



Dining for Women

Making Connections
Preview Edition
January 2007
Guatemala

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

This month, we return to Guatemala. It was the subject of our very first *MC* last February. Especially if your group has joined DFW since then, please see that edition for background information and ideas you may find useful this month. I'll refer to it occasionally here and in the full edition of *MC*. You can access *MC* February 06 or any previous edition via our Program Schedule on the website. (If you should have trouble, please contact me and I'll send you a copy in Word format: corrienorman1959@yahoo.com.)

What to Expect in this month's MC

- 1) **FYI**. Brief updates on three issues highlighted in the news since last February that can link Guatemalan women and us in several different ways: Guatemalan-U.S. adoption practices, labor rights in the industries that produce many of our clothes, and a campaign against the epidemic of violence against women in Guatemala. Links to resources for further information and action will be provided as well.
- 2) **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 to fully process the experience that so changed her life in *When I was Elena* (Permanent Press, 2006). Not just a memoir that chronicles her experience, *When I was Elena* is an 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 trying to help them. Partly told in her own voice and partly in imaginative recreations of the voices of Guatemalan women, *When I was Elena*, is a testimony to women making connections. It's a most appropriate and moving vehicle for our own learning about women in Guatemala. (Some brief excerpts from the book will appear in our "Voices" section this month.)
- 3) Dining with Women. We'll have full menu of suggested dishes inspired by Guatemala. Please review *MC February 06* for ideas (there's chocolate!) and recipes. Also, among our biggest hits in Greenville last year was a Guatemalan chicken dish called "Jocon." *Highly recommended*. You'll find the recipe in *MC JUNE 2006* (our first "review" edition) toward the end. I'm still tweaking the menu for this month, but if you need it or the recipes before the 10th, just email me. (The "Jocon" will most likely reappear as the main dish and I'm revising the recipe for it slightly; but I'm also enjoying testing some other possibilities.) Also, I refer in this month's DwW to photos of a Guatemalan family and their weekly food consumption that appear in a very interesting book, Peter Menzel and Faith D'Aluisio, *Hungry Planet: What the World Eats* (Ten Speed Press, 2005). You might see if your public library has it and display the photo (page 156) at the meeting.
 - 4) Voices. Guatemalan women suffer under the highest illiteracy rate in Latin America. In our "Voices" section, we'll see ample testimony to what they can do when they have access to education and the support of other women. The selections I've chosen illustrate their talents not only for writing but also in other creative areas. They also illustrate a profoundly moving determination to overcome formidable obstacles and to hope in the face of dire circumstances.

Ideas for Chapter Meetings

- 1) As indicated in my description of the "Voices" section of MC above, one thing that stands out as I continue to learn about Guatemala is the great creative energy of Guatemalan women. They have a long tradition of this. *MC February 2006* focused on the ancient tradition of weaving in Guatemala, still alive although suffering under the challenges of globalization and political repression. In that edition of *MC*, I listed several resources (on-line, in books, or purchasable through fair-trade companies) on weaving and other crafts. I encourage you to bring a little color to your meetings by displaying photographs of or actual items of Guatemalan handiwork. This is especially appropriate since the trustbank that we support through Friendship Bridge provides support to some women who earn their livings through these arts.
- 2) And, speaking of Friendship Bridge, they have a brand new video. It's accessible via their website (www.friendshipbridge.org), just scroll down the red-outlined box on the right side of the home page. It's only 14 minutes long and would be great to show at your meeting, technology permitting. Unless you have the means to download/project it onto a larger screen for your entire group to view together, here's what I suggest: Set up a laptop to play the video as people are arriving when they can view it in two's or three's more easily. The sound should draw them in. You might provide some Guatemala-inspired appetizers while they watch and others wait/arrive– tortilla chips and guacamole with a banana *licuado*

- (see Feb 2006 recipe) or lemonade (popular in Guatemala) if you're feeling tropical; for something more warming, maybe hot chocolate (for which we thank the Mayan ancestors of Guatemala). Latecomers might view it during dessert.
- 3) Especially if showing the video isn't realistic for your group, you might read the excerpt from Dana Whitaker's book, *Transforming Lives \$40 at a Time*, that features Magdalena Mesia, a weaver who is supported by Friendship Bridge. You might read it to introduce Friendship Bridge's work in combination with the "Voices" readings. You'll find the link to it on the FB website, a couple of items down from the link to the video.
 - 4) "Voices" this month features three short poems, two companion excerpts from *When I was Elena*, and a testimony from a Guatemalan weaver in exile during the Civil War. It should take around 10-12 minutes to read. Two of the poems were written by girls growing up in a dump in Guatemala City. They were featured in a 1996 book by Kristine L. Franklin and Nancy McGirr entitled, *Out of the Dump: Writings and Photographs by Children from Guatemala* (NY: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books, 1996). It is available in many public libraries. I encourage you to look for it and display the photos that accompany the two poems if you can. Your members would no doubt be interested to look through the rest of the book as well. The project through which the photographs and poems were generated has subsequently become Fotokids, a wonderful initiative that encourages education and leadership for Guatemalan youth. If you can't find the book, you can access recent Fotokids art at <http://www.fotokids.org/en/?locat=Home>. If you click on "shop" on the toolbar, you can access images of one of the poets (Rosario Lopez) on the Christmas cards that Fotokids offers for sale (quite distinctive cards, if you plan ahead this far...). The third poem is by the distinguished poet and activist Julia Esquivel, now in her seventies. I'll of course give the English version, but it was published in a dual-language edition. If you have a member(s) who is fluent in Spanish, it might be very moving for people to hear the Spanish version as well—even if all can't understand it. You might ask two readers to alternate Spanish and English versions of the stanzas. Email me and I'll be happy to send you the Spanish version. You'll need six readers (seven, if you include a Spanish reading). Each piece comes with a brief introduction. You might have one other person read the introductions before each piece (or the six readers could do it for their own parts). Finally, I'm hearing that groups are using the "Voices" materials to close their meetings and finding them very moving. I'm glad. But I do hope you'll take a little time to encourage discussion of the readings if you can. I choose them not only for their ability to evoke something about the women we hope to understand better but also because they might strike a chord in our own experience—vastly different as it can be from that of women in developing countries. So "Voices" should encourage us to listen to women in other places and to voice our connections with them and each other as well.

PLEASE NOTE TWO CORRECTIONS TO MC FEBRUARY 2006:

*It is estimated that at least 200,000 Guatemalans (not 100,00) died in the Civil War.

*In the recipe for banana licuado, you might start with 1/4t each of the spices listed and increase to taste. Cardamom, particularly, can seem a bit strong to some.

Happy New Year! Look for MC around the 10th and feel free to contact me if you have questions or need materials prior to that.