Traditions Of Guatemala 3

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TRADITIONS OF GUATEMALA

3

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CHRONICLES

To the dear memory of my daughter María Grazia Leda Torres Rivas.

Marta Rivas de Torres

REMEMBRANCES OF CHIQUIMULA

Marta Rivas de Torres

Chiquimula is one of the departments in the eastern region of Guatemala. Its capital, bearing the same name, enjoys a warm and dry climate. It is located 420 meters above sea level, surrounded by low mountains. The city is well-designed with straight, cobblestone streets. To the east of the city, about 2 km away, lies the Río Grande, a tributary of the Motagua River. To the south, the Tacó River, located 500 meters from the city center, is connected to the city via a stone bridge leading to the El Molino neighborhood. To the north is the Shusho River, and to the east, there is a small stream with soapy-colored water called El Ángel. Until 1935, the city's water supply was not potable; during the rainy season, it was very dirty. In homes, "filtering stones" were commonly used to purify the water. When we went to school in the early years, or "elementary" as it was called, all the girls carried small clay jars or pitchers for clean and fresh water from our homes. However, if the school's water jar ran out or our pitchers were empty, we were forced to drink from the faucet, even if the water was dirty.

To the east of the city, amidst bushes and brambles, stand the ruins of the "Old Church." The interior is overgrown with weeds, and its spiral staircase, leading to the once-functional bell tower, is dirty, dark, and heavily worn, making it difficult to climb. Despite this, people still make the effort. The ruins are located about a kilometer from the city.

Between 1912 and 1921, houses were single-story structures with tiled roofs, brick floors, and spacious, high-ceilinged rooms. The patios were full of trees and flowers suited to the climate. Lighting was provided by oil lamps until late 1932, when electric lighting was introduced. Inside the houses and on the doors or balconies, lamps were used, and lanterns were hung outside. It was mandatory to light these from dusk until 9 PM, at which time everyone retired for the night. After that hour, the city was completely dark, and venturing into the streets was rare and done only in emergencies.

Historically, during the colonial period and after Guatemala's independence, Chiquimula was a Corregimiento, encompassing what are now the departments of Zacapa, Jutiapa, and Jalapa. The *Corregidor* was a significant figure, holding an esteemed and sought-after position. In 1865, Don Vicente Cerna, a Brigadier and Marshal from the department, served as Corregidor before becoming the President of the Republic. It is said that Cerna was the last honest president of the country; when his government fell to the liberal revolution of 1871, he fled with only 20 silver *reales* in his pocket.

The population consists of mestizos and indigenous people. In the city, indigenous languages are not spoken, but they are still used in some municipalities like Jocotán. The clothing is not traditional like in western Guatemala. Likely due to the heat, indigenous men wear white cotton shirts and pants, with the shirt untucked. In certain villages of San Jacinto and Quezaltepeque, women wear blouses with slightly high collars, tucks on the bodice, and white ruffles, paired with blue skirts instead of traditional wraps. Indigenous people do not usually wear shoes but rather simple sandals, though barefoot individuals are common, even among the extremely poor non-indigenous population.

Foods and Drinks

Chiquimula has earned a well-deserved reputation for its excellent bread. Highlights include rice quesadillas, those made with washed butter, and the "hojita" quesadillas or corn bread, which were carried in baskets between tender jocote leaves. Toasted semitas, filled semitas, and egg yolk bread or "pan de yemas," topped with sesame seeds, were also popular. French bread, both sweet and salty, was made in small

pieces, especially for "molletes." Additionally, there were savory and sugary "totopostes," soft white tortillas, and "memelitas" or "pishtoncitos," which were thick, cheese-filled tortillas. Among the typical dishes, "enchiladas" stood out, consisting of tortillas fried in pork lard and adorned with minced pork, beets, pickled vegetables, onion strips, parsley, and cheese powder. The aspect of these was very eye-catching and were sold during events like circuses, movie nights which were not common since they came from Zacapa for August festivities, cultural soirées, and patron saint festivities. The tamales sold on Thursdays and Saturdays were red and very delicious. There were also sweet corn tamales, chipilín tamales, and others that contained green beans. "Ticucos," made from very dense dough with little fat, were prepared by indigenous women who came down from the "hills" to sell them wrapped neatly. When cut open, these tamales revealed whole black beans and were very common. There were also "cambray tamales," made of rice with a small piece of meat inside. These were very small, ball-shaped, wrapped in corn husks, tied in bunches, and often eaten cold. "Chuchitos," a staple throughout the country, were another favorite. At the central market—the only one at the time—authentic pork cracklings ("chicharrones") were sold very early in the morning. These were wrapped in clean corn husks alongside tender, boiled yuca, also placed in corn husks. Back then, prices were in reales, and with just a few, one could have a good breakfast. I also forgot to mention the fragrant loroco tamalitos, which were sold warm, wrapped in white cloth, just like the tortillas. The black and red chorizos, the slightly spicy sausages (*longanizas*), and the butifarras required no cooking and served as snacks. The black color of the butifarras was perhaps due to the large amount of pepper. These were round in shape, stuffed into casings, and had a long shelf life.To make black bean stew tastier, people added what we now call bacon—thick slices that were improperly referred to as "pellejos" (skin), even though they weren’t just skin but included meat. These slices were cooked with the beans, giving them a rich pork flavor. Adding simple little corn tamales with salt resulted in a thick, very appetizing stew.

It was custom to have breakfast at 6:30 a.m., usually consisting of pork cracklings with yuca, tamales, or fried black beans, accompanied by coffee or milk and good bread. Lunch was served after 11 a.m., followed by an afternoon coffee at around 3 p.m., although this was not widely practiced. Dinner was served between 5:30 and 6 p.m., always including fresh cream (referred to as "mantequilla fresca"), fresh cheese known as "cuajadita," or aged dry cheese.

Popular beverages included pumpkin seed drink, made by drying, toasting, and grinding the seeds, then sweetening them with raw sugar and serving them in clay jars. Another was "tiste," a drink made from finely ground rice flour, sugar, cacao, and annatto, whisked with a wooden frother to create a foamy texture. These two drinks were both refreshing and medicinal. Other beverages included corn atole, fermented atole known as "atol shuco" (sour atole), which was sold in the evening at the market, and "three-boil atole," made from corn processed through three stages and sweetened with raw sugar. This was often served at cofradía festivities in small, clean gourds. Coconut water was another easy-to-find drink, as coconuts were sold everywhere. Each coconut, known as a "coco de agua," provided a full liter of liquid, equivalent to four "horseshoe glasses" named for the horseshoe shape imprinted at the bottom of the glass.

Ice was brought on pack animals from Zacapa before 1920 when automobiles began to appear. With the ice, they made "granizadas," shaved ice scraped with a metal tool. Once served, it was topped with colorful, sugary syrups.

Ponche and molletes were common treats during December festivities. Ponche was made with egg, milk, and a touch of liquor. The milk was boiled with cinnamon, sweetened with sugar, and served hot, frothy, and in large, thick glasses. Temperante, a drink remembered for its delicious flavor, was often made by boiling pineapple with cinnamon and sugar. Since there was no ice, it was served lukewarm in crystal glasses, typically sold in small roadside stalls called chinamas. Chicha, particularly famous from the Menéndez family, was sold in half bottles. It was made from fermented pineapple sweetened with raw sugar (rapadura) and had a strong taste, possibly with additional ingredients. As a very young child, I remember drinking chamaralajú, though I never heard of it again after I turned seven. I tasted it during a May celebration of the Holy Cross Day—not on May 3 but on May 15, which was my birthday. A cross was raised in the yard, decorated with the traditional and essential pacaya palm leaves. After prayers, the drink was shared. It had flavors of pineapple, ginger, allspice, rapadura, and other ingredients I can no longer recall.

Candy

The Menéndez sisters, my dear and kind neighbors, were two very hardworking women: Doña Betzabé, who had a strong character, and "Nía" Laurita, who was sweet and an elderly lady. They made the best sweets, such as nuégados and little candies sold at three for a cuartillo

(a quarter of a real)—this was before World War I. Those candies, once so affordable, eventually disappeared.They also made bocadillo de coco, crafted from ground coconut and rapadura (raw sugar), and coconut conserva, similar but made with sugar. Grapefruit and fig conservas were also popular. Additionally, street vendors carried trays of sweets, including challas, rose-colored toasted sugar that looked like glass; chancaca; pumpkin seeds coated in honey; alfajores, made from dry corn flour like pinol with sugar; melcochas, sold in husks, small pieces, or spiral shapes; sugar candies; and morro candies, prepared with rapadura and flavored with morro seeds, which were good for soothing coughs. Shops sold other sweets like dulce de leche, zapote candy, pineapple candy, and small pastries. Alboroto, a treat from San Jacinto, was made from dried millet sweetened with rapadura. Colación, a festive treat, came in the shape of small white figurines with red or pink details, resembling people, animals, or tiny jars. It was sold exclusively during the August festivities. Vendors kept these candies in special boxes and lined the streets where the celebrations were held. I never discovered where these delightful treats came from, as they appeared only once a year. Espumillas, baked egg whites mixed with sugar, were white with cinnamon or red sugar on top. Turrón, made of whipped egg whites and honey, was sold in cone shapes with cinnamon sprinkled on top, wrapped in husks. These, along with arroz con leche (rice pudding) and manjar blanco (milk custard), were served in "herradura" glasses and sold by street vendors.

Fruits

All the fruits from hot climates, such as zapotes, chicos, or mamey, would have curdled milk inside when cut, and we used to make our copal (which is now gum). If we didn't want it to be white, we'd color it with achiote or by chewing a leaf of yerbabuena (mint). There was also the "cojón", a wild plant that we didn't eat but cut to quickly bring home, so we could puncture them and let the latex fall into hot water, where it would solidify to form the much-coveted copal. Back then, there weren't the varieties of chewing gum that are sold today, though copal tablets were known. These came from the capital, had flavor, and were a dark brown color, wrapped in paper. In the vegas near rivers, we grew mangos, either Castilla, Habaneros, or Sabaneros. I confess I always heard them announced but never knew how to write the names. They sounded like mangos sabaneros or mangos habaneros. There were also jocotes, in red and yellow, and a smaller type called samarutes, which, when sucked, would easily make the seed slip out, and you might choke on it. The

nances were either yellow or purple. The mamey had a tough skin and compact yellow flesh, which was said to be hard to digest. At school, they said that by rubbing the skin on your face, the interior wouldn't stain you once you became a mother. The edible part was usually chopped into small pieces and added to a liquor jar to pickle, much like the nances, which gave the liquor a tasty flavor. The same was done with cashews, whether they were yellowish or reddish. The seed of the cashew was roasted or baked in the embers left by the kitchen fire. Then, on the stone pavement, which was full of rocks, we cracked open the already slightly burned seed and extracted the very delicious nut. We also did the same with ripe almonds. These were bought from Doña Luz and Doña Nela, two elderly single women, who sold a good handful for half a real or would let you go pick them yourself. After eating the flesh without washing it, just as it was picked from the ground, we would crush the almond with a stone on the pavement to get the nut or almond, which was very tasty. The coyoles were sold either raw or in honey. The ones in honey had a better flavor, and they were sold in deep tusas (corn husks) with a bit of honey. They were difficult to crack open with a stone, and it was hard to get the whole nut or coco out. The nances also provided an opportunity to play betting games. With a closed fist, and by chance, one would ask the person they were playing with, "Odds or evens?" If they answered correctly, whether it was odds or evens depending on the number of nances, they would have to give them away, and then the other person would do the same with theirs. Guineos (bananas), at that time, weren't referred to as bananos but as guineo guime, guineo morado, or guineo majonche. They could be cooked and were popular. The red, sweet watermelons, limes from Saspán (a village not far from Chiquimula), and the olives that would stain your tongue purple when eaten, just like the caimitos. It was quite common to find fruit with worms, so we joked about buying them, but the seller would assure us, "It doesn't have worms." The sugarcane was mostly eaten during moliendas (sugarcane grinding festivals) or when freshly ground. The owners of the sugarcane fields had their plantations beyond the Río Grande (Great River). To get there, we had to cross the river, which during November and December was starting to dry up. Jumping from stone to stone, we would make it to the other side and attend the molida (sugarcane grinding festival). They would gift us thin and thick sugarcanes covered in honey straight from the kettle, which tasted similar to today’s chewy toffees. If someone brought a container, they would gift them honey to take home. At the market, they also sold purple sugarcane, which was soft and easy to peel. During the patron saint festival in August, they brought peaches, perotes, and apples from Jalapa. Although these fruits were of lower quality, they

were sold in nets on the ground. Since they weren't grown in Chiquimula, the supply would run out in just two or three days.

Popular Characters

In the streets, wandering harmlessly, there were poor souls whom children delighted in tormenting, whether by shouting at them or throwing stones. There was Chico Tonto and Manuel Tonto, who begged for food and even ate spoiled fruits without seeming to suffer any harm. La Cucha and La Mecha were two poor women dressed in rags. Occasionally, someone would gift them a piece of clothing. Barefoot, filthy, and disheveled, they always walked one behind the other, with the one in the back being completely blind. They consumed alcohol and were the target of ridicule. Pablito Vega had his small plots of land and, when returning from the fields by way of El Torito, would already have had a few drinks. The children would shout at him, "Goodbye, Pablito Vega, mosquitoes in the sack!" I also vaguely remember a beggar woman who carried a bundle of chamisa (a type of firewood) on her head, going door to door, asking people to buy it. People called her Marta Chamisa. She had one empty eye socket, which made her pitiable and horrifying to look at. I didn't see her for very long. Besides these popular figures, I must mention the nicknames that many people, young and old, carried. Many were widely known by these names, often to the annoyance of the person bearing the nickname. For example, Juana Cacho was a tortilla seller, somewhat blonde, pale-skinned, short, and cheerful in demeanor. Luisa Porosoco was another woman, nicknamed for her always messy, very curly hair, which resembled the disorganized nest of a certain type of bird. Luisa's son also inherited the nickname Porosoco. Other nicknames included: Chente Culón, Chente Culito, or Chente Tapón; Juan Pajarito, Juan Calzón, Juana Gallo, and Rosa Ronda, among others. Years later, during the 1920s, nicknames like Las Chachagualillo became known. This was given to the owners of a tavern named "El Chachagualillo," a name that gained popularity due to the boundary disputes between Guatemala and Honduras. Another woman, a "seller of affection," as Enrique Gómez Carrillo described her, became popularly known as Tutankhamen, since she appeared the same year the Pharaoh's tomb was discovered.

Popular Sayings

At some popular gatherings, especially under the influence of alcohol, riddles—often risqué—were shared, and colorful jokes and “bombas” (satirical rhymes or verses) would come to light. I recall this one:

"Bomba, bomba, jeta de moronga,
andá donde el burro a que te la componga."

And the retort:

"Esa bomba que me echaste, hasta el alma me dolió,
¿por qué no se la fuiste a echar a la gran puta que te parió?"

Of course, such expressions were only heard from uneducated and uncultured men.

In school, when there was tension between classmates, it was common for girls to mock one another. If the girl being mocked happened to pass by, the others would laugh scornfully. The girl in question would respond with:

"Here I go, saying farewell with three coconut palms.
Whoever laughs at me, let them laugh with all their soul."

In the early years of school, it was common for girls aged 5, 6, or 7 to offend each other by sticking out their tongues. The offended child would immediately run to the teacher, saying, "She’s sticking her tongue out at me." The teacher, trying to correct the situation, would respond in a humorous tone, "But I can see you still have your tongue—it hasn’t been taken out!" The teacher would then advise us to say, "She’s showing me her tongue," instead.

Some of the sayings and phrases commonly used by schoolchildren and the general public included: “eya papo” and “eya pitas” as words of protest. The term “metisaca” was used to describe someone nosy. If someone was treated rudely, phrases like “andá a comer” were met with a comeback like “cométela vos con tu mano izquierda.” To silence someone brusquely, people would say “sho,” and this could provoke the retort:

"Sho son tus machos. Si no tenés, vos sos uno. Me monto en vos, cara de calaboz. El arroz pa' tus pollitos y la m... pa' vos."

When someone meddled where they didn’t belong, they were told, “a vos qué te importa,” to which the response might be, “andá donde don Pío Porta a que te den una torta.”

Speaking of Don Pío Porta, many legends surrounded him. It was said that Don Pío had made a pact with the devil and possessed vast amounts of silver and gold. This was because he was the wealthiest landowner and merchant in Chiquimula. In the eastern part of the city, there was—or perhaps still is—a public tank with wash basins, supposedly donated by Don Pío. Popular imagination invented tales about the Siguanaba or

La Llorona bathing there. People claimed to hear her wailing loudly or even see her washing clothes at night.
When someone wanted to insult another indirectly, they would allude to their trade, guild, or social class. The offended person would quickly respond:
"Barajo mi trecho sin barajear, Zacarías dijo aquel retacho, te consumo y te apacho hasta la consumación de los siglos."
Or simply: "Barajo mi trecho."
Finally, the phrase "ojos de ajo en tusa" was used to mock those with greenish-blue eyes.

At school, we enjoyed joking around and often said phrases that could lead to playful misunderstandings, such as:
"Tomorrow it's your turn."
"What?"
"To sleep with the crazy one."
Or:
"Are you going to the burial?"
"What burial?"
"Your nose."
We also made-up silly names like "Don Serapio Joso," "Doña Refugio Tosa," or "Nía Justa Nuda." Other silly lines included:
"When you eat bread, do you sweat?" or "Are you upset because I said that?"
If someone looked annoyed, we would add: "Don't get upset." Sometimes, we teased classmates passing by with phrases like:
"Clear the way, the trash is coming through!"
But the person being mocked would quickly respond: "The beauty."

In primary school, it was customary to "be valid" with friends. This meant holding each other's pinky fingers, spinning around, and saying together:
"Carretilla, carretón, whoever doesn't pay is a thief." If a classmate had something we liked—like a treat or a nice object—we'd say: "Drop it!" They were supposed to give it to whoever said that phrase. However, if they were quick, they could reply: "Coto," which meant it was protected, and no one could take it.

During recess, we often brought snacks like candies or fruits. If someone accidentally dropped their food, they would blame the nearest friend, saying:
"You were wishing for it, that's why it fell."
Sometimes, they could still pick it up and say:
"But I won't give the devil the satisfaction." There were also "bands," like orders or chants, where we'd say:

"Bando, bando, contrabando, I'm the one in charge of that head."
Or:
"Bando, bando, contrabando, on Don Fernando's corner, there was a pooping dog..."

Superstitions

There wasn't a single child, no matter how grown up, who didn't believe in the existence of the devil. We were told he appeared with the smell of sulfur, horns, and a tail. Misbehaving at home or with elders could lead to an encounter with the devil. Hurricanes were a sign that the devil was nearby, and it was advised to make the sign of the cross. In times of danger, one could defend themselves by saying:
"Get away from here, Satan, you won't come for me,
for on the Day of the Cross, I said a thousand times: Jesus, Jesus." To have this protection, on May 3, the Day of the Cross, I would say the name Jesus a thousand times, as failing to do so meant no one was safe from the "evil creature."
Looking into a mirror at midnight was dangerous, as you might see the devil's face. Chewing copal gum after 8 p.m. was like chewing the bones of the dead. Sleeping with your doll was said to attract the devil.

Bad omens were abundant. Large black butterflies fluttering inside a house during the rainy season foretold the death of a loved one. Breaking a mirror signaled misfortune. Dreaming of teeth or molars falling out was a sure sign of a family member's death. Opening an umbrella indoors was bad luck. The call of the bird known as the chepillo, which people claimed sang "people are coming, people are coming," foretold the arrival of a visitor. A dog lying belly-up in the living room meant someone would visit soon. A fly persistently buzzing around one's face meant a letter was on its way. Seeing a spider at different times of the day had specific meanings: in the morning, good luck; in the afternoon, a letter; and at night, misfortune. There was a small book called the oracle used to interpret the meanings of dreams. Wax candles lit at the Sanctuary of Esquipulas were cherished, and their remnants were kept as protection against storms, much like the blessed palms from Palm Sunday. The hoot of an owl perched in the trees of the house's yard signaled the death of someone living there. It was also said that the owl was a witch temporarily taking that form.

Cures

During the months of July and August, the hot and rainy season, there was an outbreak of tiny mosquitoes that would get into people's eyes, causing "eye trouble." This condition involved severe discomfort, like having sand in your eyes, making it difficult to open them. The eyes would become red, filled with crust or discharge, which was called *cheles*. By the next morning, upon waking, the eyes would be completely stuck shut and needed to be opened by washing them with warm water. The infallible remedy was "vitriol," a white powder sold in small paper packets at pharmacies. Dissolving this powder in warm water and putting a drop in the eye would cure the condition after several days. However, it stung terribly and caused more irritation, often bringing tears to the eyes. People would advise smearing soot on the eye for a cure, and if someone laughed at you, you were supposed to touch them, supposedly transferring the condition. The "eye trouble" was highly contagious, and almost all the children suffered from it—no one was spared. For a stye, pispelo, or chalazion, it was said that putting some mucus on it would cure it. They also claimed it happened from seeing a dog defecate.

Nosebleeds, which were common among schoolchildren due to either a hit during play or the heat, were treated as follows: pouring water on a wall or fence warmed by the sun and then inhaling the steam, or wetting a piece of brick and taking a deep sniff of it. For minor wounds incurred during play, we would stop the bleeding by placing a spiderweb over the cut. To stop hiccups, the best cure was a good scare, or alternatively, drinking water from a glass while tilting the glass backward and taking three sips. I also saw the cook place a split bean on each temple, claiming it would relieve her headache. If her eye twitched—likely from nerves—she would say, "Someone must be speaking ill of me." Burning or red, hot ears were also believed to mean that someone was speaking badly about the person experiencing it.

Religion

In Chiquimula, the majority of its inhabitants are Catholic, although Protestantism has many followers. Schools run by Central American missionaries were very well-organized. In addition to primary education, these schools offered boarding facilities. In my time, they allowed secondary school girls to attend the National Institute for Young Ladies for their classes. For a few years, they also provided secondary education in their own schools. Their buildings, named Bethany, Bethel, Berea, Beracca, and so on, housed carpentry, printing, and bookbinding workshops, as well as agricultural practice fields—everything necessary to prepare the boys they educated to earn a living in the future. These

buildings were very beautiful, filled with gardens featuring flowers typical of the warm climate. For their evangelical services, they had the Tabernacle, a well-lit space using acetylene and gasoline lamps. Its spacious and attractive hall drew many curious visitors, who often joined in singing the religious hymns during the evening services, or "cultos," as they were called.

There are two Catholic temples. El Calvario is located south of what was called the Political Headquarters, and the Church to the east of the main square. There was always a priest available. The indigenous population actively participated in religious practices, and those of higher status took on significant roles in religious celebrations. These included Holy Week, the patronal feast of the Assumption (celebrated from August 12 to 16), Christmas festivities, and processions through the main streets. For Holy Week, beginning with Lent, a procession left the Parish Church every Friday, for six Fridays prior to Good Friday. Accompanied by music, the procession passed by El Calvario before returning to the Parish Church. Christ carrying the cross was placed on a platform carried by the faithful. Many devotees joined the image, usually from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m., praying and holding lit candles. Some people set up "resting places" in front of their homes—a type of table with curtains and flowers where Christ, or "the Lord" as we called him, could be briefly placed. Heads were covered with chalinás (light scarves), airy shawls, or something suitable to cover our heads during the procession.

Palm Sunday

Before the mass—held in the mornings—a procession called La Borriquita took place. This procession featured an image of Jesus on a small donkey and circled the courtyard of the parish church. During the mass, the blessing of the palm branches (fresh palm leaves) was performed. During their distribution, there was always much commotion, with everyone shouting: "Give me one, Father, give me one!" These palm branches were then taken home and placed at the head of the bed or saved for days of strong storms, believed to protect us from being struck by lightning.

On Holy Monday, a procession called Las Ánimas (The Souls) left the church and passed through some of the city's streets. Holy Tuesday was marked by the procession of Jesús Nazareno carrying the cross on his shoulder. This procession was called La Reseña. On Holy Wednesday, the Tenebrae was held, during which the church was darkened, and there was significant activity in town. People hurried to buy food, as it was the last day of commercial activity during Holy Week.

Shops would remain closed until Easter Sunday. Everyone also tried to bathe that day. Those with running water did so at home, while those without went to the nearby river in the afternoon. This was because bathing was forbidden on Holy Thursday and Good Friday, and anyone who did so risked turning into a mermaid or a fish, according to their beliefs.

Everyone said it was a sin to bathe, cook, sweep, sew, or do any unnecessary chores. The church bells did not ring from Wednesday afternoon and were only heard again when they rang out "Glory" during the Saturday mass. Wooden clappers replaced the bells.

Holy Thursday, known as the "greatest day" of the Catholic year, began with morning religious services. At midday, the cross was laid horizontally at Calvary, supported by two stands or "small trestles." It was adorned with corozo or coyol flowers, and at the top, a collection box or plate was placed to receive the alms of the faithful who came to venerate it. Devotees circled the cross respectfully, bowed briefly, and knelt to show reverence. The cross was washed at midday. By then, everyone in town had eaten lunch to be ready to witness the beautiful ceremony. The water used to wash the cross was brought from Esquipulas. Those tasked with fetching it walked the 56 kilometers separating Esquipulas from Chiquimula, navigating a rough path of stones, dirt, hills, and slopes. The journey took two days to go and two to return. The honor of washing the cross fell to three godparents. The jars of water they brought were previously blessed, and the ceremony began with incense. The first godparent started softly, the second raised their voice, and the third spoke louder so everyone could hear. They incensed the cross while saying:

"Jesus, in the blessing of God the Father, in the blessing of God the Son, in the blessing of God the Holy Spirit, three distinct persons and one true God. From the north, from the south, from the east, from the west, creatures are drowning—why this suffering, why this torment, Lord of Esquipulas? María del Tránsito, María Josefa, Transitus of August, Lord... "

...and much more that I cannot remember or never fully understood.

After this act, we could approach to venerate the cross. We were given "coyol" flowers, and, of course, we had already given our offering—at that time, coins such as reales or nickel halves were used. The godparents wore freshly starched or new shirts with red sashes at their waists and either new or clean pants. These were considered "the principals," as humble people and our servant, the cook, respectfully called them. I remember one of them was named Serapio Chachaguá, a tall, thin man with a very pronounced Adam’s apple. He was imperious

and haughty, even clashing and arguing with the parish priest because he wanted to take charge over the "señor cura." In the afternoon, the Washing of the Apostles took place at the Parish Church. Twelve humble boys, barefoot and from the neighborhoods of "Torito" or Democracia, represented the apostles. They entered the church wearing colorful, clean shirts and pants. Each boy wore a small crown made of colorful paper flowers on his head. At 4 p.m., the priest performed the ceremony. After washing their feet, he dried them and kissed them, but people whispered that it was actually his own hand that he kissed. At the entrance to the church, near the main door and to the left, was a poorly maintained chapel. At that time, it was lit with candles and featured a standing Jesus with His eyes blindfolded. A boy acting as a jailer would drop and lift a heavy iron chain, creating a loud noise. At the base of the image was a collection box for offerings. We prayed respectfully on our knees. The floors of the church and the Calvary were made of clay bricks. In the evening, the Procession of Silence took place. Jesus, dressed in His robe as King of the Jews and wearing His crown of thorns, was carried on a platform. The faithful walked carrying candles in their hands, while the wooden clapper sounded ominously. The procession re-entered the church from which it had departed, precisely at 9 p.m.

On Good Friday at Calvary, the cross that had been laid down since Holy Thursday was raised, marking the beginning of the "Procesión de los Encuentros" (Procession of the Encounters). The cross was carried horizontally by many arms, each bearer feeling honored to hold it amidst the crowd and under the scorching sun. The events began around 12:30 p.m. Another procession departed from the church, carrying images on platforms: Mary, Veronica holding the cloth imprinted with the face of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Saint John, who remained close to Mary, the mother of Jesus. The two processions met, and the images greeted each other by bringing their faces close together in what was called the "topes" (encounters). Jesus, who had departed from Calvary wearing a purple robe and a crown of thorns, was part of this meeting. Some children dressed as Roman soldiers were carried on platforms. Unlike the carriers of the religious images, who paid for the honor of carrying them, the carriers of these children were paid for their work. The list of carriers was prepared in advance. A man representing Simon of Cyrene, carrying a lightweight cross, also participated in the procession. On one occasion, as the walk under the intense sun and heat was exhausting, this man grew thirsty. Spotting a tavern along the route, he entered—cross and all—to "grab a drink" to quench his thirst or perhaps to gather the strength to continue bearing the cross. The entire procession entered the church before 2:30 or 2:00 p.m. Inside, prayers

were recited with great devotion, and all the altars were draped in purple cloths. The cross, carried by many men in a horizontal position, was placed near the altar and secured to the ground for the act of nailing Jesus to it. I recall faintly from my childhood seeing elderly indigenous people, candles in hand, kneeling and praying with profound devotion and emotion. At first, they prayed quietly but then raised their voices as if sharing their sorrows with Jesus, who was about to die on the cross. They cried out: "Señor, matayo a don Pío Porta, matayo a don Salvador Flores" ("Lord, take Don Pío Porta, take Don Salvador Flores"), naming the wealthiest landowners on whose lands they toiled for meager wages. At 3 p.m., Jesus had already been nailed to the cross, which was then raised vertically. This marked the peak of the fervor, with chants of "Holy God" and "Holy Mighty," prayers, tears, and many candles lit, filling the atmosphere and making it almost unbearable. The heat likely reached around 30 degrees Celsius, and the church was full of faithful. At that moment, we all felt complicit in Jesus' death and prayed with great devotion and sincerity. We had to kneel with our arms outstretched in the shape of a cross to recite the 33 creeds. A sermon followed, which was deeply moving, and then came prayers as we waited for the descent of the body. When Jesus was taken down from the cross, the priest would clean him with cotton and a fragrant substance, which I think was "Peruvian balsam." The cotton was then distributed as relics and eagerly sought after. It was impossible for everyone to receive a piece, but those who did would take it home as an amulet to protect against all evil. By 5 p.m., the church was in mourning, and the townspeople gathered in the churchyard for the solemn procession of the Holy Burial. A glass urn, brought from the capital and funded by several wealthy locals, was prepared with electrical lighting. Inside was the reclining image of Christ, and the outside was adorned with artificial flowers. The large platform carrying Christ was decorated with angels, beautifully presented. The usual images, now dressed in black, were also part of the procession. The women who carried the Virgin images had to wear black, and there were long lines of "cucuruchos" (penitents), who wore purple on Holy Thursday and black on Good Friday. The Seven Words were displayed on black cloth banners, along with the instruments that had been used to torture Christ. It was an impressive procession that wound through many streets, which were lit with oil lanterns since there was no electric light until 1932. The full moon that night helped with its beautiful and romantic light. Young girls and women wore hats for the Friday afternoon procession, and it was almost a law to wear new clothes. Some would debut one, two, or even three new dresses; to not do so was considered shameful. It was customary to watch the procession pass from the

railings or benches in the park, or to step out onto the main corners. The procession entered Calvary just before 10 p.m., where the urn and images would remain for the night.

On Holy Saturday, after mass, there was joy. Everyone wanted to go, carrying clay or ceramic jars so the priest could bless the water and take it home. At the moment when the bells rang joyfully in the church and Calvary, it was a time for laughter and jokes, like pulling hair or striking the ground to help plants grow. Parents, half-jokingly, would give playful swats to those left at home. At 5 p.m., the procession called "Soledad" or "of Pésame" (condolences) would start. The women carrying the Virgin of Sorrows and the other Virgins still wore black, and Saint John, as always, was carried by men. The procession would leave the church and head to Calvary, where the priest would lead the rosary, sermon, and chants. Then, the men carrying the urn with the reclining Christ would elevate it, simulating Christ's ascent to heaven. By 9 p.m., the festivities would conclude with a joyful dance, attended by the people of Chiquimula. The time for eating meat, laughing, dancing, and celebrating had arrived—Jesus was now in heaven. The dance would end at midnight and sometimes even last until the early morning.

At 5 a.m. on Easter Sunday, the bells of Calvary rang out for the "Madrugada" (early morning) procession of the Resurrection. Jesus, represented by an image no longer in martyrdom but triumphant, would leave Calvary. Other images would also leave the church. A little angel, made of flesh and bone, carrying a lit lantern, would rush back and forth, announcing to the Virgin of Sorrows, the other Virgins, and Saint John that Jesus had risen. These were "topes" (meetings), and fireworks and bombs filled the air, bringing joy to the dawn. The bells joined in with their cheerful peals. When the Resurrected Christ met with his Mother and the others, the procession would enter the church, where they would be placed before the main altar, and the parish priest would officiate the Mass, thus bringing the Holy Week celebration to a close.

Another religious celebration that took place between 1913 and 1915 was established by the parish priest of the time, Father Manuel Antonio Bengoechea y Lobos. He was a young, enthusiastic man with family ties to Chiquimula. Known for his grooming habits that enhanced his facial features, the scent of perfume would let people know when Father Bengoechea was passing by, typically around 11 a.m., when he headed to the church to officiate.

The festivities were held in the first days of November in the small square at Calvary. These celebrations included the recitation of the rosary, prayers, hymns, and a sermon, similar to those in August and

December. Afterward, there were fireworks, known as "fuego de cañas" (fire of cane), which were figures made of bamboo tubes filled with flammable material like gunpowder and small firecrackers. Another highlight was the "torito" (little bull), a figure of a bull created by placing a framework on the back of a young man, who covered himself with cotton to protect from the fire. The bull figure was then set on fire, and the young man would run through the courtyard and streets, shooting off firecrackers and sparklers. This tradition was exciting and thrilling, as many were chased by the "torito" during the festivities.

For the patron saint festival, called the August Festival, celebrations took place from the 13th to the 16th of August. The patroness of Chiquimula is the Virgin of the Transit. The religious celebrations started several days before, including Masses and prayers, which were held from 7 to 9 p.m., with morning Masses as well. People from all social classes participated, including merchants, municipal employees, workers, and teachers. Men were responsible for contributing to the "prayers," and their wives contributed to the Masses. At night, the traditional rosary was prayed in the church, accompanied by music. In the church courtyard and around the park, which had an iron fence at the time, the famous "fire bull" was paraded, along with "castles" (fireworks), "fire of cane," and other fireworks displays. The best night of the celebration was when the Chinese merchants contributed, as the lights and fireworks imported directly from China were the most spectacular. Fireworks were an essential part of the festivities. Similarly, the Moors' celebration took place only in August, starting on the 11th and ending on the 18th. The Moors performed dances that represented scenes from the Spanish Reconquista. The participants were humble people, sometimes illiterate, from the "El Torito" or "La Democracia" neighborhood. Some dressed as Moors, others as Christians, and every other year, a character named Laura, who played the daughter of a Christian leader, was included. A young boy played this role. Both Moors and Christians wore brightly colored costumes, turbans with mirrors, and grotesque masks but were distinguishable from each other. They also wore bells that jingled as they danced, hopping on one foot and then switching to the other, while wielding swords and engaging in dialogue in a loud, warlike tone. The drum and flute accompanied the dance. They performed in the church courtyard and also visited private homes, where they were given some coins. Although they danced near the church, it wasn’t part of the Catholic celebration. The participants practiced their dances many months in advance. I only remember these words that I eventually understood: "que precuren (meaning 'procure') entregar las llaves de la ciudad" (meaning 'that they try to give the keys of the city').

Also, when Laura was kneeling, they would say: "Levántate Laura del suelo..." (meaning 'Get up, Laura, from the ground...'). It was a very lively and entertaining celebration, but young children would run away from the frightening and strange masks and swords.

In the square, in front of the market, the church, and the park, there were small stalls called "chinamas" or "chinamos," made with woven mats or roofs of dried palm leaves. Vendors from Jalapa arrived, selling fruits like apples and large pears, which were of very poor quality but still in demand because they were fruits that couldn't be grown in the region due to the cold climate. These vendors earned good profits as they sold out their stock. They also sold another fruit, shaped like an egg, with yellow skin and purple stripes, which was juicy and sweet, known as "pepinos." The "colación" (a sweet treat) was made from very white, brittle sugar and came in various shapes such as men, women, jars, ducks, and other forms. They were transported in wooden crates, similar to those used for oil cans, but much smaller. The sweets were wrapped carefully in strips of dried corn husks, and this was a much-anticipated treat that was only enjoyed in August. Another popular refreshment was "temperante," made from cooked pineapple with cinnamon and sweetened, or simply from syrup. The expert in making it was María Cacheo, who prepared it very deliciously. We drank it warm because, at that time, ice hadn’t arrived yet. María also made a delicious coconut sweet, served in squares. Depending on how much you wanted, she would cut it with her thumbnail. Rafael Zea Ruano once mentioned this when referring to María's special talent.

Another common drink during these festivities was "ponche," a mix of hot milk, eggs, sugar, cinnamon, and aguardiente (a strong alcoholic drink), whipped with a "molinillo" (a traditional whisk), creating a frothy and much-loved beverage. Additionally, there were "hojuelas" (crispy pastries) with honey as decoration and "molletes," a type of bread filled with cinnamon, dipped in egg, and drenched in brown sugar syrup—delicious treats that were typical of the August and December celebrations.

The streets were also filled with wandering photographers who set up their stations in the alley between the market and the church, and other places around the fair. They charged 5 old quetzals for each instant photo. Gambling games like the "Wheel of Fortune," "chingolingo," and "loterías" or "polacas" were common. In all of these games, people bet money, but more was lost than won, except in the "polacas," where the prizes were based on the number of people who bought tickets. The winner would leave happy, as they could win a substantial prize for just a few cents.

The bullfights took place in the afternoons from August 13 to 16, and were announced with loud firecrackers. The bulls were brought from the famous Jicamapa and Ipala estates. The bullfighters, or "toreadores" as they were called, didn't wear special costumes. Only one daring individual would mount the bull while others worked to anger and agitate it; they would light "canchinflines" (small fireworks) behind the bull. The rider, who was tightly tied with ropes, was always or almost always Daniel Sánchez. He was often in jail for various reasons and was only released from prison to ride the bull, as he was the only brave one willing to do so. Sometimes, a character known as "Mico el Hoyo" would appear. He would hide in a hole made specifically to escape the bull or take refuge behind the palm trees that stood within the arena. He wore colorful and mismatched clothes, resembling a buffoonish version of a torero. The spectacle was free for all, with a standard-sized barrier built in the main square in front of the municipality. The park's iron fence served as one boundary, and the arena extended into the courtyard of the School No. 2 for Girls. The barrier was made of thick wooden posts, similar to a railing. In 1911 and 1912, makeshift stands with rough wooden planks were built above ground level to offer a better view of the bullfight. The crowd always gathered close to the thick posts of the barrier, often arriving hours before the event began. On some occasions, the bulls were especially aggressive, injuring the bullfighters. Other times, the bulls would break out of the arena. One such bull, which was grayish in color, managed to bend the iron bars of the park’s fence, causing a mass panic among the spectators. People ran and took refuge inside the church, as it was the safest and closest place. Aside from the bulls and the "Moros," the December festivities were similar to those of August.

Amusement

The entertainments included concerts held at the central park, though rarely at the Temple of Minerva. The usual schedule for these concerts was Thursdays from 7:30 to 9:00 PM, and Sundays from 4:00 to 6:00 PM and 7:30 to 9:00 PM. When the concerts were "extraordinary," they would run until 10:00 PM. The performances were by the "Banda Marcial," regarded as the second-best band in the country, and took place at the bandstand in the center of the park. At that time, the park was enclosed with a fence, and it had cement and brick seating. The perpetual conductor of the band was Don Marcos Salguero, who also taught solfège and singing at the Boys’ and Girls’ Institutes and their primary sections. By the 1920s, the band’s director was Don Leopoldo Ramírez. The music played was mostly classical, referred to as "con

solfa," but it also included popular tunes of the time, with much Argentine music. Young people and adults would stroll around, and the entire town participated in this recreation. However, due to racial prejudices, the young women lamented that the indigenous people from the El Torito neighborhood were the primary audience. The internal students couldn't leave on Thursdays, making the concert less lively.

Parties took place at private homes for family birthdays, weddings, baptisms, or other occasions. In August and December, "zarabandas" were held, with men paying to attend, as well as for the liquor consumed at the "cantina" or the "boquitas" (small snacks). In the 1920s, "kermeses" became popular, usually for a charitable cause. These events were very lively, with both men and women, young and old, taking part. People danced, enjoyed tasty snacks, and participated in raffles, among other activities.

In private homes, the "rusia" was used, which added to the grandeur of the occasion. It consisted of a strong cloth canvas with a pine mattress underneath, resembling a carpet, stretched tightly and secured at the edges with tacks nailed to the floor. Boric acid and grated stearin were sprinkled on it to make it smooth and easy to slide on while dancing. It was almost a luxury, though not always available. In the room designated for dancing, seats were placed near the wall, where young women and the elderly, whether parents or guardians, would sit. The young men would wait in the hallways before the dance began. The music could be provided by an orchestra, band, or marimba. At midnight, tamales were served with coffee and bread. The alcohol served was strong, though there was also fine liquor depending on the quality of the event, along with beer and fruit-infused liquors made with pieces of cashew, nance, or mamey. The beer was imported, coming from the capital or Puerto Barrios, with bottles wrapped in yellow straw. One brand was called "Negra de Alemania" and another was French, from "León D'or." The "Castillo Hnos." brand was commonly used, along with wines, "boquitas" (small snacks), which were pieces of orange, bread with some meat, and pickled tender papaya soaked in vinegar, along with onions and chilies. Before the dance started, the gentleman would approach where one was sitting, invite them to dance, and the couple would begin their promenade around the room or rooms designated for the event, passing near the seated guests, who were usually women, since the men would sit outside or stand. Dancing was accepted as part of the social norm, and it would have been considered rude or bad manners to refuse someone. Many people danced multiple pieces with the same partner, especially those in romantic relationships, who would continue dancing all night long without fearing reprimands for "abandoning" their partners.

At formal dances, invitations were sent via written cards, with a program listing the pieces the orchestra would play. Sometimes the invitations were verbal, but it was customary to receive an official written invite; if not, one would not attend. Lighting was initially provided by oil lamps, and years later, gasoline lamps became common, with electricity being introduced in 1932. During the dances, power outages were uncommon. At the end of a musical piece, it was customary to shout "encore," demanding the orchestra to play the piece again. The musicians, though annoyed, would typically comply, though if it was the young women asking, they would mutter under their breath, calling them "daring" or "bold." Dancing was done without special footwear, with waltzes, fox-trots, one-steps, and paso dobles being popular. Couples danced close together, sometimes in a semi-embrace, and later, the "tête-à-tête" style, where couples became even closer. In some cases, couples would kiss in the height of excitement, and the following day, the young crowd would gossip about it, saying things like, "Did you see that so-and-so kissed such-and-such?" The end of the event was always lively and joyful. The music played during these dances was lively, and I remember, as a young girl, watching the dances held in my house. They played "el mishito," a lively song, and the dancing was done in a circle, with men and women holding hands. The women would either have scarves over their shoulders or tied around their necks. It was the farewell dance. A man would step into the circle, and if he was funny, he would be asked to play the "cat" role. At an unexpected moment, the "cat" would choose a woman as his partner, and they would form a couple. However, someone had to remain unpaired, often referred to as "zonto" (the odd one), and they would start dancing again. Even respectable men and women would join in. Some parties would last until 5 in the morning. In this circle, no one was allowed to stay seated. There were also matinées, dance events on Sundays, which could take place in a private house, at the workers' hall, or in the Teatro Fiat, owned by Humberto Porta Mencos.

Games

In school, it was a custom to engage in various activities during the 10-minute recess. For example, jumping rope, playing "shuca" or "tenta," hide-and-seek, and other games. There were also indoor games, which we played in the corridors or the large galera, as long as there was a piece of furniture, like a medium-sized table. One popular game was called "cincos," which used marbles, either medium or small-sized glass balls. The boys referred to it simply as "bolas."

Here’s how it was played: it took place on the ground, with players squatting. They would make an indentation in the dirt, and if the ground was made of bricks, they would use chalk or plaster. This indentation, shaped like an ellipse, was called "tortuga" and was about half a meter wide. A line was marked at a certain distance from it. Several marbles were placed within the "tortuga," and two or more players could participate. The line marked the limit from where the player would shoot the marble, using the tip of the thumb. If the shot successfully removed one or more marbles, the player would take another turn. If not, the marble remained where it landed, and the next player would take their turn from that spot. The game continued like this, with players taking turns. When marbles were taken out of the "tortuga," new ones would be added. The player who collected the most marbles by removing them from the indentation was considered the winner. Some marbles would break upon impact with the "tistique" (the shooter’s marble), which made them unusable for the game, and they were eliminated from play.

The Rabbit and the Deer or The Hunter and the Deer. The boys or girls, holding hands in a circle, one inside representing the little deer, and the other outside playing the role of the hunter or shooter. The dialogue begins like this:
—Will you give me that little deer? —No, because it's too young. —Give it to me. —No. —Well, if you don't give it to me, I'll take it.

The children, with their arms stretched out and raised high, let the little deer out of the circle, and then the hunter follows, both running quickly. The little deer returns to the circle, and the other children stretch their arms to let it back in, then they tighten the circle to prevent the hunter from entering. Another child goes, and the dialogue repeats, and once again, the hunter chases the deer until he catches it. When the hunter catches the deer, the circle breaks, and the others try to save the little deer by pretending to be dogs and barking, or the hunter pretends to eat it.

"**Whose mules are they?"** is another game in which the players also form a circle, with one player inside and another outside. The player outside asks:
—Whose mules are they? The one playing the leader responds:
—Nana Beta's. —Can I catch one? —Before its face is broken.

The circle of players spins in a dizzying motion, simulating kicking to prevent anyone trying to catch the mules from getting close. But

eventually, someone grabs one by the waist, and that person is out of the circle. The game continues in the same way until another player is caught, and so on indefinitely.

Pulling the Onion. The players (boys or girls) stand in a line, one behind the other, each holding the waist of the person in front with strength. The first player is always the oldest or the strongest and grabs onto a post, a window grill, a tree, or something fixed. The more players, the better, because it makes the game more fun. A player who is not in the line asks the leader:
—Will you give me an onion? —No, because it is unripe. And what about the one I gave you last night? —I put it in the rubbish, and the cat ate it.

The player comes back a second time and says: —If you don't give it to me, I'll eat it. —Go back, go back, and take the one you want.

Then, the leader pretends to check which one is the "unripe one" by gently tapping each person's head several times with a closed fist. When reaching the last one, the leader says: "This one I'll take." They pull hard to remove it. If they succeed in separating the player, they do the same with the next one, causing a struggle that brings joy to the whole line, as everyone holds tightly to the person in front. However, sometimes for any reason, someone who wasn't the last person in line would let go, causing some players to fall to the ground. This is when the game becomes more intense and exciting.

The Needle and Thimble. (In other places, this game is called The Hawk and the Chicks). The arrangement of the players is the same as in the previous game, but the leader does not lean on anything; instead, they keep their arms free to protect their "chicks." A player steps forward and says:
—Here I lost a needle and a thimble. —Look for them, you'll find them.

The player pretends to search the ground and goes around several times, saying:
—I didn't find them. —Try looking again. —If I don't find them after three turns, I'll eat a chicken. —Catch it if you can.

The player who pretends to search, after making three turns around the line, tries to grab the last player. The leader protects the players by spreading their arms in a semi-circle, acting as if they are guarding them, and turning to prevent the "chicken" from being taken.

There are spinning movements in the line as the "capturer" tries to grab the "chicken" from the left and then from the right, which brings joy to the players. Suddenly, the last "chicken" is grabbed and taken away, and the player tries to do the same with the others, one by one.

Strength. The strongest players, two or three, stand in the center, with one line of players to their right and another to their left, all facing away from each other. The central players give the push to make both lines move in a circular motion, and the intensity of the movement gradually increases, with the players at the ends needing to move the fastest. These are the ones who fall or are dragged because their immediate partner won't let go. The excitement comes from the dizzying circular race and the falling of the players. Due to the danger of this game, younger children were not allowed to participate, and it was played on flat ground.

Rice in Milk. The players form a circle, holding hands and stretching their arms. In the center of the circle, another girl acts as the leader and taps each player's hand, saying fragmented phrases: —Rice with milk —if I marry Blanquita— Negrita will get mad. The girl who hears the word Blanquita or Negrita must leave the circle and stand outside, hugging the friend she prefers, thinking that this will help her get out soon. Eventually, only one player remains, and the leader sings and dances, saying: —I'll marry this one, I'll marry this one. The players who have already exited find a new partner and do the same. However, if there is one player left without a partner, the others shout: —Chocolate for the old one! Chocolate for the old one! —pretending to beat with a molinillo, and the last player covers her ears to avoid being startled.

Blind Hen... Find your chicks. One girl leads the game while the others form a circle. To determine who will be blindfolded, a lottery is held with this rhyme, matching each word to a player's position: —Tin, marín, de dos quién fue, cúcara, mácara títere fue; and the one who gets the word "fue" exits the circle. The leader continues: —Pinto parado, calzón colorado, chorro medorro, martín pedorro. The girl who gets the word "pedorro" also steps out, and the leader repeats these rhymes as many times as necessary, minus one, who is the girl whose eyes will be blindfolded, tightly to ensure she can't see. Then the other players shout, approaching her: —Blind hen, find your chicks, blind, find your chicks; and she tries to catch one, and when she succeeds, she immediately removes the blindfold, and the one caught becomes the new blindfolded player. The game continues in this way.

Andalizio. The players form a circle, holding hands with their arms extended. The leader stands in the center and says loudly: —Andalazio por Palacio, te responde el espinazo— Sn Martín de la redina —Teresina— andá a tu esquina; while pointing to each player as she says the words. The player who hears the word "esquina" exits the circle and either hides or stands behind a friend to hide together. When only one player remains, the leader covers her eyes with her hands and begins the following dialogue: —¿Por dónde sale el Sol? —Por el posol. —¿Por dónde sale la Luna? —Por la laguna. —¿Por dónde sale la estrella? —Por la batella. At that moment, all the players must hide, and then the leader shouts, but already uncovering the eyes of the last player: "Roma, Roma, there goes the King who takes the crown!" This player runs to take the crown from the one who had their eyes covered, and the uncovered player tries to take the crown from the first player she finds, which she does by rubbing her hand on their crown. The players, once revealed, run to where the leader of the game is to have her take their crown. The player who was revealed and had their crown taken loses and must start the game again.

Martinejo. The players sit on the ground (we used to play this at night, sitting on the cobblestone street in front of our house), forming a circle. One player stands with a cloth in hand, which could be a handkerchief, and walks around the outside of the circle, waving it. Suddenly, she taps one of the others with the cloth, who immediately gets up and runs ahead of her while being gently hit with the cloth. The following dialogue unfolds:
— Martinejo!
— Señor Viejo!
— And the mules?
— I sold them.
— And the money?
— I gambled it.
— And the little egg?
— In the little hole.
— And the salt?
— In its holy place.
— Where did you go?
— To a little puddle.
— What did you eat?
— A little chicken.
— And what did you leave me?
— The little booooone!

The dialogue ends, and the one with the cloth sits down and hands it to another, who repeats the process until everyone has had a turn.

San Pedro and San Pablo. Two of the older and stronger girls stand facing each other with their arms raised, forming an arch. A chain of girls follows, with the one at the front (usually the oldest or tallest) leading the dialogue with the "Saint Peter" and "Saint Paul" girls. As the chain approaches the arch, the leader requests permission to pass, and the entire chain is allowed through. However, when only one girl remains, the saints lower their arms, trapping the last player.

They ask her:
— Who do you want to go with? San Pedro or San Pablo?

She makes her choice and quietly whispers it, then positions herself behind the saint she selected. The chain reforms, and the game repeats until all players are divided into two groups behind the saints. Once everyone has chosen a side, the saints extend their arms horizontally and start tugging against each other, each trying to pull the opposing group toward their side. The players behind the saints hold each other's waists, forming a chain to support their leader. The side that manages to pull the other toward them wins. However, sometimes the leaders lose their grip or the chain breaks, causing players to fall, which often results in laughter and marks the game's end.

El Fueguito. We used to play this game near the pillars of the schoolyard’s shed or porch. Each girl would stand by a designated spot. The player starting the game would ask:
— Can you give me a little fire?
The others would reply:
— I threw it over there, pointing far away.
The player would repeat this with each participant. As the "fire-seeker" moved away, one of the others would raise her arm, signaling a desire to swap places. This created excitement, as the "seeker" would rush to take her spot, leaving the other "flying" and forcing her to ask for fire. Sometimes it got even more entertaining when one player requested a spot change, and another girl who wasn’t part of the swap took the vacant spot. This left the original requester without a place, making her the new seeker. This game was also known as Little Candle.

La “Shuca” or “Tenta”. This is an active game where one player tries to tag the others, and no one wants to be tagged because that means

they “carry it” — they become the one with the shuca or tenta. To decide who will “carry it,” or in games like hide-and-seek or tuero who will search, a rhyme is used for selection:
"Pelotilla, manzanilla, pie de gato, 24, 25 hasta 30 o de 10 en 10 hasta 100."
The rhyme is recited while pointing to each player in a circle, and whoever is pointed at on the final number (100) becomes “La Tenta” Another way to choose is by using a different rhyme, mentioned in another game, or by having everyone run from the same starting point toward a set goal. The last one to arrive is chosen and is often called “El Hijo de Zope” because they arrived last. To avoid being tagged with the shuca, players designate certain places as safe zones or say, "pido paro" (I claim safety). However, during races, this phrase would often be slurred into "piro paro," which granted safety upon being spoken.

Matatero, Tero, Lá. This is a singing and movement game. The girls hold hands and stretch out, with one acting as the mother while another stands in front of the group. The second girl walks forward, singing and taking rhythmic steps, and greets the group by bowing her head, saying:
— Good morning, Your Honor, matatero, tero lá.
— What does Your Honor want, matatero...
— I want so-and-so (here, the name of the chosen player is mentioned).
— And what job will you give her?
— We’ll make her a washerwoman (or an ironer, dishwasher, sweeper, or any undesirable or humble job that displeases the “mother” or group leader — but only one job per round to extend the game), matatero...
— That job doesn’t please me, matatero...

Since these humble roles are not acceptable, one of these alternatives is suggested:
— We’ll make her a princess or the king’s daughter, matatero...
— Well, here you have her, matatero...

The chosen girl joins the singer, and now there are two asking for others to join. Then three, four, and so on until everyone is included, leaving only the group leader. She might also be chosen, marking the end of the game. The entire dialogue is sung in a simple melody.
(Note: When they ask, “What does Your Honor want?” the response is: “I want one of your daughters.” Then they ask, “Which one do you want?” This is when the name is mentioned. The game always ends with matatero, tero, lá.)

Doña Ana. In this game, players form a circle, hold hands, and sing the following while dancing:
"Vamos a la huerta del toro toronjil,
a ver a doña Ana, comiendo perejil.
Doña Ana no está aquí, estará en su vergel,
cortando la rosa y cerrándose el clavel."

One player acts as "Doña Ana" and stands outside the circle. The group approaches her without breaking the circle and asks:
—¿Qué tal está doña Ana?
—Está con calentura.

The group resumes singing and dancing, then asks again how Doña Ana is. Her responses become progressively worse: "She has a fever," "She can no longer speak," or "She closed her eyes." Finally, Doña Ana says:
—Doña Ana ya murió.

At this point, the circle breaks, and everyone runs while Doña Ana chases them, pretending to be dead. The player she catches becomes the next Doña Ana, and the game begins again.

There were other games called “de prendas” that were beautiful and were played while sitting on the ground in a circle. For example, *El Rey de Mi Patria…*

Each player is assigned a name, such as a flower, fruit, city, or person, which must differ from the player's real name. It is crucial to remember the assigned name because it will be used during the game. The leader begins the game with the phrase:
"El Rey de mi Patria salió a pasear y se fue a hospedar en casa de..."

The leader then names a player using their assigned name, for example, "Clavel." That player responds:
—Miente usted.
—¿En qué casa está usted?
—En casa de Jazmín (or another assigned name).
—Miente usted.

The player whose name is mentioned must respond immediately with the same formula. The dialogue continues, and the game flows quickly. If a player fails to respond correctly or promptly, they lose and

must give up a "prenda”. It could be an item such as a hairpin, ring, or bracelet. Once several forfeits are collected, the leader assigns penalties.

The leader takes a “prenda”, hides it in their hands, and declares a penalty for its owner. Penalties can include actions like braying like a donkey, crowing like a rooster, kissing another player, reciting a poem, or singing a song. When the penalty is announced, the leader reveals the “prenda”, and its owner must perform the task. The game then continues with the same rules.

Strech and shrink. This is another "prenda" game, usually played while sitting around a table, though sitting on the ground works as well. A medium-sized cloth, such as an apron, shawl, or scarf, is held tightly by everyone. The leader of the game gives instructions by saying the words "estire" (stretch) and "encoge" (shrink). The players must act in the opposite way to what the word means. For example, in the game "Stretch and Shrink, I’ve lost all my wealth," the leader places their hand on the cloth, as if rubbing it, and says to one player, "estire" (stretch). The player must then shrink it. The leader immediately says the word again, either "estire" or "encoge," directing it to another player, who must stretch it. If a player makes a mistake, they lose and must give up a "prenda”, Mistakes are easy to make, so “prendas” quickly accumulate. The game then proceeds just like the one described previously, where penalties are given to those who lose.

Son-so-bezor. This game was also played by the boys. We would line up, facing forward, and a certain distance away, another player stood alone. Prior to the game, names were assigned to the players in the line, typically names of cities, rivers, lakes, etc. The leader of the game would address the player who was set apart, who shouldn't have heard the names assigned. Then the dialogue would begin:
— Sonso-bezor.
— Qué manda mi rey señor.
— En qué caballito te querés venir?
— En el que sea más corredor, saltador y brincador.
— Te querés venir en tal, cual, etc., according to the names assigned.

And the name that was mentioned, the player who had it assigned would go and fetch it, pretending to be a horse, galloping. If it was a boy, he would ride on the player's neck. Sometimes, names were mentioned that didn't exist, names that no player had, and if one of those was chosen, the response would be:

— Pues véngase por sus patas;
and the player would have to gallop over.

Jump the rope

It was a favorite game, played at school or on the street at night. Children of various ages played it. The best ropes were those made of strong hemp. Two players would hold the ends of the rope and swing it in the air, forming an arch. The ones jumping had to do so in time to avoid stepping on the arch as it passed beneath their feet, and the champion was the one who could jump the most times without making a mistake. Also, when the rope was long, several players would jump in line simultaneously, and whoever "lost" would leave the game, either voluntarily or pressured by the shouts of the other players. Another way to play was called "entrada por salida" (enter and exit), which involved "entering" the rope, making a jump, and then exiting, and one by one, we would do the same. We also played "el reloj" (the clock), representing the hours with one jump, two, three, etc., and exiting the rope. The players who lost, as I mentioned, would leave the game and stand in front of those still jumping, and we would say these expressions: "sebo, sebo la cotuza", "sebo para la fulana, para la mengana", etc., and indeed, the player referred to would lose, almost as if under suggestion. "Chilindrón" was a way of spinning the rope as fast as possible, and the player had to jump rapidly to keep up with the rhythm. When playing this jump rope game, there were always shouts, arguments, screams of excitement, and our teacher, Josefa Mendía, my teacher for all of my school life, would scold us for the noise, saying: "¡Qué galillo de criaturas!" and if we talked too much in class, in formation, or in places where we should remain silent, she would tell us we had "boca de tarabilla". What amazes me now, after all these years, is: how could we jump on the cobblestones of the street with such small and pointy stones!

Guayabitas agrias

A game similar to "Arroz en Leche" was called "Guayabitas Agrias." The one leading the game would say the following, touching each player:
—Guayabitas agrias en miel y maduras, vuélvete reina de espaldas.

Whoever was touched with the last word would turn their back, and as the game continued, that player was no longer considered.

Once everyone in the circle was facing away, we would push each other with the back of our bodies toward the center of the circle.

We also entertained ourselves very quietly, and it wasn't necessary to be accompanied. On the outskirts of the city, or in some yards or fences, there were bushes called "Chacté." Their green leaves, serrated edges, and yellow flowers like bellflowers. A well-filled bouquet of flowers was enough, cut and left for a few hours or, better yet, until the next day. Once they were wilted, we would inflate them with our mouths, and if they weren't broken, we would close them like little bags using two fingers and snap them on the forehead, arm, or hand. The wilted ones were called "churucas," and the buds were sought after to "pop."

Stickers also provided entertainment. They came in various shapes and colors, and we bought them to stick in books, notebooks, cups, etc. The general way to make them stick was with water, but we mostly used saliva, rubbing it with our index finger and frequently moistening it to stick them.

Kites

It was a game more typical for boys, young children, and adolescents, but a girl could also play if there were boys in her house. The game was played in the streets, as there were no electric wires or vehicle traffic, except for the occasional ox cart, and horses, donkeys, and mules carrying loads. The kites were made of colorful tissue paper and were shaped like stars, cubes, lanterns, and other variations. They used lightweight mountain sticks. To "encumbrarlo" or lift the kite, they used thread No. 10. However, if the kites were made of cloth instead of paper, the sticks were made of bamboo, and the thread was strong hemp or twine. The kite's tail was made of thin cloth, narrow, and the end had a piece of strong plant or a ball of twine tied to it to help the kite fly higher. This ball of twine was called "molote." In the slang of this game, terms like "cola de mico," "chachaguate," "encumbrar," "cobrar," "soltadillas," etc., were used. "Cola de mico" referred to when the kite’s tail got tangled in the thread, causing the kite to spin downward and fall. "Chachaguate" meant knocking down a kite that was "encumbrado" by throwing a thread with a stone at the end onto the kite's thread. Those who did this would end up fighting. "Cobrar" meant pulling the thread to wind it onto the ball or stick at the end, either to bring the kite down or to prevent it from getting caught in a tree branch. The term "enviar un telegrama" referred to when a piece of paper with a hole was attached to the end of the thread. The constant motion would make the paper

rise high up, always staying within the thread. "Soltadillas" was the most exciting part. A group of boys would form a line, one behind the other, facing the owner of the raised kite. They would tie a branch or another heavy object to the kite's thread and shout, "¡Ay va!" (Here it goes!), throwing it up in the direction of the line of friends, who would raise their arms to catch the branch. Whoever managed to catch it would control the kite's thread for a while before doing the same. The exciting moment was the throw because everyone would shout with joy and hope to catch the branch and control the kite. Sometimes no one succeeded, and the kite would "irse" until it landed in a yard in the city or outside of it. At this point, the joy was even greater, as everyone would rush to find it. Since all the houses had large yards with many trees, and once the landing spot was known, permission would be asked to "entrar a sacar el barrilete," which was usually granted. Generally, the game would begin in the last days of September, after the school tests or exams that took place in October, and the number of kite players would increase, ending in November. The general public believed that the flying of the kites caused the rains to cease, and they would say, "Causa de estos ixocos (a derogatory term for children), ya no va a llover."

Deaths

When a person died, relatives would gather at the house of the deceased (since there were no funeral homes) to accompany the immediate family in the room where the body lay. Friends arrived without needing an invitation. The body was dressed in its usual attire, generally black for men or a nightgown for women, and sometimes shoes. It was placed on the bed or a table, with its face covered by a cloth, which each person would lift to see the deceased. When the coffin arrived, the body was placed inside it. Close friends remained near the family, while others stayed in the corridors, sometimes even in the yard or street. They would speak loudly, telling jokes, riddles, and making playful comments, creating an atmosphere full of laughter. The lovers would find a secluded spot; some would play cards. They would distribute cigars, aguardiente, aniseed liquor, or other drinks depending on the family’s economic status. At midnight, tamales, coffee, and bread were served, and there were some who "sneaked in" just to take advantage of the food. The vigil would turn into a semi-party. White curtains placed at the door and window, tied with black ribbon, signified mourning.

The burial of children from very poor families was distinguished by some sad music and humble instruments, particularly the clarinet. From the church bells came joyful peals, and for the adults, the bells tolled mournfully. The musicians who played were several, depending on the family's economic position, and they played funeral marches. The coffins were black, while children's coffins were white. For the very poor, the coffin was made with just four unpolished pine boards nailed together, and the procession sometimes consisted of just the four bearers and a relative who marched as quickly as possible, especially if it was a child, or "angelito" as they were called. In all cases, the most intense moment of sorrow came when the coffin lid was nailed shut: the mourners cried loudly, their grief renewed with each arrival of a close friend. Family members didn't go to the cemetery, except for the men, while some friends stayed behind to keep the family company at home. There was no hearse, and the coffin was carried on the shoulders of friends. For nine days, the rosary was prayed, and the *novena de difuntos* was recited, for which certain close friends, generally neighbors, were invited, usually in the evening from 7 to 8 p.m. *"Que Dios los saque de penas y los lleve a descansar,"* and *"¡Cuán terribles son mis penas, piedad, cristianos, piedad!"* were refrains from the sorrowful stanzas read from *"El Ancora de Salvación"* and the *"Novenario de los fieles difuntos."* One of the stanzas read:

"Soy tu padre hijo querido
quien tu compasión reclama
no me dejéis en olvido
penando en horrible llama"

"¡Cuán terribles son mis penas,
piedad, cristianos piedad!"

Translation:
"I am your father, dear child,
who claims your compassion,
do not leave me forgotten,
suffering in horrible flames."

"How terrible are my pains,
pity, Christians, pity."

At a certain part of the rosary, with the women kneeling, the one "leading the rosary" would say: "Here, we make the request." Then,

there would be silence, and it was an opportunity to silently ask God for a special favor for the soul of the deceased. On the last day of the prayers, or the 9th day, coffee with bread and sometimes tamales would be served. Every day during the prayers, a cigarette was offered to the older people, as they were the only ones who smoked. Friends sent white flowers to decorate the altar during the novena, and on the 10th day, they would go to Mass, inviting people to attend. Afterward, flowers and wreaths were taken to the cemetery, thus concluding the funeral ritual. On the anniversary, the same procedure was followed—novena, Mass, etc.—and people spoke of the "cabo de año" of Mr. So-and-So or Ms. Such-and-Such.

The criticism was harsh for family members who didn't strictly adhere to mourning customs in terms of clothing and refraining from parties or other distractions. For parents, mourning lasted for two years; for siblings, one year; and for uncles, aunts, and cousins, six months. However, widows abstained from wearing brightly colored dresses for life. Full mourning consisted of wearing black dress, shoes, stockings, and a black mantle. The mantle was made of merino wool and was square. It would be crossed or, the same, folded into a triangle, with two points hanging forward and the other falling down the back, lower than the waist. The mantle was worn for a year, though widows could wear it longer. Men, as a sign of mourning, wore a black tie or a black crepe ribbon on their left arm or on the lapel of their jacket, but it didn't last long.

Social life

In those years, there was almost no social life in Chiquimula; nobody visited anyone. But if, for some reason, someone had to go to another person's house to inquire about the health of a sick person or to ask about someone who was absent, it would never occur to the host to play the role of a host and offer a cup of coffee or a refreshment. A friend would never think of inviting another over to their house for a meal. Only on birthdays would some neighbors gather or send a gift. The typical tradition on one's birthday was to send tamales to neighbors and close friends, even if they lived farther away. This was done early in the morning so they could be eaten for breakfast. It was well known that when this happened, people would ask, "Who is celebrating their birthday?" and would reciprocate with a present of flowers or something else. The "agua de canela," "Horchata" (rice drink) and pieces of delicious "marquesotes" (a type of sweet bread) were always present at children's piñatas.

A trip to the capital was an event and a luxury. Modest people, but naively vain, would announce they were going to Guatemala when they were actually just spending time in a neighboring village. It was incredible and extraordinary that when people from that background met a fellow countryman or a friend in the capital, they would not greet them. Instead, they would either look straight ahead or away from where the other person was walking. This was more common among women.

San José, Costa Rica, May 13th 1974