



Dining for Women

Making Connections
January 2007
Guatemala

*The cry of the poor
is clear water
that rinses off our makeup;
We can let the mask fall.*
--Julia Esquivel, Guatemalan poet

*In the face of such enduring obstacles, a woman's doubt in her ability to
create positive changes becomes ingrained. Yet hope and strength spring from
the collective courage of women who gather together.*
--Freedom from Hunger Report, 2002, Friendship Bridge website

Happy New Year! We look forward to our second year of making connections with women in many places and to all they might teach us about themselves, ourselves, and the hopes and struggles of women around the world. This month, we return to Guatemala and Friendship Bridge. Guatemala was the subject of our very first *MC* last February. Especially if you've joined DFW since then, please see that edition (accessible via the Program Schedule on our website). Here, we'll follow up with news reported since last February that may link us to Guatemalan women in several different ways. As we support the women's trust banks sponsored by Friendship Bridge, we'll see a number of other examples of the "collective courage" of Guatemalan women. And, we'll learn about women from the United States for whom encounters with Guatemalan women have "let the mask fall," changing how they see themselves and live their lives.

FYI: Updates on Women in Guatemala... and Us

Guatemalan Adoption. Guatemala has been a place of hope for many Americans who've turned to her seeking to adopt children. According to a *New York Times* report in November 2006, "one out of every 100 (Guatemalan) children is adopted by an American family." The sad reality of childhood poverty and malnutrition in Guatemala might seem to indicate that this is a very good thing. But the high percentage of children being taken out of Guatemala has stirred controversy; and the ease with which Guatemalan adoptions can occur may be coming to an end.

The system that has "streamlined" Guatemalan adoption and made it the third most popular adoption location for Americans has also skirted human rights, international criteria for adoption, and Guatemalan law, according to human rights advocates and

Guatemalan officials to whom the *NY Times* spoke. The bottom line is that Guatemala has become a “baby farm” where children are treated as “commodities.” As one Guatemalan official told reporter Marc Lacey, “Babies are being sold, and we have to stop it.”

Adoptions in Guatemala are handled primarily by private lawyers with little government oversight. They often work with *jaladoras* (“baby brokers”) who roam rural areas looking for desperate women and girls, offering to pay maternity expenses and—under the table—a cash payment, usually a few hundred dollars. (A Guatemalan adoption can run upwards of \$30,000.) There have been attacks and even murders of *jaladoras* in rural areas where people fear they steal children or are buying them in order to harvest their organs for sale.

The treaty established by the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoptions expressly prohibits payment other than “reasonable professional fees” and “expenses.” It “states that international adoption should come only after a loving home...is sought in country.” And, it aims to stop the “traffic in children.” Members of the Hague Convention—Canada and Great Britain, for example—already restrict Guatemalan adoptions because of violations. According to the *Times*, the U.S. “plans to join the convention next year... and intends to stop approving adoptions from countries that do not meet the standards.” “Guatemala,” according to one U.S. official, “is the principal concern.” And, Guatemala’s Constitutional Court, just last year, finally decreed that the nation must adhere to the Hague criteria. Its President has signed the treaty in 2002.

Not all Guatemalan adoptions violate the criteria and many international agencies strictly guard against child trafficking. But according to one American adoption expert, prospective parents often do not know if the child they may adopt was stolen or bought from its mother. For some desperate for a child, she says, it’s “don’t ask, don’t tell.”

Violence against Women. In last February’s MC, I mentioned the shocking wave of violence against women in Guatemala. Amnesty International released an update of its original report on the violence last July. The situation is worsening. “More than 2,200 women and girls have been brutally murdered in Guatemala since 2001,” the report states. More have been brutally attacked, raped, and mutilated. The murder rate has continue to climb each year, and made a jump in the first six months of 2006.

AI faults the Guatemalan government for not “taking necessary initiative” to prevent the violence and death or to investigate and prosecute. Only 30 percent of the murders have been investigated, with arrests in only 3% of the cases. Investigations are often flawed and blame placed on the victims. The report cites Guatemala’s police chief as stating that preventing the murders depends on women avoiding “street gangs” and “violence within the family.” In a culture where macho street gangs rule many neighborhoods and domestic violence is endemic, Guatemalan officials, according to AI, just don’t take seriously the “gendered nature” of this violence and the fact that these are not isolated incidences but the results of the culture’s attitudes toward women.

In 2005, Amnesty International’s Stop the Violence Against Women campaign sent Guatemala’s President a list of recommendations. This May, 117 U.S. Congress members called on the State Department to urge “prompt and effective action” by the Guatemalan government and asked it “to provide technical assistance” in investigation. We also can get involved: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/women/guatemala/>.

Let's put a face—or a voice—to this. In our “Voices” section at the end of this edition, you'll find a poem by Rosario Lopez, a young woman working to help youth who grew up in Guatemala City's trash dump. Rosario and her sister survived the dump, but they are two young women living in a *barrio* where being threatened by gangs is an everyday occurrence. Let's hope they beat the odds once again.

Women and Labor. When you buy a T-shirt labeled “Made in Guatemala,” do you wonder who made it? The struggle for labor justice has been long and hard in Guatemala and is far from over. It is in large part a struggle for justice for women, who make up 80% of factory labor. Last time we looked at Guatemala, *MC* mentioned the 2002 Human Rights Watch report that outlined the exploitation, sexual harassment, and discrimination that women workers in Guatemala endure in the *maquilas*, or factories (often called “sweatshops”) where clothing is made for export. Many belong to U.S. manufacturers or to other “multinationals” from which U.S. companies subcontract the goods they market here. Only two *maquilas* in Guatemala have women's unions, according to STITCH, an international women's labor organization. To learn more about how Liz Claiborne, The Gap, Target, and other U.S. companies have responded to labor issues in Guatemala and elsewhere, go to <http://www.usleap.org/Maquilas/maquilatempnew.htm>. For “scorecards” on sweatshops and child labor for popular retailers, see <http://www.coopamerica.org/programs/sweatshops/scorecard.cfm>.

Last February, I also encouraged you to celebrate the Guatemalan banana as you dine together. If you do, please do so carefully for the sake of the *bananeras*, the “banana women,” in Guatemala and elsewhere in Latin America who harvest and process the bananas we eat. According to a report on WeNews by Linda Wisniewski, women comprise about 1/4 of the banana labor force. Some are young as 14. Many are single-mothers who must find other work when the growing season ends.

Labor in bananas is not easy for anyone, but there are particular hardships for women. They earn, for example, anywhere from half to a quarter of what men make in the fields and plants. They are assigned the lowest-paying jobs—like sticking those little labels on the fruit. According to a report issued by STITCH (which has taken up the cause of the *bananeras* as well as women in the *maquilas*), when Wal-Mart demanded that Guatemalan packing plants not only clean, weigh, and pack bananas but also bag and price them (saving labor costs in the U.S.), those extra tasks were assigned to women's production lines. Wal-Mart would not pay more, so the plant did not pay the women more. In fact, because the new tasks slowed the production on their lines, the women could not meet assigned production goals, resulting in lost wages and more injuries as they rushed to keep up.

And there are other dangers, chief among them pesticide exposure. The women whose task it is to spray the ripening bags into which bananas are placed are at particular risk. The insecticide used is linked to birth defects and a host of diseases including leukemia.

How can we make sure that eating bananas here doesn't kill or cheat the *bananeras*? How do we know a truly “good” bunch from the rest? Along with checking for ripeness and blemishes, look for organic (pesticide-free) and fair-trade (fair wages, good working conditions) labels—and talk to your grocer. Some companies, such as Wild Oats and Whole Foods, have made commitments to fair-trade bananas. Buying organic and fair-trade fruit won't help all the *bananeras* right away, but by letting your grocer

know you care about these issues and helping to increase demand, you could do some real good bunch by bunch. (You won't be alone—demand has already increased substantially in last few years and producers are taking note.) For more information, see http://transfairusa.org/content/shop/fresh_fruit.php.

Recommended Book

In 1991, Ellen Urbani Hildebrand, fresh from her sorority house at the University of Alabama, arrived in Guatemala wearing a Laura Ashley dress—with matching luggage and hair ribbon. Her fellow Peace Corps volunteers dubbed her “The China Doll” and took bets on how long this blue-eyed, red-haired, fair-complexioned southern girl would last. Two years later, she emerged from Guatemala a lot less color-coordinated but a lot more grown-up. It would take her another decade, however, to process fully the experience that so changed her life in *When I was Elena*. When she did, she found that what stuck with her most were her relationships with Guatemalan women. In an interview with *Peace Corps Writers*, she said her main reason for writing became “to repay the trust and friendship extended to me by the women of Guatemala by speaking of, and for, them.” She did this by interspersing their stories with her own, telling them as she imagines they would based on her conversations and experiences with them. As she wrote, she developed an even greater appreciation for the strengths of women who are “virtually silenced” in their own culture. “It was a humbling, heartening endeavor,” she said. *When I was Elena* is a testimony to women making connections and a most appropriate and moving vehicle for our own learning about women in Guatemala. Some brief excerpts from the book appear in our “Voices” section at the end of this edition. **Recommended Book: Ellen Urbani Hildebrand, *When I was Elena* (Permanent Press, 2006).** It's available from amazon.com—remember to order via the DFW website so that we receive a percentage on the sale!

Dining With Women

(Please see *MC February 2006* for a brief introduction to Guatemala's traditional foods, more recipes, and fair trade sources for Guatemalan foods.)

A couple of years ago, the photojournalist team Peter Menzel and Faith D'Aluisio published *Hungry Planet: What the World Eats* (Ten Speed Press, 2005). This coffee-table size book contains photos of families around the world—some very poor, some pretty well-off—along with the food they consume on a weekly basis. Among the families included is the Mendoza family who lives in a village in the mountains that have been occupied for centuries by Mayans. The Mendozas are better off than most of Guatemala's people and eat better in terms of quantity and quality of food. Susana feeds her family with fresh fruits and vegetables. She avoids the sweets craved by most in her culture; her daughter Cristolina proudly displayed her “cavity-free” smile to Menzel and D'Aluisio. While most of their fellow villagers would have meat less than once a week, the Mendozas can have chicken, lamb or turkey more frequently. (They live too far from the water to have fish.) Still, they base their diet on the rice, beans, eggs, and corn tortillas on which most others survive. Susana's recipes illustrate a frugal use of meat—in a soup extended and enriched with cornmeal, for example. I didn't include Susana's Turkey Soup recipe here because it isn't very practical for most of us. If, however, you

are willing to kill and dress your own turkey, I encourage you to seek out the book. Please do anyway; it is a revelation.

In the photo of the family, they appear beautifully clothed in traditional dress with their week's supply of food that costs them the equivalent of seventy-five dollars. An array of vegetables and fruits—green beans, tomatoes, chiles, squash, garlic, oranges, lemons, bananas, pineapple, cabbage, potatoes—sits alongside sacks and baskets of dried black beans, cornmeal, and rice on hand-woven cloths. Four plump golden chickens peak out of a pot sitting next to a tray of eggs. A few small bags of tortilla chips, some chocolate, and chicken bouillon are the only prepared foods. There are no sodas; only bottled water, a wheat drink, and coffee. To see what the Mendozas consume in a week is to see not only how so many other Guatemalans could eat save for poverty but also how most of us ought to eat more often.

Menu

Susana forgive us, but our menu includes *two* dessert possibilities—a traditional flan and a cookie inspired by the indigenous mix of chocolate and chile. Everything else, I hope, she might approve. All the recipes can or should be made ahead, at least partially.

Guacamole, salsa, and tortilla chips,
served with a tropical fruit drink such as banana *licuado* (see *MC Feb 2006*)
Jocon
(Guatemalan Chicken with Pumpkin Seed Sauce)
Latin Rice Pilaf
(a good quality mix, such as Goya's Mexican Rice, is fine)
Frijoles Negros (Black Beans)
(as a side or with warm corn tortillas or rice and salsa for a vegetarian main course)
Curtido (Cabbage Relish)
Mayan Chocolate Cookies and/or Almond Flan
(with Tropical Fruit—or fruit alone for the newly resolved)
Fair Trade Guatemalan Coffee

Recipes

Jocon

(Chicken with Pumpkin Seed Sauce)

Adapted from http://www.whats4eats.com/recipes/r_po_jocon.html

This was a big hit at the Greenville meeting last February, but I didn't put it in *MC* because I thought the longish instructions might put people off. Silly me. So many asked for the recipe that I included it in our review issue last June. Here it is again, slightly revised. It really is easy if you have a food processor or blender and very forgiving—quantities don't have to be precise. And it's so good. I hope you enjoy it as much as we did last year. Cilantro-phobes needn't worry: the grassy taste that some people abhor in fresh cilantro mellows when it's cooked. The seeds and tortillas serve as thickeners for the sauce in this recipe. If you're strapped for time, you can use a plain rotisserie chicken instead of poaching chicken breasts—good but not quite as outstanding (see note at end).
3 1/2lbs chicken breast halves (bone-in)

1 1/2-2 cartons (quarts) of low-sodium chicken broth (such as Swanson's Natural Goodness or an organic brand; any leftover broth can be used for other recipes)

1/4 c roasted *pepitas* or pumpkin seeds (hulled or unhulled)—found in Latin sections of groceries and in health-food stores.

1/4 c tahini (raw sesame seed paste—the same thing you’d use to make *hummus*)

1 bunch coarsely chopped cilantro (leaves and tender parts of stems)

1 bunch coarsely chopped scallions/green onions

1 1/2c chopped fresh tomatillos, papery hulls removed (canned tomatillos, drained and chopped, or an equal amount of tomatillo puree will also work)

2 jalapenos, seeded and chopped, or more or less to taste (heat varies widely in jalapenos, so test each one)

2 toasted and cooled 6-inch tortillas (leftover ones are fine—even authentic)

fresh salsa, sour cream, and cilantro for garnish (optional)

For Chicken:

Place the chicken in a large pot (with lid) and add enough broth to cover it well. Bring the broth and chicken to a full boil and boil for 1 minute. Cover and turn off heat.

Allow chicken to sit in the broth undisturbed for approximately 1 hour until done.

(If chicken isn’t done, just let it sit a little longer.) Drain, cool, bone and shred chicken.

Reserve the chicken broth. You could do this a day ahead and store the broth and chicken separately in the fridge. Btw: This is a great way to get moist chicken for salads or casseroles and to improve purchased chicken broth.

For Sauce:

Soak the tortillas in a little of the chicken broth to soften them. Warm roasted pumpkin seeds in a non-stick pan to bring out flavor. Grind the pumpkin seed in a coffee or spice grinder to a powder. (Or just do your best with a food processor or a hammer!—you’ll process these again later.) Toast tahini in a non-stick pan just until fragrant and tan-colored. In a blender (or food processor), place coarsely chopped cilantro, scallion, and tomatillos. Add chopped jalapeno to your taste and the softened tortillas, torn into large pieces. Pulse to grind ingredients. Add the ground seeds and toasted tahini to the processor plus 1c chicken broth. Process all the sauce ingredients to a smooth puree.

To Complete the Dish:

In a large saucepan, mix the chicken and puree and just enough broth to make a fairly thick sauce-like consistency for the chicken. Simmer for 25 minutes, partially covered on a medium-low heat, stirring occasionally. Sauce will thicken slightly. Add more broth if it’s too thick. If it’s lacking zip (can happen if you use canned tomatillos or if they aren’t quite as zesty as they should be), add a squeeze or two of lime juice. Serve with rice or tortillas. A fresh tomato salsa and some sour cream on the side are nice too. I like to place the Jocon in the middle of a large platter, surround it with rings of rice into which I’ve mixed some well-drained black beans and defrosted, cooked corn, and top the whole thing with dollops of salsa, a drizzle of sour cream (thinned slightly with a little milk) and a sprinkle of chopped cilantro. It’s gorgeous! Leftover Jocon makes great enchilada or taco filling.

Note on Using Rotisserie Chicken: Shred the chicken and set aside. Make the sauce in the blender as directed, adding 1 more cup of broth to the puree before cooking it. Cook the sauce—but without the chicken—for twenty-five minutes as directed. Then add the chicken and cook only until it’s heated through. You may need to add more hot broth if the consistency is very thick. Don’t let the dish boil after adding the chicken.

Frijoles Negros (Black Beans)

fr. Lora Brody, Slow Cooker Cooking (William Morrow, 2001)

Here's a good reason to dig out your crockpot. This is the easiest and best way I know to cook flavorful black beans. Makes a lot (around 8 cups). The recipe is for a 5 quart slow cooker. You can halve the recipe for a smaller crockpot—just make sure the beans are well-covered with broth when you start and check them earlier for doneness. My three-quart cooker on HIGH does half the recipe in eight hours. From here you can develop soup, refried beans, etc, etc.

1 lb dried black beans, picked over, rinsed, and drained (no pre-soaking)
1 c loosely packed fresh cilantro
1 large onion, chopped
3 garlic cloves, minced
10 c low-sodium chicken broth or vegetable broth
1/3 c vegetable oil
1 smoked ham hock or 1/2 lb smoked turkey in 1" cubes, optional
Tabasco , optional
Salt and Pepper

Put everything but the tabasco, salt and pepper in the slow cooker. Cover and cook on HIGH for 12-18 hours, until the beans are extremely soft. Reheating even improves these. I like to add a dried ancho or pasilla chile (stem and seeds removed) and a tablespoon or so of ground cumin at the beginning. The depth (not much heat) added by the dried chile and cumin is especially nice if you're making this vegetarian.

Curtido

Adapted fr. Suzanne Martinson at <http://www.post-gazette.com/food/centamrecipebp9.asp>

Curtido is cross between coleslaw and cabbage relish and is eaten as an accompaniment to other foods in Central America. In the United States, you're most likely to find it served alongside *pupusas* (corncakes) in Salvadoran and Guatemalan restaurants.

1 small head of cabbage, finely shredded (or, a bag of finely shredded cabbage)
2 to 3 carrots, finely shredded (or, a bag of shredded carrots)
1 small onion, chopped finely
1 t dried oregano (or 1T fresh)
1/2 c apple cider vinegar
1/2 c water
1t brown sugar
Salt and pepper

Fill a bowl large to enough to hold the shredded cabbage with water. Add enough salt to the water to give it a salty taste. Add the cabbage and allow to soak for 15 minutes. Drain well. Add the other ingredients and mix well. Marinate at least overnight in refrigerator. It's better after two days. Adjust salt if necessary and add plenty of black pepper when ready to serve.

Mayan Chocolate Icebox Cookies

Adapted from the recipe at <http://sourpatch.wordpress.com/2006/05/06/cbbp-1-mexican-chocolate-icebox-cookies/> based on Maida Heatter's. Also consulted: <http://www.texasmonthly.com/forum/read.php?f=1&i=4755&t=4755>

This recipe was popularized in the United States when it appeared in the renowned Maida Heatter's *Book of Great Chocolate Desserts* in the eighties. Although she got the recipe from a Guatemalan friend, she dubbed it "Mexican Chocolate Icebox Cookies." The recipe got a second life when Liberty Bar, a popular restaurant in San Antonio, put a version of it on its brunch menu. There, Guatemala is acknowledged in the name. I'm going to split the difference and call them "Mayan Chocolate Cookies." The combination of spice and chocolate is surely inspired by the Mayan heritage shared by both countries. The spice is subtle but adds an interesting dimension to these addictive cookies.

1 1/2 c all-purpose flour

3/4 c unsweetened cocoa powder (preferably Dutch process, but plain old Hershey's works and Fair Trade cocoa even better)

1/4 t salt

1/4 t finely ground pepper

1/4 t cayenne pepper

3/4 t cinnamon

1 1/2 sticks (12 T) unsalted butter, room temperature

1 1/2 t vanilla extract—Mexican vanilla preferably

1 cup granulated sugar

1 large egg

1. Sift together the flour, cocoa, salt, pepper, cayenne, and cinnamon and set aside.
2. In the large bowl of an electric mixer cream the butter. Add the vanilla and sugar and beat to mix thoroughly.
3. Beat in the egg, then on low speed gradually add the sifted dry ingredients, scraping the bowl with a rubber spatula and beating only until mixed.
4. Toward the end of the mixing, if the dough starts to crawl up on the beaters, remove the bowl from the mixer and finish the mixing with a wooden or rubber spatula.
5. Lightly flour a large board. Turn the dough out onto the board. Lightly flour your hands and shape the dough into a cylinder about 10 inches long and about 2 inches in diameter.
6. Wrap the cylinder of dough in plastic. If you need to make them sooner rather than later, place it in the freezer until firm—at least 30 minutes. You can bake immediately after that, but the dough improves if stored in the fridge several hours or even a couple of days. Dough can also be frozen for several weeks, but you'll need to allow it to thaw slightly before trying to cut it.
7. When you are ready to bake, adjust two oven racks to divide the oven into thirds and preheat oven to 375 degrees.
8. Unwrap the dough and place it on a board. With a sharp, heavy knife cut it into slices 1/4 inch thick.
9. Place the slices 1 1/2 to 2 inches apart (they may spread a little during baking) on ungreased cookie sheets.
10. Bake 10 or 11 minutes, reversing the sheets top to bottom and front to back once during the baking to bake evenly. The cookies are done when they feel almost firm to the touch. Watch them carefully—they can overbake very easily because it's difficult to see

the dark chocolate burning. They will continue to “cook” a bit as the cool down but shouldn’t become hard.

11. If you bake only one sheet at a time, bake it on the upper rack and watch very carefully—the cookies will bake in a little less time than if there were two sheets in the oven.

12. Let baked cookies cool for a few seconds on the sheets until firm enough to be moved. Then, with a wide metal spatula, transfer the cookies to the racks to cool.

13. Store airtight. They’re best baked a day ahead and they keep well for a few days.

Almond Flan

Adapted fr. http://www.sallys-place.com/food/ethnic_cusine/guatemala.htm

This version of the popular Latin American custard dessert that traces its history to Spanish roots comes from Guatemalan chef Lou Siebert Pappas. Flan isn’t really complicated, but I’ve given full instructions for those new to making caramel or custard. The recipe calls for a 1 1/2 quart ring mold that is ovenproof. Mine doesn’t quite hold all the custard, so I suggest a two-quart. You’ll also need a larger pan in which your mold will sit without the sides touching—a 13x9 baking pan usually works. 8-10 servings.

1 c sugar

3-1/2 c milk

6 eggs

2 egg yolks

1 t vanilla extract

1/2 t almond extract

1/3 c toasted chopped almonds, tropical fruits (such as kiwi, mango and pineapple) or berries for garnish (optional)

Preheat oven to 350 and place a rack in the middle.

Make the caramel: Heat 1/2 cup of the sugar over moderate heat in a heavy saucepan or nonstick sauté pan (my preference) until it melts and turns a deep brown-amber and is fluid—five minutes or so. Swirl the pan occasionally so the sugar melts evenly, but don’t stir the sugar. **NOW BE VERY CAREFUL HERE:** Hot caramel can give a nasty burn. Don’t touch it and don’t taste it! Immediately but cautiously pour it into the mold and tilt to coat the bottom completely. The caramel will heat the mold, so have some hotpads nearby to hold the mold as you tilt it. If you spill caramel on yourself, just stop and apply ice immediately—1/2 c of sugar isn’t worth a burn. The caramel will become solid quickly and may even crack. That’s okay, it will liquefy again as the flan cooks. To remove caramel from edges of the mold, counters, pans, etc., allow it to cool completely and most of it will crack and peel off. You can apply cold water to any stubborn pieces to help them release or melt them with hot water. Whew... it sounds traumatic, but if you’re reasonably careful, this works out just fine.

Make custard: Have a pitcher of very hot water standing by. Place your mold inside the larger pan. Pour milk into a saucepan and heat until scalding (small bubbles appear around the edges). Beat eggs and yolks until light and beat in the remaining 1/2 cup sugar. Stir in a little of the milk and whisk vigorously. Gradually add the rest of the milk and the vanilla and almond extracts. Pour into the mold sitting in the larger pan. Carefully place on your oven rack. Very carefully fill the larger pan with hot water until it comes about half the way up the sides of the mold. Carefully push the rack in the oven and close the door. Bake for 45-50 minutes until set. (If your mold doesn’t quite hold all the

custard, check it 40 minutes—mine was done in 42.) The flan’s inner and outer edges should be firm and it should jiggle very slightly around the middle when lightly shaken. Remove carefully from the oven and then from the larger pan. Let cool on a rack, cover, and chill several hours, preferably overnight. With a thin knife, loosen the flan around the edges of the pan. Place a plate (at least a couple of inches large than the mold) over the mold, and carefully turn over the mold. Tap it gently to release. The caramel should run out while the flan stays firm. (If some of the caramel remains solid in the pan, that’s okay. You can place the pan in warm water to melt it, but you’ll have plenty anyway.) You can sprinkle the flan with almonds or serve with berries or diced mixed tropical fruit, but its good on its own.

Resources

<http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/guatemala/>

<http://www.stitchonline.org/>

<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2002/02/12/guatem3733.htm>

<http://peacecorpswriters.org/pages/2006/0605/605talkhildebrand.html>

http://www.ellenurbanihildebrand.com/media_room/photo_gallery.php

http://www.epica.org/Library/women/guate_women.htm

<http://www.fotokids.org/en/?locat=Home>

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/document.do?id=ENGAMR340192006>

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/countries/guatemala/document.do?id=ENGUSA20060718001>

<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/foodmonthly/story/0,,1433606,00.html>

<http://www.usleap.org/Maquilas/maquilatempnew.htm>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/05/world/americas/05guatemala.html?ei=5094&en=6509083f93123b43&hp=&ex=1162789200&partner>

<http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/2970>

<http://www.bananalink.org.uk/>

www.laborrights.org/projects/corporate/walmart/Wal-Mart&Women0905.pdf

Julia Esquivel, *The Certainty of Spring: Poems by a Guatemalan in Exile*, trans. by Anne Woehrlé (Washington, D.C.: EPICA, 1993)

Kristine L. Franklin and Nancy McGirr, ed. *Out of the Dump: Writings and Photographs by Children from Guatemala* (NY: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books, 1996)

Margaret Hooks, *Guatemalan Women Speak* (EPICA, 1991)

Connie Newton et al, “Microcredit with Integrated Services: A Case Study of Friendship Bridge in Guatemala Friendship Bridge” April, 2005

See “Voices” on the next page...

VOICES

To read these aloud in your meeting, you'll need six readers, one for each of the numbered excerpts below, plus another person to read the introduction below and each of the introductions to the excerpts (titles underlined). Readers will want to review the selections ahead of time.

Introduction

Guatemalan women suffer the highest illiteracy rate in Latin America. Here is ample testimony to what they can do when they have access to education and the support of other women. Here is testimony to the power of their creativity unleashed—in writing, in the ancient tradition of weaving, in modern photography, and in the perpetual, everyday task of cooking. Here is expressed the determination to overcome formidable obstacles, to hope in the face of dire circumstances; and to use self-expression as a form of protest against injustice, as a means of self and world transformation. Here is the courage to live in the face of death, a courage often quickened by another woman's words, actions, example, or *just by her paying attention*.

When we hear these voices, we may also hear something familiar. As vastly different as our circumstances can be from that of the women of Guatemala, they can gift us with the ability to see our own selves anew, to encourage us to give voice, to take flight.

A Poet's Protest

Julia Esquivel has led a life of speaking out on behalf of the poorest of Guatemala. She has stared down evil and pointed beyond it to a different way—a way of hope and humaneness. While many of her compatriots have lost their lives—tortured, assassinated, martyred—Julia, now in her seventies, continues their work as she has for decades, as a theologian, peace activist, educator, and poet.

Among the evils that Julia Esquivel is eager to name is the patriarchal nature of oppression; for in her eyes the oppression of women and the oppression of an entire people arise from the same cold objectification of human beings into tools to be used, property to be seized; things to be rationalized and controlled. Throughout the years, she has found inspiration in the women of Guatemala, to whom she dedicated a collection of poetry entitled, *The Certainty of Spring*. In one of the poems, she confronts the *machismo* of oppression for what it is, refuting its dismissive way of silencing women (and men) who see another vision of life.

1. I Am Not Possessed! (1986)

*For the many valiant women
Of my Guatemala (John 8:49)*
I am not possessed
I am not crazy
obsessed with an idea.

I am simply a woman
with a human heart.

I am a rebel
when faced with the cold and calculated
correctness of a bureaucrat.

He who is always bound
by the limits of the “the correct”
“the objective” and “the prudent”
of an always-neutral balance.

The one who avoids taking risks
for the sake of his office
and his prestige.

I am the possessor of
(not possessed by)
the normality of a woman
that rejects and always will reject
the disorder constituted
by *machos*,
all of them potential generals.

By all those
who place the law
above life;
the institution above humanity,
the personal project
above truth,
fear above love,
ambition
above humility.

But I must admit
to those obsessed
with such criteria,
I am a red-hot coal
lighted by the fire
of a great love.

Brother,

Do you know the story
of the burning bush
that was never consumed?

Weaving Women, Weaving Worlds

In 1991, a book of testimonies by Guatemalan women appeared. Such speaking out was a form of protest that eventually made the world take notice of Guatemala's plight, albeit very late. Foremost among the women who spoke out was human rights activist and noble laureate Rigoberta Menchu Tum. She connected the ability of Guatemalan women to rise above their suffering and the hope of preserving the indigenous culture of Guatemala, with their long tradition of weaving. "Our women have known how to struggle for our culture," she said, "...we are the weavers." In this testimony, "Elena," a weaver in exile in Mexico, connects the empowerment of Guatemalan Indian women in their creative work to speaking and thinking for themselves. Like Rigoberta and Julia, she expresses the belief that the empowerment of women is essential for the preservation of a people.

2. "Elena's Story" from *Guatemalan Women Speak*

In 1985 I became involved in the weaving workshop.... We are interested in the Indian question; the original idea behind forming the workshop was to be able to work on this issue in addition to producing our weavings.

I love weaving. I began to weave when I was seven. I can weave anything and embroider as well. In Guatemala there would be five of us weaving together. My mother and my grandmother would be around and so would other people. It was more sociable. We often wove on the patio under the trees and it was good fun. But in Mexico City it is different—we started off in an apartment. We had the warp tied to the window-pane and we were always afraid of making too much noise and disturbing our neighbors. We felt uncomfortable—it wasn't how we had done it in Guatemala.

I don't wear my *traje* (the traditional dress embellished with elaborate weaving) here. It's not possible. It's very hard for me because it is instilled in us that we are Indian, and that our identity comes from our *traje*, from our language, and from our community. By 1980 if you wore an Ixil *traje* you were automatically regarded as a guerrilla. I wear these clothes, trousers, because I have to. But I don't feel right. I have stored my *traje* away, but sometimes, when I can, I put it on for a while. When I picture myself in Guatemala, I always see myself in my *traje*.

...To most people in Guatemala, the Indian is ignorant and illiterate. So, when they see an Indian like me who can speak Spanish, who wears glasses and a watch, they say I am no longer an Indian. But it doesn't make any difference---I can wear these things and know how to operate a computer, and I will still be Indian. The fact that Indians improve themselves and get ahead doesn't mean that they are not Indians. It depends on what you feel and your identity with your people, your culture, and your ancestors.

Indians are involved in the struggle, but what is it that we really want? We began to analyze this in the weaving workshop, to put forward different ideas and to talk to Indians from other groups. Then we thought, "We're talking about Indians in general, but what about Indian women?" Indian women carry two or three times the load because we have to struggle against racial and sexual discrimination. But we believe that Indian women have a right to organize as women.... In the workshop, we soon realized that we women were the ones doing most of the work---not only producing the weavings, but doing the political and solidarity work as well. We became aware of our abilities. We weren't women "fit for nothing but housework, who can't think, who are backward"—all

the awful things they say about women. But when we began talking about women's situation, many Indian *compañeros* said, "What kind of women are these?" and started running us down....

Presenting women as "victims" goes hand-in-hand with discrimination. Unfortunately, this still goes on practically everywhere. The woman gives testimony and the man gives analysis. From our point of view, this cannot continue. We can continue to give testimony, but we can also provide analysis and even write books. We must become the protagonists in our own struggle.

Out of the Dump

Also in 1991, Reuters photojournalist Nancy McGirr went to Guatemala. She found herself drawn to the children—some 1000—who live in Guatemala City's sprawling dump. The children were also drawn to her, or, to her camera. She taught some of the children to use cameras to tell about their lives. Writer Kris Franklin helped the children put into words what they were capturing on film. The result was a book of poetry and photos called *Out of the Dump*. McGirr developed the project into a non-profit organization called Fotokids that provides education and leadership training using the visual arts. The work of these young photographers is being displayed around the world.

Two poems by members of the original group illustrate the depths of hope and despair among Guatemala's poor women. They contrast the dreams of girlhood with the sad reality of too many women's lives. Rosario Lopez and Gladiz Jimenez were only 11 and 13 when they wrote their poems. Today, Gladiz is a secretary in one of Guatemala's leading medical practices. Rosario manages the scholarship program for Fotokids.

3. Like a Princess

by Rosario Lopez

Sometimes I find treasures
in the trash.

I like the toys,
the dolls and the balls,
but toys are for six-year-olds
and now I'm eleven.

I'd like something new.

Now I'd like to find
a purple silk skirt,
flat, black shoes,
the kind that shine
like a mirror, a pink silk blouse
with long sleeves, with lace.

I'd like to find a gold necklace,
and a golden bracelet too,
and a ring with a diamond
that gives light like a star;

and dressed this way
I would walk around
as happy as a princess.

4. Old Woman

by Gladiz Jimenez

The oldest woman
at the dump dresses

in a tattered Indian skirt.

Her clothes are torn,
she goes barefoot all the time,
her face is very wrinkled.

They cover up
her old brown eyes.

It is a sad face
because she's depressed.

Her daughter died.

The old woman used to sell gum
and fruit drinks on the street,

But now she doesn't do a thing.

She used to live

With her thirteen-year old granddaughter,
but the granddaughter got married.

Now she lives alone,

The poor old sad woman.

Another "Elena"

And (once again) in 1991, Ellen Urbani Hildebrand, fresh from her sorority house at the University of Alabama, arrived in Guatemala wearing a Laura Ashley dress—with matching luggage and hair ribbon. Her fellow Peace Corps volunteers dubbed her “The China Doll” and took bets on how long this blue-eyed, red-haired, fair-complexioned southern girl would last. Two years later, she emerged from Guatemala a lot less color-coordinated but a lot more grown-up. It would take her another decade to process fully the experience that so changed her life in *When I was Elena*. Not just a memoir about herself, *When I was Elena* is Ellen's attempt to understand and give voice to the women of Guatemala who befriended her, sometimes rescued her, and gave so much to her while she was supposed to be helping them. Partly told in her own voice and partly in imaginative recreations of the voices of Guatemalan women she knew, *When I was Elena* is a testimony to what Guatemalan women have to share with us and to women making connections across cultures. Here “Elena” talks about Hermilda. Then Hermilda talks about herself.

5. “Elena's story”

When I first met Hermilda she seemed a nebbish soul; but then she was no longer who she had once been. Life sucked her from herself. But like a child she was eager for new experiences, as if to replace all she had lost.

She expressed great interest in the after-school class I taught... “I would like to learn!” she said with gusto, and so I invited her along but, egad, No!, she could not do

that. “My husband,” she said, with a swooping gesture, as if to indicate he could be around, anywhere, omnipotent.

“What about him?” I asked, and she replied with a whisper that he would never let her leave, and so it is that I discovered her confined to the house.

“Then I will write instructions for you,” I said, “and you can do the projects here at home.” But, egad, No!, she could not do that, and so it is that I discovered she cannot read.

“Then I will stop here before I return home every Wednesday, and we will work on something together.” Here, finally, we hit on a plan that worked.

... We sat always together in the cramped kitchen corner, which she explained belonged to her, and the other, larger (nicer) kitchen, to her mother-in-law who lived with her. To my practical question of why they did not share a kitchen she responded with incredulity: “She would never let me work in her kitchen, and since this is her son’s house I do not deserve the better space. This is because she hates me, of course, and I am very scared of her. But she won’t come into my kitchen, because it disgusts her, and so I am safe in here.”

I taught her first to spell her name and then to draw, to knit, and to crochet. She taught me to make her glorious guacamole, the ingredients for which are simple and few, but –as with my grandmother’s mashed potatoes—I can never seem to mix them appropriately enough to replicate the taste of the original. I introduced her to the traveler’s dutch oven, a big pot with a pan balanced on a rock inside that, covered and put to flame, yields a biscuit or cake or cookie, and at this the chef in her escaped and never disappeared again.

From the single pot on the chintzy flame came this insurrection: aromatic stews, roasted squash, pasta, a pie! ...Hermilda blossomed at the end of a wooden spoon.... Her original confections so pleased me, and my enthusiasm so pleased her, that soon she set her full creative energies to the design of self-inspired meals for our pleasure. I stopped teaching her my artistic crafts, for what sense is there in diverting such bountiful potential? Instead, I kept her company while she worked and then ate and departed. Hermilda knew when to shoo me from her home, shuffling me out with an eye to the sun, so she could cook the beans and tortillas her family required. This left her time to finish her mundane chores before her husband and mother-in-law returned from their day out to cause her trouble....

Hermilda showed up at the after-school group, sneaking over intermittently at first, but then becoming a regular attendee. In the beginning she took part in the regular craft class, then escorted me to her home and cooked for me as had been our custom, but one day the soup tasted too delicious not to share, and in the excitement generated by my profuse praise Hermilda agreed to teach the children to make it....

Hermilda arrived late, visibly shaking with fear, her countenance cowed and the vegetables dancing a nervous shuffle in the cradle of her skirt. When her face lifted and she saw us all she yelped, dropped the food, and then turned and fled, scuttling back toward her house with frantic steps. I caught up with her quickly though, turned her around, said “You can do this!” Holding tight to her hand, I coaxed her back.

That first time I provided the commentary, for she could not speak.... By plying her with questions, I managed to wrangle from her in the ensuing weeks a few words now and then, until finally one day she spoke without my prodding.

...Hermilda changed. Proof came when she let down the hem of her skirts, for they no longer fell all the way to her ankles, and you may insist it is only that she stood straighter but I will always believe she gained confidence-won height. You must believe me... she grew! She talked more, too, and laughed from deep within herself. Suddenly she told stories, and then one day she gave advice, which only someone sure of herself can do.

... (F)ull of good food and competent instruction, the girls crowded around her... and swaddled her in long-overdue adulation.

What a joy it is to see someone become the person a child believes she can be.

6. “Hermilda’s story”

I have been busy making recipes from my own mind. My tongue has a good way of knowing when the tastes go right together, and with a thoughtful consideration of the combinations I can make even the normal foods taste special. The squash is a good ally that will adapt its self to the mixtures of different spices, and the fruits from the trees that I forage up the hill, beyond our field, yield great sweetness when put to the flame. I collect the food very gently and coax out of it with kind talk the best of its flavor. So while I cook I have a conversation with the materials and they most often answer me with a fine taste and it is as if I am not working alone but in friendly company....

Now I have this thing of which to be proud, and also have begun to ponder the question of where the road goes as it passes my house. I have decided it is time to make some of my own decisions about where I can go and what I can do with this food I create....

What a strange relief to have found I am yet alive; I have not died!... I will say at first, the thought of tying up my husband and my mother-in-law... did appeal to me. But of course there were many problems with that plan... In the end, I only talked to him. Do not forget, though, that it had been some years since we spoke to each other more than a few words, so talking alone was enough of a surprise. I had my speech and I made it just the way I planned, with my face set in just the way I hoped to hold it to hide the fear. Throughout it all I kept my hand with the knife in my pocket in case I needed it, and it gave me strength even though I had no use for it in the end....

I said: "For many years I have been your wife and I have served you well. I know you do not like me or think good thoughts of me, nor I of you, and that will never change." (As I hoped, I shocked him with my speech, and he did not move to strike me in his surprise.)

I continued: "But no more will you tell me what I cannot do and where I cannot go. I will do all of the tasks I have always done, and neither you nor your mother will ever know that anything has changed, but when no one else is around, I will make the decisions for myself of what to do with the time that is mine. And if you think to try and stop me, or to strike me or punish me or keep me from doing these things, I will put poison in your food and murder you dead and your mother with you."

When he did not move to kill me or to respond, I knew he could see the me I was again and that I would be, in small ways, free. So still I do my chores and light my mother-in-law's fire, and I cook the beans and the eggs for my family with the tamales and the tortillas too. But for myself and for my class I make the new recipe inventions. On those days I work extra hard and fast at my other tasks, but this brings me some

pleasure for now I do it for my own purposes. My husband still does not talk to me, and that is fine for he does not interest me, and my mother-in-law I no longer let myself hear.

...Though it is perhaps only a small change for you to hear about, I am happy with all that I have gotten back. It is more than I expected, and that is more than enough for me.