was born in Rio Hondo and because of business reasons her family moved to the same town. They met in Teculután, Zacapa. How exactly they met, I do



not know, but I think that because of business relationships both families met. On my mother's side, my grandparents had a restaurant and a bakery for more than forty-five years. My father's mother was one of their customers. So I think that is how they met.

My dad is very friendly, affectionate but very strict. He always told me that above all we needed to listen and analyze in order to be able to respond. He always taught us to respect our elders. My mother is not as affectionate as my dad. She is more strict. But she tries to understand us and sees things from our point of view but not very often. She was taught to pay attention to what she did. She does not allow us to make errors. My dad tries to understand us and supports us with small problems. But



*Walter & Children 2001*

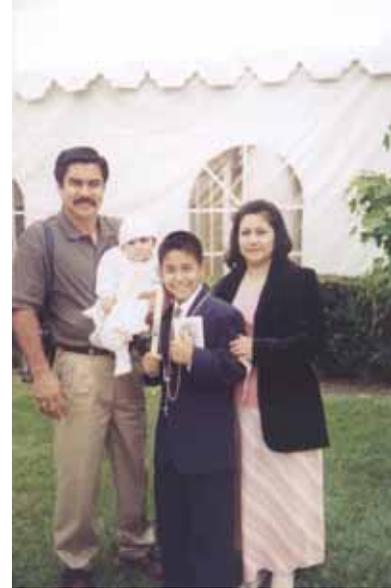
with serious problems, both are very strict. Both are very special, they are very attentive, open and unselfish.

Unfortunately I did not celebrate the “**quinceañera**,” My parents planned the party but I had hepatitis a month prior to my birthday and I had to spend my birthday at the hospital. My parents were very loving and caring, they took a lot of time off work to come to the hospital to be with me. I still communicate with my parents every week or every

two weeks. We talk by phone and they come to visit us for a month whenever they can. I have three brothers. As the only girl in the family, I had some special treatment. My older brother is Jose Rodolfo, I am the second one. The third child is Walter Amilkar and William Geovanni is the fourth one. Jose Rodolfo got married in California and now he lives in Springfield, MO. Walter Amilkar is in Lancaster, Pennsylvania with his wife and children, and William Geovanni lives in Guatemala.

Jose Rodolfo is an expert in auto mechanics. He has a degree in auto mechanic engineering. He graduated from George Kerschengeitner Aleman in Mazatenango, Guatemala. Walter Amilkar is an accountant and he also has a degree in auto mechanics. William Giovanni is an engineer in agronomy.

When I was growing up there were only my parents and brothers living in my home. I



*Fajardo Family*



*Ohio – June of 2000.*

identify more with my father and my aunt, my mother's sister. My father's characteristics I most admired were his love for life and his desire to work. He always wanted to start something new and he was always very positive, not negative. As far as my aunt's characteristics I can see in myself are the following: to be a very communicative person, to be open with people, to listen and analyze. Sometimes out of respect for or fear of my mother, I used to be quiet. But with my aunt, I could share my thoughts. Whatever my thoughts were, good or bad, she was ready to talk with me about them. My aunt is still living. She lives in Guatemala.

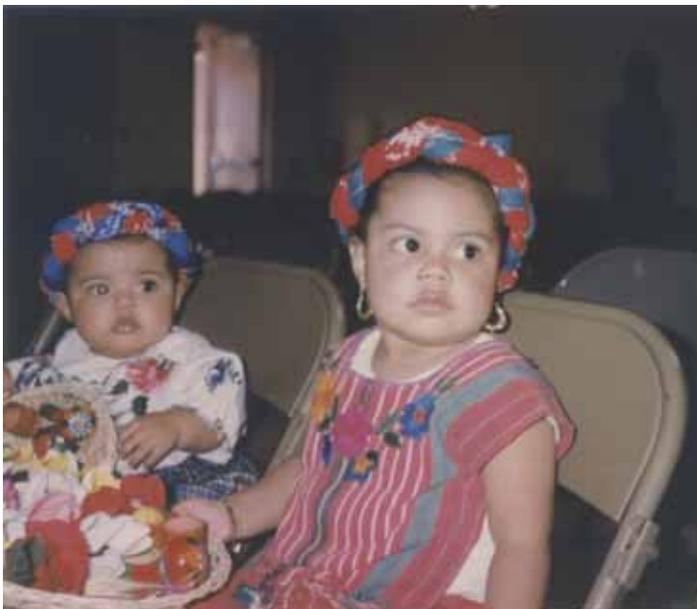
My family moved about four or five times when I was a child. From the town I was born in to the capital, and from the capital to the town. Therefore, about the period of my life when I was 6 to 8 years-old, I do not remember much. But, according to my brother, our first house in the capital when we were very young was located in Zone 12. It was located about 20 minutes from the Roosevelt Hospital in the center of the capital.



*Jennifer Nicole, 5 months old.*



*Michelle & Jennifer  
1994.*



*Jennifer, 1 year old & Michelle, 2 years old.*



*Jennifer, 5 years old.*



*Michelle, 1<sup>st</sup> grade.*



*Jennifer, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, 2002.*



*Michelle, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, 2002.*



*Angelica & Walter, (Niece & Nephew).*



*Angelica, 1 ½ years old.*



*Walter, 2 ½ years old.*



*Edwin, 2 ½ years old.*



*J Harrison, 2 ½ years old.*



*Michelle*

## CHAPTER 2: EARLIEST MEMORIES AND CHILDHOOD

### *My nickname and my typical day*

When I was little, I had a nickname: **Negrita**. My dad gave me that nickname because of my skin color. When I was 5 years old, we all had to get up and make our beds. If we did not make our beds, we did not get any breakfast. We all had to be at the table at a certain hour for breakfast. If we were late, my mother did not give us any breakfast. After breakfast, and when my father was home, he used to take my brothers to the backyard to plant, to paint, to teach them the chores men do. I stayed in the house with my mother and the woman who helped us around the house. I usually went to the store. My mother always had a small convenience store. I used to help her weigh sugar and salt, clean bottles, seal bags of sugar, help hang strips of candy, and wait on customers. That's what we all did all the time.

I had several other responsibilities when I was growing up. I had to wash my own clothes. They taught me how to iron, how to clean my shoes, and how to keep everything in order. There was a place for everything. Our free time was from 2:00 p. m. to 4:00 p. m. My brothers and I would spend this time tidying up our rooms or playing. I learned to play boys games because I did not have a sister with whom to play. I played yo-yo, spinning top, cards, domino, chess, horses, making cars, pushing tires with a stick, and swinging.

When I was 9 to 15 years old, my mother made me responsible for my own personal care, my clothes, and my room. I got up early and started the school at 7:00 a. m. Therefore I had to get up at 6:00 a. m. Before going to school and after school I had to sweep the whole house, mop the floors and cook. My mother had to open her store. There was a woman who helped us around the house. Her name was Nana Olivia. She helped my mother raise us. She was never treated as a servant. We always respected her, She was supposed to do the cleaning but actually my brothers and I ended up doing it because my mother thought that we needed to learn to do things right. She used to tell Nana Olivia that if we misbehaved we would be punished. That is how we learned to do things around the house. Nana Olivia is still alive; she is probably 65 years old and lives in the same town.

### *My homes*

The first house I remember is the house in the capital. My mother bought the house in the capital. It is still standing up. It had five bedrooms, there was a garden and a small room that my mother used as a store. In the garden there was an avocado tree, and a peach tree. When I was five years old, I liked picking fruit. My mother loved the paint of the house which was turquoise and beige. The backyard was fenced. There was a big tree from which we hung the swings. My favorite room was the living room. My mother always kept it nice with lots of fresh flowers. We also had lots of books. Even though my parents did not finish school, they recognized our need for having books.

My mother told me that television arrived in Guatemala around 1955. Since not everyone had power, people had to use car batteries. A group of Germans who lived in a town about 10 miles from our town started using TV. The programs I watched were **Los Chavos del Ocho**, **Tom and Jerry**, **Topolliyo** (a little mouse). We did not watch a lot of cartoons because we did not have time to watch them.

Some of the rules my father enforced were: respect for everyone, to listen, and to avoid doing bad things. I always had my own bedroom. My brothers did have to share a bedroom. In my bedroom I had a desk, an armoire, a bed, and lots of posters on the wall. My mother would paint the house every six months and would get annoyed because the posters had to be taken off the wall. This was when **Los Chicos**, **Los Chamos** and **Menudo** were popular. **Los Chicos** are from Puerto Rico, **Los Chamos** from Venezuela, and **Menudo** from Puerto Rico. They sang ballads. Ricky Martin became famous. They also played salsa and meringue. Camilo Cesto was a singer I liked, too. I did not go to dances. My parents were very strict. When we were 16 year old, they had a strict curfew.

We had a dog and a rabbit. Someone also gave my dad five rabbits and some pigeons. After a few months the rabbits reproduced so much and the pigeons did, too. He had to give them away. The reason why they reproduced so much was because my brothers and I fed them all the time. We gave them all the vegetables that otherwise would be put in the trash.

#### *School and teachers*

We were always accompanied to school. Either my mom or someone else she would select for this responsibility would walk with us to school. When my dad was home he would take us to school. We did not have to take the bus because school was close to our home. I had a favorite teacher, her name was Edna Noemi. She was my first teacher. She was very affectionate and paid special attention to me when she found out that my dad came from the same town as she. There was a teacher I did not like. He gave me and my brothers a lot of problems. He was very hard with us. Instead of helping us he would say to my mother that we did not understand and that we did not study. He was the natural science teacher in **basico**. Education is divided into three main levels: **jardin de infants** (Kinderganten), **primario** (first to sixth grade), **basico** (Junior High), and **diversificado** (High School). When we reached the **diversificado**, we selected a career of three or four years of study. Then we went to university for four or six years.

I did not play any instruments. I liked the guitar but at school I had to play either the drums or the flute. I lost interest in playing an instrument.

#### *Celebrations*

We celebrated Christmas, New Years, Epiphany, The day of Candelaria Virgen, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Independence Day. Another holiday is Holy Week. I remember when I was about 8 years old they had religious processions in the town during Holy

Week. Nowadays, people go to a resort. On November 1, and 2<sup>nd</sup> we celebrated **Dia de Difuntos**.

Our Christmas started several days before Christmas Eve. We had the posadas at my grandmother's home. There were about sixty people. The two children my grandmother had and their own children. Then we would get together again for Holy Week. Officially, in Guatemala we would have a whole week for this holiday.

I used to get clothes, toys, and shoes as Christmas presents. My mother loved specially the presents my grandmother made. A traditional birthday was celebrated with lots of fireworks early in the morning at 3:00 a. m. **Las mañanitas** is a traditional song everyone sang. Mother prepared hot chocolate and served a small cake. Then everyone went to school or work. If the birthday was on a week day, we waited until the weekend to have a luncheon or a special dinner with friends. **Las mañanitas** goes like this:

Estas son las mañanitas que cantaba el Rey David...  
Despierta mi bien despierta, mira que ya amanecio,  
Los pajarillos cantan la luna ya se metio...

I do not know where this song originated but it is popular in Guatemala and Mexico. Traditional weddings in Guatemala begin with the engagement. Parents are involved in the preparations. Invitations are sent. There is the bridal shower. I remember bridal showers as being nice and proper. Grandmothers and mothers participated in bridal showers. Another custom is the mother's blessing. The bride is blessed by her mother before she enters the church. The groom also has his own bachelor's party and also receives his parents blessing. In Guatemala, the word **casado** means the house of two, literally. It means that the young couple is committed to live as a couple. Both husband and wife are committed to treat each other with respect. Abuse towards the husband or the wife is not desired.

The traditional color for wedding gowns is white. Brides also wear a white veil and carry the bridal bouquet. There are only one or two bridesmaids. The groom's parents are responsible for all of the expenses, including the bridal gown, flowers, etc. The bride's family is responsible for the reception. The flower girl and the ring bearer complete the wedding party. **El lazo**, the bow, is made of satin or silk. It is placed around the groom and the bride and it is a symbol of the unity between both of them.

Funerals vary according to the financial situation of families. If the family does not have much money, their friends contribute with flowers, tamales, coffee, white sheets, and fabric. When someone dies, there is the wake and the interment. The wake lasts all night long. One day after the interment, they have the **novelaria**. This is a series of nine prayers for nine consecutive days. Twenty-six days later, they have a special mass. Another special family tradition is the special way of preparing meals. My grandmother taught some special recipes to my aunts. They are: pollo relleno, lengua fngida, pato en naranja, and tamales. **Lengua fngida** is beef tongue. It is boiled, dipped in egg and fried. It is served with rice and tomatoes. The **tamales** are a tradition in Guatemala.

They are different from the Mexican tamales. They are prepared in banana leaves. The dough is white mixed with a red sauce of tomatoes and spices. The filling is chicken or pork. My grandmother always added some olives, capers, and sweet chili. A very special dessert I liked a lot when I was growing up was “**leche cuajada**” that was prepared by my maternal grandfather. It is actually the first step in making cheese and it is served cold with sugar.

#### *National holiday*

Independence Day is celebrated from December 13 on. People from surrounding towns congregate in the central park of Guatemala City. In the middle of the park there is a lighted torch. Runners light their own torch and run the marathon back to their own towns. Their goal is to run for one or two hours and reach their town before midnight on December 15. There are also parades. Kindergarten and elementary school children parade in the morning. Secondary school children parade in the afternoon. There are dances and several school competitions. On the last day, there is a firework display and everyone celebrates Independence Day.

Guatemala was founded by Pedro de Alvarado in 1524. This city is known as Ciudad Vieja or Antigua and was the capital of the country until 1776 when a new capital was built a few miles to the east. There are three government branches: legislative, judicial and executive. The president is elected by the people and serves for a period of four years. Guatemala has a tumultuous history with revolutions and dictatorships. There has been some violence in Guatemala. We were living in the eastern region of the country. In that area there was no violence. The southern area has been affected by violence and especially the indigenous people have suffered a lot.

My grandmother used to tell me about some special people who lived in the mountains. They were good people but when the population in town grew, they started disappearing. These people carried their babies on their back and did not use the money we used. They used **bambas** which were made of ceramic.

#### *Sad and frightening*

One of the unhappy experiences I recall is when we were in the capital and I was seven or seven years old. I remember my grandmother's home. In the lower floor there was the bakery and in the upper floor there was the dining room. In the backyard there was a creek where we used to go wading. My mother's youngest sister who was about twelve years older than us, used to take care of us. One day while we were playing, this aunt caught a small frog and put it on my back. I got scared and started screaming. They took the frog off my back but since then I see a frog jumping and I start jumping too. Another bad experience was when I contracted hepatitis. I was eleven years old. My mother was working, I was alone and when I was getting sick I went to the bathroom and I saw a snake. I screamed and my mother came. It was a small snake but it scared me a lot.

### *Best friends*

I have three best friends. One is my friend since elementary school, her name is Graciela. Other friends are Julia and my sister-in-law Blanca Gomez who grew up in the capital. She married my brother. I still see these friends and have a good time with them.

### *Giving a present*

I remember a very special present I gave my mother. It was a card I made myself. I learned to write at an early age. The cards we learned to make at the public school I attended were made of white paper and little flowers made of the pencil shavings that were saved specially for this purpose. Orange rind was also used for this purpose.

### CHAPTER 3: THE TEEN YEARS

Schools are private or public in Guatemala. I attended public school. The first school I attended was in Villanueva and I attended that school for 3 years. I did 6<sup>th</sup> grade in the Escuela Nacional, and then I attended the National Institute IMBA where I did the first, second and third of basico. On my second year at the basico, I took a health class and completed the program to become a **promotora de salud**. After this program I started another program to become an executive secretary. This took three years. Then I applied to the school of medicine without success. They required an average of 90% and higher and I got an 85%. Therefore I entered the school of nursing. Only 25 girls were accepted. I graduated from nursing school. It was at this point in my life that I decided to leave Guatemala and did not continue studying.

I was not allowed to go out with boys or have a boyfriend. My parents always thought that school came first. However, I met a very special person at that time. His name is Roger Calderon and he is my present husband. He is seven years older than I. I did not do much for entertainment when I was growing up.

When I became 12 years old, it was my responsibility to help my mother in the store. On Saturdays, I had another responsibility. I had to do the laundry and the ironing. My mother believed that one had to learn to do everything and that I had to learn to do those chores well so that I would become a good person in the future. A woman must learn to do things well so that she can delegate responsibilities to other people in the future. I had very few friends. They were actually some acquaintances who lived in our neighborhood. Most of them were my classmates. But we interacted only at school. We could not get together outside of school because my parents would not allow us to go out. Not because they wanted to keep us at home, but because we always had something to do.

When I was a teenager I had a classmate, Graciela Margarita. She grew up in the same environment as I. Julissa Aldana was another classmate. Her parents had the same type of business as my parents. Sometimes, my parents would allow us to get together once a month either at my home or hers, but not always. I still keep in touch with Graciela. She lives in Guatemala and works in a bank.

I enjoyed classes when I was attending school. I was very open and communicative with everyone. I had the ability to adapt to other people and they adapted themselves to me. After graduation, there were some class reunions but I did not attend any of them because my family and I moved to the capital. We returned to my hometown about once or twice every month. My brothers and I were attending school in the capital and if we had a lot of assignments to work on, my parents would not allow us to go to our hometown. The reason was because the school we attended required that we achieve at the 90% and above. If we did not meet this standard, we had to find another school. So we tried to do our best always.

When I was a teenager, my parents gave me some money for the work I did around the house. This money was used for household expenses and school supplies when my

brothers and I were in the capital. And if the money did not cover all of the expenses, we had a lot of explaining to do to our parents. My younger brother was very thrifty, he was always saving his money. So my older brother and I would say: "William, let me borrow some money for the bus ride." He would reply: "But mom gave us enough money." If I did not borrow money from him, my other brother would. We grew up managing our own money and our expenses. We cooked our own meals and prepared our uniforms. My mother was always working. So was my father. We would see our father once every two weeks. Sometimes we went to the institute and my father also had to go to the oil refinery in Amatitlan, Guatemala.

Transportation was by car, except in a few occasions when I would just walk. When my brothers and I were living in the capital, we used mainly the bus. I did not use a car if either my father or my older brother or a special person paid by my mother did not accompany me. We did not have a lot of independence.

My favorite books are those related to science and medicine. I listened to the radio but I was more interested in special programs related to the work of medical organizations. These organizations set up some community work and every time I had a chance I participated in community work. My mother always said that I should take advantage of every opportunity to help people. She allowed me to participate in these activities.

I enjoyed watching TV programs such as: **Topolliyo y El Pajaro Loco**, **El Chavo del 8**, and **Tom and Jerry** because they had clean language. I always liked **Chayane** and Ricky Martin who were popular then.

My parents were instrumental in helping me to become who I am now. They were always my best friends. They always advised my brothers and me and taught us how to achieve and improve.

When I finished the "**tercero basico**" that is, the end of the equivalent of Junior High, I had the opportunity to take on some more new responsibilities. Although my brothers and I lived independently from our parents, we behaved as responsible individuals and succeeded in our studies. Other classmates of mine did not do as well.

## CHAPTER 4: ADULTHOOD

When I finished High School, I wanted to become a doctor. As an adult in 1996 I studied cosmetology for a year and a half. Since then, I have not studied anymore because I have to take care of my daughters. One of my dreams is to return to my country and with the Lord's help I would like to go back to school. As a mother I must educate my daughters first. I must comply with my maternal responsibilities first. I know there are women who have been able to be mothers and also have a career. I do not feel comfortable leaving my daughters with babysitters. My daughters go to school but when they are at school I work.

My financial situation is that of a middle class individual. I have always had the basic things necessary to have a good life. After I graduated from High School as a secretary, I studied for two years in Nursing School. Perhaps I will complete my studies. I feel that nursing is my vocation.

I left my parent's home in August 1986 when I came to the United States. I went to Santa Ana, California in Orange County. I lived at my brother's home. He had come to the States a year earlier. I had no plans to come to the States. It was out of curiosity that I decided to come and see this place. I was studying and working in Guatemala. I had a job at Laboratorio Unipharm in villa Nueva, Guatemala which was ten minutes from my home. I did not come looking for a better life, but because I wanted to see the country. Once I got here, I liked what I saw and adapted to the way of life in California. Since my brother and I were independent, it was easier for us to make the transition.

My brother did not want me to work. He wanted me to continue studying at Rancho Santiago. I attended that school for one week. I did not like it because they had gangs and students gave some problems. One time they let the air out of my tires. Sometimes when I was ready to sit at my desk, they pulled the desk away. There was some discrimination because the teachers would give us some assignment to work in class and they would get annoyed when I finished before the rest of the class. Teachers would also make fun of me. They did not think it was possible for me to do the assignments because I did not speak perfect English.

In Guatemala, for the past fifteen years, English has been a required subject in schools. Five years before I graduated, I had to take English. I do not speak English perfectly, but I tried to read and write in English, and when I came to Santa Ana, I did not really have a good opportunity to improve my English. About 90% of the student population was Hispanic, Japanese or Chinese. Most Asians were interested in learning Spanish because they thought that by learning Spanish they could have a better chance to learn English. That was a mistake, we all conformed to speaking Spanish because the majority of the student population understood it.

Most of my friends in Santa Ana were Latin Americans. I had an Arabic friend who was important to me. His name is Ramzy. He helped me a lot. He and his mother lived in the house behind ours. They owned several stores. They spoke some Spanish and were

wonderful. Ramzy and his mother gave me some good advice when I needed it. He was like a brother to me and tried to motivate me in my studies.

I met my first husband through a friend of mine. She and I were working at Maruchan Soup, in Santa Ana, California. We used to go dancing with another friend from Guatemala who was my brother-in-law's wife. So that is how I met my first husband. After dating for eight months, we decided to get married. A year and a half later we got a divorce. Unfortunately, we *were not compatible*.



*With daughters and husband, Roger Calderon.*

I never stopped loving the first boyfriend I had in Guatemala. Because of several circumstances, he went his way and I went my way. Now I realize that marrying a man you are not in love with is a mistake. I regret that this first marriage did not work, but at the same time I thank the Lord because I have two daughters, Jennifer and Michelle. After I divorced my husband, I lived with my daughters in an apartment and in summer I went back to Guatemala to visit my parents. In one of those trips, I run into Roger Calderon. Our friendship was renewed. He came to Chicago and then after two years he went to Pennsylvania and lived in my brother's home. Roger was always a good friend of my brothers. He asked me to marry him. I told him that I wanted to wait until my daughters were at least 6 years old. So we eventually we got married and have been husband and wife for six years. I cannot complain because my daughters and he have adapted very well. He does not smoke nor drink.

Our wedding day was fine. We went to the courthouse. I did not want a reception. Our witnesses did not arrive because they went to a different place. While we were waiting for the witnesses to arrive, the justice of the peace was annoyed and finally told us that if

we were going to get married we should do it then. My husband put the ring on my wrong finger. When the ceremony was over, we left the building and saw Juan Salazar and his wife outside and told us that they had gone to the wrong place. We told them that we were already married. This was in Springfield, MO in a weekday. That weekend we had a special ceremony at the Centro Familiar Cristiano.

My husband is a very open minded person, a positive person. He is a good worker. He works in construction. My daughter Michelle is very active and intelligent. She has a hearing problem that started when she was seven months old. She has to wear a hearing aid until her eighteenth birthday. We hope her hearing will improve. Jennifer is the second one. She was a preemie. She spent about three months in the hospital. It was a difficult time for all of us but she is very intelligent and fast. Both daughters go to Bingham School. Michelle is behind because of the operations she had.

An unplanned event in my life was the health problems with my daughters. But I find it as a positive thing in my life because it gave me a better understanding of medicine. My grandparents were 100% Roman Catholic. I did not read the Bible a lot. I do not know why. We always based our understanding in what the priest preached on Sunday.

Now we attend the Christian Church and have a better understanding of our religion. I adapt myself to my parent's religious ideas but I feel that I have a better understanding. When I was sick with hepatitis, I had a dream. I saw a tunnel with a bright light at the end. I saw several doors with names of different people. I walked, and walked. I interpreted this dream as being my life and the doors as being the answers to different problems.

I came to Springfield looking for a new opportunity for my husband and my daughters. I wanted to start a new life. My husband came to Springfield before I came. He was already here for one year. When I told him I would marry him I moved here. I stayed with his family for a few days. We rented an apartment for eight months. It was a cold winter, my daughter got very sick, and his relatives in Houston told us to go there because the weather was warmer in Houston. We were there for two-and-a half years. I worked as a cashier at Food to Wn. My daughters went to school and did well. We went to Guatemala for six months and then moved to Springfield.

I have had several jobs in offices, in hotels, and in stores. I was also a baby-sitter, a machine operator, a soldier. Here in Springfield I worked in Burger King and McDonald's, and in Marigold Hotel as a housekeeper. I worked seven days a week. Now I work for a business that makes fabric sample books.

I like my present job because there is room for some creativity. The sample books are interesting but the salary is low. However, the work is not too hard. The sample books show all kinds of material. Each sample book carries about eighty different samples. It is a good job because people are nice and they give me time to take my daughters to the doctor if I need to.

## CHAPTER 5: LIFE MISSION

My mission in life is to be a good mother and perhaps become a doctor. I think that I have accomplished my mission about 50%. Obviously, my mission has changed thought different times in my life especially in this country. I know that my daughters with good education will be able to succeed. I would like to send them to Guatemala to stay with my parents. They could spend their vacation with them and I hope they will be able to appreciate things. Here it is easy to acquire material things, but they are not everything.

The lowest points in my life were when I got married without being sure about my decision and the medical problems of my daughters. I did not feel competent to help them. My mother told me that I had them when I was too young. The highest point in my life was to maintain a stable family. I am not talking about material things. I want a home with love and understanding. I want us to feel united. It is important to have communication and respect for each other. Something that will fulfill me is seeing that I have succeeded as a mother. This is what keeps me going. As I look back, my brother Jose Rodolfo has been influential in my life. He is always ready to support my ideas and makes time for me. He helps me feel confident.

## CHAPTER 6: LATER DAYS

If I could project to the future, I can see myself as an older person who returns to Guatemala. I would like to start a business in my own country. Here I do not have a lot of responsibility related to my church. I will see what the Lord has for me. I am always ready to help and share any information people may need. I do not have any connections with other Guatemalan people here in Springfield. I have met some Hispanics in Carthage, Missouri. I enjoyed interacting with them.

For me and my daughters the day begins at 6:00 a. m. My husband wakes up at 4:00 a. m. He gets his lunch and leaves for work. I get up and have breakfast with my daughters. At the end of the day, I pick up my daughter and bring them home. On weekends my daughters help me with the chores. Everyday I help them with homework. I am not very good in math, so my husband helps them with math. We always tidy up our home. On Saturdays we clean house, have breakfast and then we may go shopping or driving to another town to learn more about the culture. We have gone to Monett, Nixa, Branson, Carthage, Joplin, Arkansas, and Kansas City.

What I value more in friendships is sincerity, honesty and respect. One thing I would have done differently in my life if I had some money, is to help orphanages and single mothers. Single mothers need a lot of love and support. One thing I regret is my first marriage, but at the same time because of my first marriage I have my two daughters. If I could wish something for future generations, I would wish them to continue in school. I would like for them to always seek help to achieve what they want.

## CHAPTER 7: MY SPRINGFIELD EXPERIENCE

When I came to Springfield, Missouri has been a good experience. More than that, it has been a challenge for us. Roger told me that schools were pretty and good here in Springfield. My challenge was to improve my English. I think that 80% of people accept us, however there is a minority that find us very different. My feelings about this is that all of us are human beings. Mrs. And Mrs. Thompson who participate in the Centro Familiar Cristiano are very interested in our culture. I cannot say that people do not accept us. My daughters have no problems at school. The school principals have been very helpful. They have even tried to translate documents to make it easier for me.

I have tried to adapt to this country's ways. I still maintain my own culture. I want to add on to my culture by adapting to what is positive in this culture. We speak Spanish at home because I do not want my daughters to be ashamed of their own culture. In my opinion, parents must transfer what they know to their children. My daughters go to Guatemala often and I expose them to literature, to different indigenous people and anything that is good and valuable in our culture.

I would like to see people in Springfield to give a chance to other people by not judging them according to the way they talk or the way they dress. Even though we have problems with the language we do have many good values. This ought to be a mutual responsibility. Those who live here and those who come from the outside should try to communicate in order to become better people.

Perhaps I can make a suggestion that would help Hispanics. There are many documents and forms that we must use. It would be helpful to have translations of those documents in order to help us understand. We could use a guide that will give us an idea of different places, organizations that we could use. It is true that many people are educated but there are also many who have not gone to school. Many people are afraid to ask for help. They are very interested in working because they are hard workers but are afraid to ask for work. Churches and other places could help.

I personally had a bad experience in one of the stores in town. While my daughters and I were looking at some books, one of my daughters said: "Mom, can we get these." I said that yes, one for each of them. We were talking in Spanish. A person behind us said: "Speaking Spanish here? Spanish is trash." So I told her that talking a different language is not trash or stupid. It is true that we are in a different country. Then she added: "Hurry up, get a job so you will not use our Welfare." I do not speak perfect English but I am learning and trying to improve. Mrs. And Mrs. Thompson, Judy Gonzalez and her son, the Centro Familiar Cristiano, the Mobil Clinic, Gertudiz, and other people have been wonderful to us. Walgreens have tried to have employees who speak Spanish. Many Americans and Hispanics have tried to help us. In my opinion, we all need to help each other.





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