

The flavors of my life:
Memories of five generations around the
fireplace

Fatima Garcia Lastra

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The flavors of my life:
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by
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To my mother, Elizabeth, as a tribute, with the hope that through these stories you continue living... with all my love, source of inspiration.

To my motives, your grandchildren: Alvaro, Fatima, Juan Pablo, Leopoldo Agustin, Luisa Elizabeth and Silvia Alejandra...
And mine: Mateo, Patricio and those who come further on.

To my beloved companion: Alvaro.

PROLOGUE

WHAT ARE WE EATING TODAY?

To arrange the meal every day is something that with the years becomes tedious and, to simplify, it falls into repeating the usual dishes. As a newlywed I strived very hard to try different stews, I tried laborious and complicated recipes, but later it became routine, because although “with Alvaro I had no problem, if I made certain thing, Juan Pablo did not like it; if I put peas, Fatima did not like it either...” so, for our children, as long as they ate, the repertoire of dishes was reduced to those tasted and approved by those who daily sat at my table.

At present, once the children have taken their path, I have again innovated my menu with recipes that I stopped doing for a long time or with others that I had not tried from many which my mom wrote to me and that, with the desire to pamper dad, she would look for to flatter him. In honor of the truth, my mom also liked a lot good food, although she, thanks to Carmela, rarely went into the kitchen, only on special occasions to make some dessert, an entry or something similar. She had a real passion for the recipes and she came to have an impressive collection. When someone provided her with one, she experimented it and subjected it to the judgement of dad; if he liked it, it entered the repertoire, and if not, she kept it in another notebook thinking that one of the family might like it; of course, there were many that were not brought to trial. Mom always respected the copyright of that countless recipes, along with the title she settled the origin.

Her dad was born in the Hacienda and being an orphan, she was not of elaborate meals or of celebrating anything. But, despite this, grandma, more cosmopolitan, enjoyed good food and traditions.

Mom used to say that when she was a child, Christmas Eve was not celebrated at her house; grandpa, as I mentioned, did not have the habit. But for Christmas Day, grandma would arrange a tasty meal.

The cuisine of the Campeche region, its origin, is very different from that of other parts of the country. The variety of its ingredients goes from the autochthonous, as the Achiote, to mention one, up to the Europeans: the saffron or the Dutch Ball Cheese covered with red wax, whose use was generalized in the southeast because the ships that came for Palo de Tinte or for other woods brought it like ballast among other goods. Likewise, the pirates enriched it by bringing to its port various spices of the Caribbean. In short, it is a mixed cuisine with multiple colors and flavors.

In the year of 1929, Mrs. Adela Lily Mena de Castro published the book “Cocina Campechana”, which was a success in the city of Campeche. Mrs. Lily was a distinguished person, native from that place, who had taken special courses in cooking and pastries abroad. My granny gave mom this publication that would turn later on into her first cookbook. Both shared this passion, so she also wrote to her several booklets of formulas: soups, ice creams, desserts and stews... I keep a small one, with dark blue and black streaks cover, scraped by the use, very peculiar, she titled it: Stews I like, for Chabel. Of the many formulas written there that caught my attention, I transcribe one because of the way in which it is written and the quantities specified are still in reales: (*eight real, one peso; four reales 50 cents and two reales 25 cents*)

MOLE

All afternoon the turkey is parboiled; the next day fry the preys. Then, grind the sesame, ½ pound; 4 slices of toasted bread; grind color chilies, one real; enough tomatoes, ½ bar of cinnamon chocolate, toasted almonds, onion and garlic, all ground, melt it in the turkey broth and strain it, put enough salt, boil the broth with enough lard, until it is thick and move so that it does not burn and then throw the preys in it.

Mom would get linked like one more ring in the chain of this tradition; I would do it too later on.

She and I were very close, she was for me the person in whom I could find the solution to any difficulty that was presented, being of any nature; I accepted all her suggestions with closed eyes, she never imposed, she was subtle, she was characterized by her kindness and prudence.

When I got married, she made me a cookbook and, on some occasions, she gave me some more, but when she really flipped out in the writing, was a year after my dad died, with the subtitle: recipes that I have collected for forty years, and the dedications: “Only my love for you could induce me to undertake this ‘Roman Work’ ... this way I feel that I help you and continue”, she began a formidable company, twelve cookbooks!, yes, twelve, those of hard cover and with five hundred sheets, from La Tarjeta, (*stationary that was an institution of Puebla in the second half of the twentieth century.*) a true culinary treasure perfectly organized: a notebook of meats and entrails, two of sweets, one more of cakes, another one of Christmas desserts, nor what to say the one of pastas, for everyday and for special occasions, the one of corn and tortillas, and... so many more that ended up having as an impulse her great love: “For my dear Faty: with the desire to help you, even after having gone away forever... My hands and the hours fly when it comes to copying recipes for you”. Those exquisite notebooks with allusive linings and

their markers are now my source of inspiration; yes, it continues and still helps me.

This morning, reviewing those cookbooks, Carmela's image came to my memory when I asked her: "Mrs. Chabela, what will we eat today?"

This rite was repeated daily, and mom, looking in her notebooks, arranged the meal very carefully; Carmela, in turn, asked her to read the recipe, with that it was enough to do it with care. Now, when I remember that moment, I wonder why would she ask her to read it for her if she knew how to read and she used to read a lot. I suppose that, on having listened to her, she would memorize it and that way she began her daily routine: go to the market to buy what she needed for the menu of the day; while we lived downtown, to the market "La Victoria"; when we moved from home, to the market "mercadito del Carmen".

My family, when I was born, was composed of father, mother, maternal grandmother - who had widowed two years before -, a brother: Polo; Carmela Perez, who was my mom's cook practically since she got married, and Carmen Contreras Sanchez, my nanny. This family structure remained unchanged until my grandmother died; I was twelve years old then. We had no close relatives in Puebla. My dad was Spanish, he had settled in Campeche, where he met my mom. She was a native of that state. Gustavo, my cousin, who was fifteen years old when his dad died, son of my mother's only sister, came to live with us for a short time so he could finish his studies; further on, in due time, his brother and sisters would come: Eduardo, Zoila and Carmen Maria. During a period more or less long, Aunt Estelita lived here with her family; she was a very dear cousin to mom. Some years later, several cousins from Campeche stayed in the house, only for short seasons, because there was no teacher's career; so the reduced of our family's core fostered a great union among us, it was my perfect world, the one which I hoped that would never change. I perceived the love and affection through its acting and this shaped me.

Thanks to the enormous confidence that flowed between mom and I, I was subject of many testimonies which, in her eloquent conversation, transmitted; so many stories and anecdotes of family or contemporaries; experiences lived in environments totally oblivious to mine; conversations splashed with emotion and affection. When I heard them I used to tell her: “mom, you will see, I will collect all these anecdotes, I will write them to be a legacy for your grandchildren and mine”.

It was the beginning of the twenty-first century when Alvaro and Juan Pablo, my two older children, had already undertaken their way, and Fatima, the youngest, was about to do so. I had just turned forty-eight years, life paused to rethink my goals. This is how it was reborn in me the concern to study a university career because I was in debt with myself, in addition it was an unstoppable impulse the desire to learn, to know more and the motivation to write these conversations and place them in the right context: when, how and where they happened. I hoped to do it before mom left us and that in her own voice, once again, she would tell me those extraordinary events. I regret that it was not so; however, now as a tribute to her I will try to recreate, in the best possible way, everything that, when listening to, permeated my being and in the same way as adding ingredients to a stew, seasoned me.

For me, food is a preponderant fact, in some cases because I consider myself having a very good appetite and I enjoy it; in other cases, because mom enjoyed the search and experimentation of new dishes; or because I like to cook; or because those who prepared them were very special, or perhaps because on having valued it, they taught me that behind the food there is more than mere matter, quoting Adriano. (*Marguerite Yourcenar, Adriano 's Memoirs, Barcelona, Planeta, 1998, page 17.*)

To eat a fruit means letting get into our being a beautiful living object, strange, nourished and favored like us by the earth; it means consummating a sacrifice in which we choose for ourselves before things. I never bit the bread crumbs of the

barracks without marveling that this heavy and rude jumble could be transformed into blood, in heat, perhaps in bravery.

In this writing, I try to capture fragments of my childhood environment and the stories of mom, as in chapters one, two, three, four and five, in which she is who lends me her unforgettable voice to narrate and give them life, as well as in all recipes, except for chapter eight, in which Carmela is the one who instructs me to dabble in the kitchen; in the seven, I support myself in the letters of Grandpa Paul; the six and the remaining are supported by the memory and knowledge of my brother Polo and others in the bibliography that he gave me, as well as in my experiences. The recipes that frame them are pertinent, and they all have, as in the feast that life is, color, magic, truth and fantasy.

CHAPTER 1

Fu - Fu

At my grandmother Pepilla's house, they used to make Fu-Fu very often, she liked it a lot, also it made her remember her beloved land: Cuba...

When you prepare it, choose five or six big bananas that are ripe, not too much; cut the tops and then divide them in two or three pieces...

Being still very young my grandmother Pepilla - Josefa del Rio Cabrera -, together with her mother and brothers, were forced to leave the village of Remedios, in the province of Santa Clara, in the island of Cuba, where they were born; the first movement of independence in that country was about to be unleashed. Her father, Alejandro del Rio y Rodriguez, was part of that current of thought that sought a new project of society, The Democratic Republic, sovereign and of social justice, (*Eduardo Torres-Cuevas The Independence Project of 1868 and the Cuban Masonry, House of High Studies Fernando Ortiz, Havana, <http://dialnet.uniroja.es>.*) that left aside the colonialism and the reigning slavery, which endangered not only his life, but that of his whole family. Following the advice of his fellow and friend, Pedro Santacilia, (*Husband of Manuela Juarez Maza, older daughter of Benito Juarez.*) he embarked wife and children heading to Mexico, with the exception of Joaquin, the firstborn, with whom he shared, besides his profession, the same ideals and he had decided to remain with him in Cuba.

Santacilia suggested him to establish themselves in the capital of the country, where several mutual friends who, as him, had been exiled; they would be provided also with the members' support of the

Mexican government who communed with the liberal thought. However, the Del Rio Cabrera family was established in the city of Campeche, perhaps not to feel so far from Cuba. It is likely to have happened a few months before the start of the Ten-Year War in 1868. (*October 10, Demajagua, and November 3, The Scream of Yara. It is called the Scream of Yara at the beginning of the Independent Process of Cuba of the Kingdom of Spain.*)

My great-grandfather Alejandro descended from Spanish from Canaries: Antonio Luciano del Rio and Catalina Rodriguez; he was born in Remedios, in the street Amargura - now bears its name -, on April 11, 1812. It was there where he had his first studies and later he moved to Havana. He entered the Royal and Literary University of Havana, where he graduated in pharmacy.

At the university, a natural field of intellectuals, he met most of the initiators of the revolutionary movement, characters of unusual intelligence and broad culture influenced by the ideas of the French Revolution. As them, he felt himself infected with the libertarian ideology. The Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy were the seedbed of these conspirators. (<http://www.uh.cu/historia>).

...you set them to boil with the peel of the banana; when already cooked, peel them and grind in the metate...

After completing his studies, he returned to Remedios and founded a drugstore, which he attended with great dedication. Some years later he married Josefa Cabrera y de Rojas and procreated six children: Alejandro, Antonio, Josefa, Concepcion, twin of John, and Joaquin.

Alejandro, my great-grandfather, was a person of values, very generous; when some cargo of slaves came to the market of Remedios, he would go and buy, according to his possibilities, from one to three, to whom first he taught the language, then an occupation and finally he granted them their freedom, with that they became

freedmen. For this reason he was much loved by the black population of this place. Those who knew him made reference to the nobility of his gaze, charisma and kindness. It is precisely the abolition of slavery one of the motives that dragged him into the Independence Movement.

...already crushed the bananas, fry them lightly in lard, not before putting a bit of salt to taste, spread it in a big plate...

Some of his biographers have written that in his pharmacy meetings were carried out with the followers to the cause, place that was like the revolutionary center of the entire jurisdiction: (see <<http://www.ecured.cu>>) “It joins to the lines of the Cuban Liberating Army in February 1869. He was appointed a member of the Chamber of Representatives of the Republic in Arms with the position of Inspector of the Armed Forces”. (*idem.*) He was also deputy for the province of Los Remedios.

During the great uprising of the Patriots in February 1869, he was gathered in a house, when a couple of guards came to arrest him, but a servant of color that worked there took him to the stables and hid him behind a horse that was lying. Apparently, he laid down behind the horse and they did not see him. Thanks to this he was able to continue in the movement, not without being persecuted.

One or two years later, in the midst of the struggle, they were cornered by the troops. My great-grandfather was ill, and Joaquin, his son, carried him in his arms. The soldiers shot Joaquin in the feet to stop them, and that is how they were taken prisoner. When great-grandfather Alejandro was registered, they found the statement that accredited him as inspector of the Armed Forces of the Republic in Arms. He was sent to Remedios to be shot. He was a very respected person, so he was offered his freedom if he abjured of his ideas. He did not accept it; until the end he was congruent with his ideal.

Cubans and Spanish who sympathized with the cause tried to prevent his death, but they did not succeed and in October 10, 1872 he was shot in that village. Joaquin, his son, was sentenced to fifteen years in prison, of which he purged ten in Ceuta, Africa, (*probably it was not Ceuta, but the island Fernando Poo, Equatorial Guinea, which was the political prison: "There in the quarries also were kept the health professionals of that time who changed the medical instruments by the machete...Among the deportees were 10 doctors, dentists and pharmacists, who were taken to their destination on board the ship San Francisco de Borja. They were...Joaquin del Rio, thirty-eight years old pharmacist from Remedios". See <<http://www.uvs.sld.cu>>.*), and five years in Malaga, Spain. After this time, he returned to Cuba, where he married, but never heard from him again.

...The beef or smoke-dried meat (this very similar to the machaca, perhaps drier than the smoke-dried meat that we know, for that reason it had to boil) is put to boil to soften and grind or shred...

When the family Del Rio Cabrera was going to leave Cuba, the great-grandfather Alejandro gave my great-grandmother a badge, a five peaks star, made with gold and each tip of a different enamel color: yellow, green, red, white and blue, and in the center it had several symbols. He said to her: "if at any point you find yourself in a predicament, just by showing it to some mason, he will help you". In the family it was never assumed that the great-grandfather was a mason. The transmitted version was that a high-ranking mason whom he had helped, gave it to him in gratitude; years later, my mom confessed to me in secret that the insignia belonged to the great-grandfather: "By various sources we may know that, to be initiated into the conspiracy, it was necessary to serve in the GOCA (Great East of Cuba and the Antilles)" (*Eduardo Torres-Cuevas, op.cit.*) and now I also know that: "from the fifteen assemblymen, thirteen were

masons”. (*Gustavo Pardo Valdes, Masonry in Cuba,*
<<http://www.visionmasonica.rog>>.)

...first fry the chopped onion, then add the meat, one
tablespoon of good vinegar, season it with salt and pepper;
cover with this the banana layer...

In the year 1944, my mother donated to the museum of Remedios, Jose Maria Espinosa, (*at the moment it is called Municipal Museum of Remedios Francisco Javier Balmaseda.*) a letter that, hours before his execution, great-grandfather Alejandro wrote to great-grandmother Josefa, in which he said goodbye to her and their children; he asked them to always be consistent with their ideas, to maintain ethical and moral conduct and never to forget the helpless and needy; he also reaffirmed her how proud he was to die for such a noble cause. The news of the donation was published in a local newspaper of Remedios called El Faro: “Valuable donation made to the Museum of Remedios, by Mrs. Maria Zuluaga, from Campeche, Mexico...an autograph letter from Don Alejandro del Rio y Rodriguez, written shortly before his death. It was given to the Direction of the museum by the doctor Manuel Perez Abreu, commissioner of the distinguished donor, granddaughter of the illustrious patriot from Remedios...”

Upon arriving in Campeche, my great-grandmother and her children established a cigar factory. The Cuban cigars were famous, and with them they brought people who knew how to make them; they were probably women. (*the cigar's main attraction was that, at the end of its elaboration, the tobacco was enrolled by Cuban women on their naked thigh.*) However, they did not cease to encounter certain difficulties; the great-grandmother tried to make use of the insignia that brought with her, but in Campeche no one knew what it was about, perhaps in the capital it would have been different, because in those moments there were in full effervescence the Masonic lodges.

Alejandro, the eldest of the children who came with her, was a lawyer and could not practise because he did not know the laws of Mexico, but as he played the piano and the guitar very well, he dedicated himself to teach music. Antonio, the second, was a doctor and had no problem. Juan died as a child. Concha, who was called Conchanquito, stayed single and lived until her death with my grandparents Pepilla and Joaquin Zuluaga.

It is very probable that Aunt Concha was the one who inherited the generous appearance of her father. As a girl, still very young, when given some candy, she would put half on a stick and stretching the arm to the sky, would say aloud: "Take it, Juan", offering it to his twin brother, who had already died. As a young woman she gave away everything that she possessed among the people in need. Suddenly she would find herself with nothing to wear, that is why frequently Pepilla would re-supply her of clothing and footwear. As usual, during Lent there were those who performed some form of penance, Conchanquito opted to stop drinking water in the day, something complicated for the tropical climate. Pepilla repressed her because she considered that this could harm her health: "Concha, do not do that, you are going to die!" Concha was a pious and good woman, very affectionate with the nieces; in the same way, they always loved her a lot.

...To prepare the sauce that will go on top of the meat, chop onion, tomatoes and chili, if you want it hot...

Only one black maiden, that had been a slave, came with the family of my grandmother Pepilla, her name was Caridad. The whole servitude wanted to travel with them, but considering the circumstances in which they came out, it was not possible. Pepilla told us that among the servants who stayed in Cuba, there was another black maiden, named Poncia who, apparently, by the tattoos she had, was a princess in her tribe. She was taught to comb the whole family

and, sometimes, when there was a party, even the governor's wife from Remedios requested the services of Poncia to help her get ready; she also knew how to quill (*to compose or iron a thing forming canons; like starched turns. Encyclopedic Dictionary Espasa, t.10, Madrid, Espasa, 1979,p.533.*) and did some simple tasks, since they tried to respect her rank. The valets and workers that stayed in Cuba cried a lot for not being able to accompany them to Mexico, and once that the family left the house, they went out and fled.

Pepilla was married in Campeche with Joaquin Zuluaga Clausell. A few years later, he returned to his native country, along with his sister Concha, and his two oldest daughters: Maria, my mom, she was eight or ten years old and Estela one less. When they disembarked at the Havana Pier, the voice had spread that the daughters of Don Alejandro del Rio were visiting, and a copious group of black people showed up to receive them. When they got off the boat, they approached them and kissed the fringe of their dress as a sign of gratitude and affection for what their father had done.

In 1898, Pepilla, with her four daughters and Concha, her sister, assisted as guests to the ceremony of Independence in Havana. In the official act, while the flag of Spain was lowered, the Spanish soldier in charge fell down dead as a result of a heart attack; this impressed drama and more emotion to the moment. When they raised the flag of Cuba, they expressed that for them the moment of greatest joy was to verify that their father's death had not been in vain.

Great-grandfather Alejandro has been qualified by history as a hero; however, this never comforted Conchanquito, who, referring to her father, said: "A hero is no more than the last step in which others are impelled to succeed".

My grandmother Pepilla was not a beautiful woman, but very distinguished, of very long neck and slender figure, possessed a great personality. With the inexorable passage of the years, she put on weight; reason why my grandfather Joaquin said to her: "Pepilla, I married you because you looked like a palm tree and you turned into a mango bush". Nevertheless, her looks were elegant and she possessed great taste for jewels. When she spoke about her memories

as a young girl, she made special mention of her visits to Havana. She commented that she liked to go out with her nanny to the market and contemplate with great curiosity the jewels that the mulattoes went out to sell in enormous cups, product of the theft of the filibusters that besieged the island; because they could not do it, they sent their wives to offer the merchandise badly obtained in their robberies. During the Mexican Revolution, Pepilla ordered to be made for her a sort of long vest, with many hidden pockets, where she kept all her garments; she used it daily, in case someone robbed her house or the store, nobody could imagine that she was carrying her goods.

...parboil the onion, then the chili, add the tomato, let it season until it is concentrated, add salt and when it is ready, pour this sauce on the meat and banana.

CHAPTER 2

CHICKEN STEW

Notice how all the cultures that enriched the cuisine of my land are reflected in the campechan stew; it is usually served for holidays, you can do it with pork loin, turtle, seafood, chicken or any other bird; my favorite is with chicken, perhaps I should have been a mountain fox and that is why I love it.

The ingredients are: chicken in pieces or any kind of meat you want; olives, raisins and almonds, to taste; tomatoes, onions and garlic, all roasted; saffron, salt, cinnamon and ground black pepper; sherry and vinegar...

My grandfather Joaquin Jesus de la Santisima Trinidad was born in Campeche (*around 1840*) and he was the oldest of six brothers. (*Ana, Jose, Manuel, Carmela and Fernando; this last one, posthumous child.*) His parents were Jose Zuluaga (*originally Zuloaga, with the passing of the years and by force of hearing it like this, it was transformed in Zuluaga*) Gutierrez, Spanish Basque, and Francisca Clausell y Couto, from Campeche. His maternal grandfather (*Francisco Clausell Rosell*), Catalan, was a shipbuilder in the Port of Campeche, and it seems to me that this kinship was shared with Joaquin Clausell, the relevant impressionist painter whose origin was from Campeche. In May 1861, when grandfather Joaquin Zuluaga turned twenty-one years old, in addition to the Mexican nationality, he was granted the Spanish nationality by the Consulate of Spain settled in that port of the Mexican southeast, attesting to this the Vice-Consul Don Vicente Ferrer.

Grandfather, still a teenager, was sent by his father to the United States to perform higher studies, starting with baccalaureate. He enrolled the St. Charles College, a Jesuit institution located in Springfield, Illinois, near Chicago.

On having completed the bachelor's degree, he started the Commerce Career; when he was studying the third year and after

living there for five years, his father died. This circumstance forced him to return to Campeche to take care of the business that his dad had founded: the shops “El Brazo Fuerte”. Two established in the city of Campeche: one in the San Francisco neighborhood, which was strategic to receive goods from abroad, especially from Europe, and the other one within the wall, on the tenth street; one more in the Palizada Villa, Campeche, the most important in the region of the rivers (*this way is known a specific zone that covers territory of the states of Campeche, Chiapas and Tabasco.*) and the Laguna de Terminos, from where it was distributed to the others and to another in Jonuta. I am not sure if there was also a store in Tenosique, near the Guatemalan border, or if they were only installed during the local fair. These last two were in the state of Tabasco.

Besides placing himself in front of the business, he became the head of the family. He, along with his mother, made the important decisions related to the brothers.

Jose had gone to study medicine in Paris, at the Sorbonne. The profession surpassed him, every time that he had to attend a dissection, he could not handle the disgust that caused him and invariably he vomited. When his father died, he returned to Campeche, he abandoned the idea of being a doctor and opened a store downtown, in front of the park. Time after he married Adela Lapierre, a very beautiful woman of French ancestry. (Her father came to Mexico with Maximilian. Later settled in Hecelchakan, Campeche, where he installed a bakery.)

...chicken is prepared with vinegar, pepper and salt. Overglid and separate, right there fry the roasted minstras (Italian voice that means menstras; seasonings that are added to the stew), slightly grounded...

Ana married Anacleto Gutierrez, a Spanish man based in Campeche, they lived there for a while and then went to Cuba. They

had no children. Anita professed enormous affection and sympathy for the nieces Zuluaga del Rio, she identified a lot with my grandmother Pepilla, she preferred them to the Zuluaga Lapierre.

Manuel married in Campeche and neither had family.

Carmelita was pretended by Manuel Quintana, a person whom my grandfather Joaquin did not know, reason why he investigated him and asked for references about him in Spain, his country of origin. He turned out to be a good man that, upon hearing about this, was very offended and he told Carmelita. The siblings drifted apart. Carmelita and Manuel married and the story was repeated: they had no offspring. Because of the disgust with Joaquin, Carmelita felt closer to the Zuluaga Lapierre, she said that they were the prettiest nieces and she did not sympathize with the Zuluaga del Rio.

Fernando, the youngest, who was posthumous son, and therefore very pampered by the mother, sisters and sisters-in-law, was no more than an elegant, very handsome and distinguished gentleman. At some point, grandmother Francisca and the aunts came up with the outlandish idea of him marrying the spoiled niece: my mom, but when Grandma Pepilla became aware of their intentions during a trip to Havana, she put distance between them. Fernando died very young, he was only thirty-eight years old; supposedly of miserere colic. *(when his body was exhumed, they discovered in the place where the liver is located, countless stones)*

Joaquin, once established again in Campeche, resumed friendship with Joaquin Baranda y Quijano (who was appointed Minister of Justice and Public Instruction by the then President of Mexico, Don Manuel Gonzalez, position he would perform for two decades with Don Porfirio Diaz.) and with Joaquin Gutierrez McGregor, who also were their neighbors. They were the “three Joaquines”, this way they were called, bachelors coveted by the young women from Campeche.

Grandpa was handsome, with a beautiful profile that would later inherit my mom; very conceited, he liked being photographed; charismatic and elegant, a man with a vast culture who also spoke English and French.

Several years later he met Josefa del Rio y Cabrera, with whom, after a not very long engagement, he married. Joaquin and Pepilla settled in the house of Mrs. Francisca Clausell, mother of him, who was on the top floor of the store on 10th Street, in the San Roman neighborhood; that had been his home since he was married and where he lived with his mother. Aunt Concha and Uncle Antonio del Rio stayed with them. Mrs. Francisca was an authoritarian and dominant person; there no one could hang even a picture without her permission.

Pepilla and Joaquin had procreated two girls: Maria del Buen Viaje, (*advocation of the patron virgin of San Juan de los Remedios, Cuba, birthplace of Pepilla.*) my mom, and Josefa Estela. When Adrian, the manager of the shops of Palizada and Jonuta, died of smallpox, my grandfather felt the need to move there to attend her, at least while finding a trustworthy person who could do it.

I guess that grandma Pepilla should have jumped with joy to see the opportunity of getting out of the house of her mother-in-law.

Palizada was an important fluvial port, located in an affluent of the Usumacinta River and with the same name, the main population that the Terminos Lagoon linked with Carmen City, the place from which the Palo de Tinte (*with the palo de tinte o tinto colorants of different shades were produced. Because of its hardness it was also used to make railroad sleepers. In the early twentieth century synthetic anilines began to be manufactured, which caused the trade in natural dyes decline*) was exported to Europe: “The main offices of the French company that bought and exported the palo de tinto, were in Palizada (*Francisco Lastra Lacroix, Chronicles not to forget, Mexico, ed. of author, 2008, p. 16.*)...The entire area of rivers and canals had enormous commercial relevance. Campeche was declining in that field; the Yucatecan founded the port of Sisal and, later, Progreso, a situation that brought more difficulty to the friction that already existed between the two entities. Through these ports, the Yucatecan began to export Henequen, the green gold, and stopped using the port of Campeche for their shipments.

...already stir-fried, add the browned chicken, a cup and a half of hot water and sherry wine...

Grandfather Joaquin, in addition to the store, exported lizard skins and heron feathers to the United States and Europe, goods that he collected in that area through the constant circulation of the multiple boats that moved diverse products by the river. My grandfather found greater opportunity to do business and took advantage to settle there, where his two young daughters were born: Sara and Josefina. (Fina)

By this time, he received the invitation of his dear friend Joaquin Baranda to collaborate with him in the capital of the country, since he was a very well prepared person, but grandfather did not accept. He had his own business, quite prosperous, and at that time his four daughters had been born, so he considered it risky for them taking them to live in a city as big and full of dangers as Mexico was. He decided to stay with his family, to live permanently in Palizada, which transited through its best moment.

The house of Palizada was located at the edge of the river, next to a high house that was a little hotel. The first door next to this building was the room of my granny Pepilla, it had an iron fence and a wooden window with grids that opened as a door. The wooden doors were always opened and the fence, closed. At the top of each of the leaves of the gate was a letter, when closed, in the center, as a finishing, the initials JZ were distinguished.

Then followed the two gates in the shop of grandpa Joaquin; in the backroom, my grandmother had placed a small cot where she used to lay down when my grandfather got up at dawn to receive the products that came to him, that way she kept him company. Then there was the porch, where the merchandise went in and out, which, once my grandfather died, it was closed down with wood and rented it to Mr. Angel, the Canary; they called him that way because he was a native of the Canary Islands, of butcher activity and he kept the meat

in that place because it was fresh. He paid the rent to my granny with his products.

...when half-cooked, add raisins, olives and peeled almonds, cinnamon powder and saffron dissolved in boiling water...

Inside the house there was a beautiful brickwork courtyard with flowerbeds, my grandma had sowed a tree of maculis, which when blooming it seemed of lace and it released a delicious aroma of honey. There, in that courtyard, when it rained, enormous puddles were formed where, Chole and I loved to splash, while my grandma Pepilla´s soul busted out of her body because we were barefoot and getting wet.

The rooms and the kitchen were facing the courtyard. In the room of grandma Pepilla, in front of her bed, there were two paintings, two enormous lithographs, one of a Christ and the other of the Immaculate Conception; in front of them always burned an oil lamp. The Christ was a gift from his sisters-in-law: Ana and Carmen, and the virgin, a gift from her mother-in-law when my mom was born. This same Immaculate is the one that she gave me and that I gave you the day you got married. *(This picture has in the back a writing saying: "1874 Francisca Clausell widow of Zuluaga to Josefa del Rio de Zuluaga; to Maria Zuluaga de Lastra; to Elizabeth Lastra Zuluaga in entering the Marian Congregation of San Luis Gonzaga 1934, march 21; to Fatima Garcia Lastra June 7, 1975 when he married Alvaro De Velasco Rivero".)* When my mom gave it to me, I had to do some repairs and cuts, it was all chopped up because, over the years that grandma Pepilla´s house was closed, the moths almost finished it, that is the reason why now it is nothing more than a medallion.

After the house Zuluaga and El Brazo Fuerte, followed the Siempreviva, shop and residence of the Cabrales, property that my grandfather rented them and later they would buy from him.

The grandfather began a good friendship with the doctor Lafont, doctor of the French company who traded the Palo de Tinte in Palizada. He was a very interesting character with whom my grandfather enjoyed practicing his French. He was also very educated and an expert in a series of very peculiar practices, some useful, like the one of using the casein of the sour milk to add it to the lime paint as glue; with this he painted his house and lasted more than the common ones. He also had the habit of emptying the Dutch Ball Cheese by a small hole and leave the crust; subsequently, he filled it with wine, I do not remember of what kind, he let it ferment covered and, after a while, he ate with a tablespoon all the worms that had been formed. Grandfather Joaquin never dare to taste what Dr. Lafont considered a delicacy of gods.

My grandfather felt the proudest about his daughters. During the meal my mom played the piano or the guitar, sometimes Aunt Estela accompanied her singing, which she did very well. Mariquita said to have been the consent of her father because they had a lot in common.

When in the evenings he sat down in the living room of his house surrounded by his daughters, Joaquin commented:

- How beautiful and adorned my living room is with my four daughters, hopefully it will remain that way and no one comes to take them...

To what Aunt Concha retorted:

- Yes, very pretty, and even more so when within a few years are sitting four talkative spinsters nodding off... - comment that she made to him joking so that he would not happen to really prohibit them from marrying.

The brothers-in law of Grandpa, Anacleto and Manuel, associated and decided to install a ropemaking in Havana with their wives' money. The two families went to live to Cuba and took with them their mother and Fernando, still a teenager. There was no family left in the city of Campeche. Jose and Manuel had already died and Joaquin lived in Palizada, sufficient reasons for great-grandmother Francisca to agree to travel with them to Havana.

...if the sauce is a little bit loose, it thickens with soda cracker powder. If you wish to sweet, add a spoonful of sugar...

Aunt Carmelita Zuluaga widowed. The family began to insist on her marrying again because, ii Uncle Anacleto died, who was going to see for family businesses? She did not want to, for she claimed to have lived totally in love with Manuel, (*Quintana*) her first husband; however, he married a second time with another Manuel, Escudero Rascon, a very wealthy Spanish gentleman, but they neither had children. Once again she widowed. Old and alone - her mother and brothers had already died -, she returned to Mexico City to live with the nieces Zuluaga Lapierre, who lived in the capital, until a nephew, Roque Escudero, son of a brother of his second husband, persuaded her to return with him to Cuba. He would be the heir to the fortune of the Zuluaga family.

My grandfather Joaquin died in Palizada as a result of an infection generalized by an injection badly put; he was not yet seventy years old.

The Zuluaga Clausell family disappeared from Campeche. In fact, the last name Zuluaga became extinct, the males died very young or without offspring. When my mother returned to Campeche, she found Santiago, who had been a loyal employee of my grandfather Joaquin. He was a Spanish man who had come as a child in a boat and had grown up in the Zuluaga house, so, when referring to him, he was called "Santiaguito, from the Zuluaga House." (*This reference was abbreviated up to be as Santiago ca 'Zuluaga; later, as Santiaguito the Zuluaga.*) When he visited, he said very ashamed that he was going to apologize because, in spite of his pleas, his two sons had decided to adjudicate the last name Zuluaga. They said that, after all, there was no one in Campeche that was called this way, nor who claimed them and they liked it. Santiago thought that it was disrespectful, but there was no human power to make them change their mind and they left it to

themselves. My mom told him not to be mortified about it, because it was not his fault. She decided not to give it importance.

...it is served only with vegetable stew, if desired it can be accompanied with white rice or yellow rice (*prepared with saffron*).

CHAPTER 3

STRAINED TAMALES

You buy a kilo of nixtamal dough, dilute in water with your hand, approximately two litres, once dissolved, like a light atole (slightly thickish), strain through a cloth, sky blanket or sieve, this is what makes the mixture very fine; let it set...

Jose Felipe, your great-grandfather, man with hair and light color eyes, tall and handsome, was the descendant of Jose Eusebio Sainz de la Lastra, a personage of great character, will and perseverance, with a high sense of honor and very haughty.

Jose Eusebio was the son, not first-born, of a Spanish nobleman, and therefore without the right to inheritance in accordance with the Spanish Law of the primogeniture. He was educated in the Royal Spanish Navy. As captain of high ranking, sea and war captain, and having obtained a royal grace (*Spain was living in a precarious economic situation that made it difficult to keep the enemy from their possessions. With the initiative of establishing a city for the Crown, this one paid with a royal grant and allowed, to whom it was granted, to exploit the riches of the place to extract the costs, to maintain its military detachment and to make fortune.*), he came to America (*“like two of his brothers, Antonio settles in Cuba and Diego goes to Tampico; their descendants live in Huasteca Potosina”*).

See <<http://www.catazaja.gob.mx>> in the second half of the XVIII century to establish populations that could consolidate the Spanish power before the danger that was representing the penetration of the Englishmen from the Lagoon of Terminos, from which they had been expelled a few years before. There was also huge interest in finding for Guatemala a way out to the Gulf of Mexico. (*“The place where today is the town of Catazaja, since pre-hispanic times it was a passage where there was the fluvial communication of Palenque to the coast of the Gulf of Mexico.”* *Idem*)

I remember hearing in my youth that it was still preserved, and was in possession of the family branch that inherited the Tintillo, (*“Don Jose Eusebio also established the Finca El Tintillo on the shores of the Lagoon of the same name, in the municipality of Catazaja. On the banks of both lagoons, Catazaja and El Tintillo, the jungle grew, from which a wide strip was of Palo de Tinto”, F. Lastra Lacroix, op. cit., p. 15.*), the ranch of Jose Eusebio, the sword and uniform of rank of the Spanish Bourbon

Navy, attribute of its category and command, and that had been maintained for more than one hundred and fifty years as relics, with fervor and veneration, for successive generations of Lastras.

...when the dough has settled at the bottom of the container, take away the water...

Jose Eusebio entered America through Guatemala, from where he went to Chiapas and established the town of “Playas de Catazaja” (*“The first human settlements are of Mayan origin. In the XVIII century was founded the Villa of Playas of San Jose of Catazaja by the Spanish captain Jose Eusebio Sainz de la Lastra, who established the the cut of palo of tinto”. The municipalities of Chiapas, Mexico, State Center for Municipal Studies/Ministry of Governance/Government of the State of Chiapas (Col. Encyclopaedia of the Municipalities of Mexico), 1988*). It was a feat to cross the Sierra of Guatemala by narrow muddy paths in the high mountains covered with pine forests, where the cold shudders and at times the path is so narrow that only a man can walk on the edge of endless precipices. Further on, when descending from the mountains, near the sea level, he ran into deep rivers and the jungle, its weeds, the oppressive heat and the tropical rain (*These places are the same where centuries ago Hernan Cortes was lost on his way to the Hibueras (1524-1526)*). The town was and still is very small; he settled in the middle of the dense jungle, among rivers and marshlands, close to nowhere, on the shores of the lagoon of the same name. Catazaja is like a peninsula that enters the lagoon. It could be accessed in two ways: from Guatemala City (*The City of Antigua was destroyed by an earthquake in 1773, and the probable date of the foundation of Playas of Catazaja is 1798. It can not be clarified if the city of Guatemala was already in functions or if it was still dispatching in Antigua*), through the high mountains and the continuous and fast-flowing rivers of the area; or from the sea, by some of the major arms of the Usumacinta that flow into the lagoon of Terminos or on the coast of Tabasco, in the area of the marshes of Centla. The relatively closer population was Palenque, in the state of Chiapas, where the Mountain Range ends and it is dominated the entire Tabasco Plain, dependent on that time of the General Captaincy of Guatemala.

...Heat half kilo of lard with a clove of garlic, when dissolved, remove the garlic and pour over the dough, stir very well, test of salt and add the leaves of chopped epazote...

From there the surname Sainz de la Lastra spread in the region where the states of Chiapas, Tabasco and Campeche converge. It was later simplified in Lastra; this is likely to have happened because of the influence of the antinobiliary emulations consequence of the pro-independence moment.

He married in first marriage with Rosalia Maricci (*there exists the presumption that the surname Maricci was transformed, over the years, in Marin*), Italian (*in the time of the Bourbons came many italians*) lady from Palizada, and time later, with Fructuosa Garrido Calderon, granddaughter of the discoverer of the Palenque Ruins, Don Jose Antonio Calderon, deputy mayor of the Party of Palenque (*the municipalities of Chiapas, op. cit.*). He created two sons with Rosalia: Felipe and Agustin; this last one married Rosario Araoz, native of Campeche, and they had several children. The youngest, Jose Felipe, was my grandfather.

Still single, Jose Felipe Lastra Araoz lived with his mother in El Rosario, the family ranch. Ahead of El Rosario was the ranch of Agustin, his brother, who was married to Rosalia, from Tabasco. With some frequency, the mother of Rosalia and Adela, her sister, went to visit her. The father was blind and for that reason he did not travel with them. His family lived in Montecristo (*now Emiliano Zapata, Tabasco.*); the way to the ranch of Rosalia and Agustin was very long and tiring, because it had to be done by river, in the middle of the rainforest in small boats that were partly covered with palm supported in two arches of rods and wooden crossbeams giving a curved appearance similar to the west wagons. They embarked in the early morning to avoid the burning rays of the sun, but when it was already tortuous to continue, they stopped to refresh and rest in El Rosario,

which was on the way. There they spent the night and, the next day, or several later, they continued the trip.

...you need to cut enough rectangles of banana leaf, lightly roast to smooth it and to take off the vein of the center from it because if not, they break; take a piece of the leaf, and with a kitchen spoon, you put a small amount of dough, add the filling, fold it and moor it with a little strap or with the vein of the same banana leaves...

To leave the most comfortable rooms to the visits, Jose Felipe used to move to the corridor that communicated to the rest of the house. They talked that, when all the ranch dwellers had gone to sleep, in the course of the stifling night that invaded the senses, and being careful not to be seen or to encounter each other, sometimes Adela and sometimes her mother, did not resist the temptation of going to romp in the fresh linen hammock of good-looking Jose Felipe. And as a result of these delusions, the two became pregnant. For the mother it was not difficult to deal with it because she had responsible author; the one that was actually in a predicament was Adela.

Jose Felipe, who had been engaged in marriage with Petrona Garcia Franco for some time, was in Palenque keeping his word. Shortly after, he found out about the pregnancies. After the months, the two children were born: Antenor and Juan, the son of Adela.

...accommodate them in a pot and allow them to cook for an hour or until they are easily detached from the banana leaf, before they used to place a coin in the bottom of the pot to be sure that the water did not stop boiling, because when it stopped sounding, it was a sign that it was not...

Petrona and Felipe had five children; of them, the last one was my dad. The years went by and, when they least expected, the past became present. A brother of Rosalia and Adela, a violent man who was called Guero, found out who was the father of his nephew Juan and decided to challenge him to clean the honor of the sister; very probably that he never knew that his brother Antenor was also my grandfather's son. Guero sent several letters with his claims to Jose Felipe, which Petrona did not give him, reason why he was not aware of what was happening.

On one occasion, horseback riding on his way to the ranch, he saw written, on the wall of a house in ruins, a sign that said: "Jose Felipe Lastra is a coward because I have challenged him many times and he has never responded to my challenge". When he got home he began to find out what meant the legend he had just read. Petrona explained to him that, precisely, to avoid a confrontation, she destroyed all the letters that Guero sent to him. My grandfather burst into fury and, of such great disgust, Petrona got sick. She could not help it, Jose Felipe and Guero battled on a duel. It was a pitched battle because the employees of both ranches confronted. As a fatal ending, Jose Felipe, in the duel, killed Guero.

Petrona could not bear this tragedy and died of a heart attack. When her corpse was exhumed, they found clear evidence that she had been buried alive: the small pillow with the embroidered cover where her head rested was found at her feet, and the contracted hands had splinters of wood on her fingernails. In fact, what was supposed to be her death was a catalepsy attack. This event has always accompanied me with real distress.

...you are going to prepare the filling as follows: with a hen or chicken cut into parts and pork meat in pieces. You put to cook with enough water, about three cloves of garlic and salt, in the middle of the cooking you add ground species...

Jose Felipe blamed himself his whole life for having left orphaned from mother to his still-young-children. He married in second marriage to another Petrona because he said that the first one had been an angel of kindness; he procreated three children with her. A few years later, tormented and sick, he died (*“the oral tradition tells us that as a result of this act (the death of Guero), Don Felipe fell into a depressive state that took him to his tomb”*, F. Lastra Lacroix, *op. cit.*, p. 28), not without first acknowledging Adela´s son: Juan Lastra.

My grandfather appointed as tutors of his still small children to Micaela his sister and to her husband Miguel, who was also his brother-in-law, brother of the late Petrona, his first wife. My grandfather assumed that no one better than them could perform the role of tutors and to love their children; They were brothers on both ways. How wrong he was! They were very harsh with them. Being the children the owners of the Hacienda where they lived, they dressed the youngest ones with flour sacks and they sent them to the kitchen to eat because little cousin Carlota, the youngest of six siblings, did not like to eat with them at the table and, since the girl cried, well, too bad, they had to fulfill her whim.

... grind the achiote with about eight peppers of Castilla, a large clove of garlic and salt, all dissolved with a couple of vinegar tablespoons...

Agustin, my dad, was sent by his uncles to study with the Jesuits in San Cristobal (before Ciudad Real; now, de las Casas.), in Chiapas, as well as his brother Rodolfo. During his stay at the school, at the age of eighteen, Rodolfo died, apparently of typhoid. Betzabe, the second of the girls, also died at the age of six. Of the five children of Jose Felipe and his first wife, only survived Herlinda, Rosalia and Agustin, the two women married very young to flee from the guardianship of the uncles.

Herlinda had inherited “El Progreso”; Rosalia and Agustin, “El Rosario”, this last, the largest *(it should be taken into account that the farms in these places are very large areas of land. Being stockbreeders, they have several paddocks where the animals take turns to allow the grass to grow again; they also have sites with many swamps and closed jungle, it is not farmland)*, it was the most important Hacienda of Jose Felipe. The second wife always protested because for her and her three children, he only left a ranch, and he always favored the other ones with more land, but this was also motivated by remorse: my grandfather felt responsible for having left them orphans and, perhaps, he wanted to compensate a little the damage he caused.

Rosalia married Maximiano Gonzalez, who was many years older than her, and even older than my dad, so he was the one who was in charge in El Rosario. They began to have dislikes between them three because he forbade Aunt Rosalia to serve her brother. This included that no one at the service would fix his clothes, let alone that she intervened in anything related to Agustin. Don Maximiano was a very possessive man. Aunt Herlinda, the other sister, was the one who used to go every month to visit him with maids to wash and arrange his clothes.

...when the meats are soft and the broth has reduced, add then three peeled tomatoes, deseeded and chopped, the epazote herb and try it to check the salt...

Herlinda married very young with a cousin without being in love: Enrique Margraff Lastra, about twenty years older than her. As a child, one day, while playing in the corridor of the house, she found Enrique crying and asked him why he was crying. He replied that his girlfriend had ended it up with him. She, in her innocence, told him: “Do not worry, when I grow up, I will marry you”. And of course, he

returned for the pledge made by the rich heiress. A bit by commitment and a little bit because she saw the opportunity to flee the guardianship, she decided to accept him. She lived through a hell. He, after a short time of marriage, held a torrid affair with the widow of his father-in-law.

Herlinda left “El Progreso” and went to Palizada, where she settled, and there she met again with Francisco-Panchin-Brown, an old friend, and initiated a relationship; when Enrique died, she sold the ranch and got married, in Palizada, with Panchin; the ceremony was conducted by the bishop of Campeche. As I was her confirmation goddaughter, I carried the tail of her wedding dress, something necessary in the town, because as the house was so close to the church, the bride walked there, and the dress could not get dirty with the dust from the street.

She was a woman with a lot of personality, of very strong character and dominant; I presume somewhat bitter and authoritarian, tall and corpulent, very thick. She deeply loved my dad for being the youngest of her brothers, whom she saw almost as her son, with greater reason because she did not have them.

...once the sauce has been reduced and the tomato is well cooked, it is removed from the fire. Crumble the meats, or put it them in preys if you wish, mix with a bit of sauce and the filling is ready...

Aunt Herlinda was quite a personage. As fashion dictated, with some frequency she would dye in black her eyebrows and fuzz, because there was a saying: “woman with fuzz...tasty kiss”; I could not believe that my aunt would have been beautiful someday, and less with the weak favor that she did to herself with her makeup; nevertheless, Carlos, my cousin, who had known her since she was a child, said yes, that Herlinda in her youth had been a beautiful woman.

She had two maids of all her trust, wherever she went, she would take them: Chonita, who was in charge of cleaning the house and clothes, and Manuela, cook and laundress. Chonita prepared the bath to Aunt Herlinda every evening, a ritual that began by taking out from a cedar trunk the clothes that she would wear and, since the clothes had the folds pronounced, it was necessary to ignite the charcoal to iron it again (*the iron plate was placed on the coal to heat it.*) then, heating the water to fill the tub where, sitting on a wooden bench, she would take her bath; this was repeated every day.

The huge chickens that were bred in Aunt Herlinda's house were of fame; this was not fortuitous. Manuela was in charge of feeding the birds, in addition to the grain, the leftovers of the food from the house. The technique she used was to fill the beak with food, to close it and to keep it pressed and tight between the fingers, until the unlucky animal gobbled the morsel, repeating the operation until finishing the ration. It was like that how, by dint of stuffing the chickens, made splendid specimens grow.

An anecdote that portrays Herlinda full-length: if some afternoon she craved to snack tamales, she would say: "Let us make tamales", and for her this was that, sitting on a chair like a throne, at the head of the kitchen table, she brandished the baton, supervising and ordering how she wanted the tamales. She, of course, did not move a finger. She always like to be in charge.

...to serve one can put, on top, a sauce of habanero chili prepared in the mortar with a clove of garlic, four roasted tomatoes, habanero chili and salt to taste, grind it very well and now... enjoy them!

CHAPTER 4

PUCHERO OF JUECH* WITH MOMO**

**(the word juech derivates from the mayan huech, that means armadillo.)*

*** (momo=holy herb or acuyo)*

In my life I have seen two mighty trees fall; one of them your grandfather and the other one your dad... I have always believed that the violence that shook my grandfather's life, Jose Felipe, covered us like a shadow. I convinced myself of this when, looking for an explanation to the chiaroscuro of my father's life and yours, the two oaks that I saw falling, I realized that it could not be anything other than the consequence of those past events. As the Bible already says: "The sins of the parents will fall upon the children up to the third and fourth generation (*num. 14, 18 and Ex. 34, 7.*)

Take the shell from the juech, open it by the paunch, empty perfectly from its guts and wash it in several waters with lemon juice...

Your grandfather used to eat stew pot of different types of meat: beef with vegetables; chicken with noodles, potatoes and legumes; armadillo in broth with holy leaf; jicotea or freshwater turtle stewed with achiote in blood; venison salmagundi; wild boar, perhaps also with holy leaf; in general, the pouts and typical stews of the Rivers Region (*it is known as the rivers region to a portion of territory that covers part of the states of Campeche, Chiapas and Tabasco.*), Catazaja or Palenque, to this last municipality belonged El Rosario, the property so called by his grandmother and where he was born probably in 1872.

Agustin, my father, was a very smiling man and joker, he had the habit to establish analogies with all kinds of animals, he loved nature. Tall and robust, very blond and (El Viejo). Already older, he wore a mustache Kaiser type. He knew how to horseback ride with great skill, he said that he had been born on horseback and, these animals were another of his passions. Good shooter, he would lower a sparrow-hawk on the flight with a shot. A frank and energetic man, forged by life, the hostility of the jungle and the intense climate. Brave and with much temper, qualities needed to survive in the mount and in the jungle, where it was necessary to take care from the animals and from one or two that would want to take advantage of the situation.

Still being a child, his father taught him to ride and took him with him to see the management of the cattle. In one occasion in which a herd would be moved to another ranch, it was necessary to cross the river; his father had told him that he had to get off the horse to cross and to hold at the head of the saddle, because if a strong current came, the horse could lose the balance and be pulled with the rider and everything. Your grandpa Agustin was afraid of getting into the river, he would tell his dad that he was scared of alligators on the shore. So, my grandpa Jose Felipe pulled out the gun to shoot in case one of the alligators went into the water, but your grandpa got scared and thought that his dad was forcing him to cross by threatening with the gun, so he had no choice but to throw himself into the water as he had indicated him. Over the years, he laughed and enjoyed remembering this episode that caused him terror.

My dad was the youngest of the five sons of Petrona (*Garcia Calderon, the first wife*) and Jose Felipe. As a result of the fatality, he lost his mother being very young and, not long after, his father. His aunt and uncle, Micaela and Miguel, the tutors, they were very rigid and he had a very bad time, because of them and because of their daughter Carlota. Many years later, as adults, my dad and cousin Carlota coincided in some place and he told her, referring to uncle Miguel: “I met the old man - of fondness - in Jonuta and I hugged him”. To which Carlota replied: “Did you hug him? Agustin, how good you are!” At distance he realized how unjust his parents had been, since she, after all, was only a child.

When my dad reached the age to attend school, he was sent by his tutors to San Cristobal (*then Ciudad Real, now de las Casas*), just as they had done with his brother Rodolfo. Because San Cristobal was the capital of the State of Chiapas, it was a well-established colonial city, located on an important route, since it was a place of passage on the way to Guatemala, although then it was not so busy. It was the nearest civilized place and with educational institutions that enjoyed prestige. However, there were no good roads for horses or mules. They were meandering, narrow lanes on the mountain slopes, usually muddy for the constant rains that made them even more dangerous;

the animals could take a false step and slip by the cliff; so the trip took place in group, loaded by native chamulas, as it was a custom from the pre-hispanic period, in which they called them, as I understand it, head chair. It consisted in a type of armchair assembled with wooden screws and tree bark strings that were placed on the back. Using a strap, they supported it on the forehead on something like a small cushion that relieved the pressure that exerted the weight. In that chair people were transported on the back, a very singular trip, but common in that area. The native chamulas, with short underpants and a simple shirt, according to the style, was the whole clothing that they wore in spite of the low temperatures of the region. Your grandfather, intrigued, asked him if he was not cold. The native man who was taking him replied: “Do you feel cold in face?” my father answered him no, to what the other replied: “I am all face”. Over time he realized that his skin weathered by the climate.

...once seasoned and without the musk, put water with salt in a pot...

Your grandfather was registered as an intern at the Jesuit School. From that time, he often remembered an anecdote of mealtimes. It is probable that who supervised the conduct at the tables had been a coadjutor brother whom they called Tatita; when the students had realized of all the contents in the dish, the Tatita approached and asked one of them, perhaps a still hungry boy: “Did you run out of food out or did you finish?” This one answered with relative shyness and perhaps hoping to get one more ration: “I ran out of food”. Tatita concluded firmly: “You finished”, leaving a huge disappointment in the boy in question. I keep thinking that there was some cruelty in the interrogation of Tatita.

Your grandfather Agustin grew up in El Rosario, property immersed in the jungle of intricate weed, abundant palo de tinte, mahoganies, pacayals and large ceiba trees; laberynth of rivers,

lagoons and marshes where the jaguar and the wild boar coexist with the tapir and the deer; spider monkeys and howlers; macaws and parrots... the explosion for the life of flora and fauna never ceases. This ranch was the inheritance left by his father for Rosalia and for him. Rosalia married Don Maximiano Gonzalez and he became the administrator of the place, taking his role so seriously that he did not allow my father to have anything.

On an occasion that Don Maximiano went on a trip for many days, to San Cristobal or to Villahermosa, your grandfather, who was already of age, ordered the construction of a horse stable for him, because aunt Herlinda used to say: "You are as owner as Rosalia and you have more right to command than Maximiano". When Don Maximiano returned, he infuriated and, enraged, called the laborers and asked them who had dared to build that horse stable without his authorization. My dad said to him: "It was me, Don Maximiliano". In spite of that, he commanded to throw it down. Your grandfather Agustin pulled out a gun and warned everyone: "He who gives the first hack, dies", and since Maximiano saw that no one moved, he said: "well, I will give the hack". Your grandfather replied: "Well, you die". Don Maximiano, seeing him so determined, he desisted. And people say that to date that stable still exists. All this motivated grandfather to propose to Don Maximiano: "Do I sell to you or do I buy from you?" He bought him his share and my dad took the cattle that belonged to him. He acquired El Peal, which was located on the banks of the River Palizada (*Campeche*) towards Jonuta (*Tabasco*).

By some friends in common from the riverside communities of Palizada, your grandfather met my mom, Maria Zuluaga del Rio. They married and went to live to El Peal. Sporadically, and in rainy season, by the increasing of the waters, they were in Palizada and then they returned to the ranch. They procreated three children: Jose Felipe, the eldest, whom your grandfather called like that in memory of his father. Unfortunately, the child died of infantile cholera before the two years of age. Then, a woman was born, to whom he did not know how to name. he did not want to repeat any name of the family, learning from what had happened to Jose Felipe. In the search for

names that the ancestors had not used before, they baptized her as Zoila Victoria, my dear sister Chole; finally, I was born, Elizabeth de la Luz.

El Peal had the main house in the upper part of the land and on an elevated platform two or three steps, so that in times of flood, the water of the river that was far from it about fifty meters, would not enter. It was a one storey-house, built with planks of javin, very hard wood by which a bullet could not penetrate, and revoked with mixture, roofed with French tile and brick floors. It had a corridor at the front that was used for meals, since there could be enjoyed the fresh that the breeze from the river provided. At the end of the house, on the left side was the orchard where he had planted tomato, sweet and hot chili, Chaya, lemons and herbs for seasoning; the orchard was closed at the front and back with a fence of stems of tasiste (*species of palm trees*) so that poultry would not enter. Next to the orchard, were located the kitchen and Lugarda's room, the cook, built with jahuacte, a species of bamboo of the region, very fresh and probably flattened with bajareque (*mixture prepared with clay, cow excrement and grass*). Further on, the toilets, the henhouse and the pigpen. Your grandfather had American fattening pigs that were killed twice a year and from there they took two or three cans of lard that had to last nearly six months for the consumption in the house and for the people of the ranch. It was kept inside, on a bench next to a window to keep it fresh.

On the right side of the house were two immense iron tanks to store the rain water that was used to drink; it followed another small construction with two rooms, the grocery store and, next to it, the room of little old man Gabriel, foreman of El Rosario who followed my dad. He had a very long white beard that reached him to the middle of his chest. Gabriel had no family, he lived there and he ate in the kitchen with Lugarda.

At the back of the house, as to one hundred meters away, field in the way, there was a barbed-wire fence, held at the ends with stacks of palo de tinte, and then fastened by stems of tasiste, every meter and a half, approximately; behind the barbed-wire fence was already

jungle. In this part that was field and by the front of the house, your grandfather had numerous bushes of mango, orange trees, avocado and a chestnut tree. Next to the stakes of palo de tinte, at both ends, there were doors as locks. On the right side were the corrals, where a barn came out, roofed with guano, to ship the cattle that my father sold in foot. At the end of the barn, with crane, they loaded the cattle from the horns and the loin, to flat barges divided in corrals and an engine towed them.

Following in a straight line towards the river from Gabriel's room, there was also a fence of tasiste, about a meter high, with trunks in the shape of a ladder on each side, like three, to go on to the field. In the middle of this journey were your grandfather's stables. In season of flood, a hanging bridge was placed across the front of the house to move to the kitchen, to the cellar or to the toilets. After eating, Lugarda would go down through some plank steps towards the river to wash the dishes. Through these steps could get to a small pier where El Pipiante was (*the name referred to a mahogany ship that used the indigenous of Central America since the pre-hispanic period, called Pitpan*), one big cayuco (*twelve meters long (length)*). Flat bottom boat, one-piece, built by hollowing the trunk of a large tree, such as the ceiba or mahogany) that was the way of transport of the family. An oarsman and several rowers drove it.

My dad knew about homeopathy, he had a German case with everything related to this practice and, when necessary, he was sent the substances he needed. He healed people as well as animals, also supported by the home remedies of the region. A species of tarantula used to sting the cattle, especially cows and horses, on the hoof, and the venom caused them to rot and its nail to fall. Your grandfather cured them and managed it to re-grow, but anyway they were already affected and left very sensitive. In times of flood, he had to take the cows to pastures in the highest areas, because if they were reached by the water and they stayed soaked there, they could not lie down and they could get infected by something called derrengue and after that they died. He also healed the cows from some illness like cancer with fillings of an herb called, precisely, cancerina. In the evenings, after

eating, he sat at the table in the corridor, with a dish with pieces of raw meat and a dish with sulfur. He called his dogs and other dogs from the ranch and he gave to each one of them a piece of meat passed through the sulfur to cure or prevent the scabies.

...when boiling, add the washed meat and cook with a piece of onion, a sprig of coriander, a sprig of parsley and one more of chives.

On several occasions, during the Revolution, your grandfather Agustin received the visit of rebel groups asking *(they asked for them and did not steal because they did not know where they were. The horses and cattle in general were moving from pasture to pasture as they finished the grass, and the pastures were distributed in several places in the jungle that only grandfather and the people in the ranch knew)* for the cause; some of them did it claiming their struggle and others thrived with the situation taking the cause as a pretext. On one occasion they came up with supposed revolutionaries and demanded him horses, my dad enraged, especially because when telling them something about the armed movement, he realized that these advantageous people did not know what he was talking about. Then he asked them why he had to give more, it was not the first time and he had already collaborated. In a previous visit, they had taken many horses, and still they had not left the ranch, when they were already mistreating them, riding them by two or more, and doing lots of savage acts that, for your grandfather, who adored and cared so much for his horses, was a huge disgust, as well as the theft. So on this occasion my father, who was not scared before anybody, said to them that he would not give them anything because they did not know how to treat the animals because they were beasts. The man insisted saying that they were for “my general”. My dad answered him: “I am grandson of a military man, he was really a brave man and his people was honorable. He did not surround

himself with a crowd of thieves like you”. The man threatened him to hang him if he opposed to collaborate with the cause, to what your grandfather responded: “You can hang me and extract my tongue and I will not give you anything”. They were already taking him to hang, when Chole, your aunt, still very small, began to cry. Your grandfather turned and threw over her the hot coffee and said to her: “Do not cry! A Lastra never cries!” Seeing this, the rebels were intimidated and left with nothing.

Soon they returned and asked for fewer horses. This time your grandfather agreed, by the mediation of grandmother Mary, not without getting upset. He told them to choose them, because he did not want to be responsible if they had problems with a horse and said that, on purpose, he had given it bad. They tested them, and since they were not experts, they took several of those that were convalescent of the sting on the hoof, but that was their choice.

The Lastra Zuluaga family continued living between El Peal and Palizada for several years. Life in the ranch was quite routine, your grandfather used to get up at four in the morning, he had coffee and soft-boiled eggs for breakfast in company of your grandmother Maria; when he used to go to the field, she would go back to bed. He watched the work with the cattle by supervising pastures and cowboys; he took with him a bowl of sour pozol (*traditional drink with which the heat and thirst are relieved in the field. It is prepared with busted nixtamal mass and afterwards ground, which is beaten with cold water. It is taken fresh or sour, fermented by heat*), a piece of fresh cheese and a bush (*guaje*) with water. His return was around noon. He took the fresh air and a dog nap (*before eating*) in his hammock. The food was served at one in the afternoon, and then my dad smoked a cigar. He made them himself with Simojovel tobacco that he soaked in rum, then he covered it with a canvas and, after some time, I do not know how much with accuracy, probably when it was already ductile, he made his cigars and dried them in the sun. When he lit it, the smell was so strong that it knocked down; he used to say that they were for men. In the afternoon he attended the pending issues from the ranch; at six

o'clock he had dinner, only oatmeal in his bowl, and at eight o'clock he would go to sleep.

From Monday to Friday was the same, and on Saturday your grandfather had the habit of going to Palizada to stock up on groceries. He embarked at four in the morning and it was about four hours of travel. When he arrived, he did his errands, he spent the night at my grandmother Pepilla's house, and the next day he would return to eat at El Peal. Suddenly, on the weekends, during his absence, cattle began to be robbed from him. A former laborer of Peal, Antonio Martinez, who was then a worker at the neighboring ranch of Don Eduardo del Rivero, assured him that Manuel, Don Eduardo's son, the family's black sheep, was the one who was committing the stealing, and that he could show him where they buried the hides of the cattle that he killed and that they had his iron mark, a swastika (*then, it had no ideological connotation*). My dad, enraged, wanted to wait for Manuel to adjust accounts. My mom, of course, did not agree because she was the godmother of one of the children of Don Eduardo and, Manuel's mother, Doña Manuelita Inurreta, was a friend since their youth. Also, she made your grandfather see the danger that he was facing, because although he was determined - "I get killed or I kill him" -, what if the death was really him and he was leaving his daughters orphans, still young, and repeated the story of his father.

In addition, on an occasion when Tomas Garrido Canabal visited Palizada, when talking to your grandfather Agustin, to whom he had appreciation and, in turn he also felt affection for your grandfather because he had given him his first horse, he called him uncle; your grandfather told him: "You do not know the damage that makes you to be surrounded by all those bad people, that Perez Verdia, everyone says that he is a thief, a murderer. When they entered into the Peal, during the Revolution, they took even the hens. You should have sent him to be hung already (a saying) ..." the man named Perez Verdia was standing next to Tomas, listening to everything my dad was saying, he did not know him. Of course, there would always be a person who would tell your grandfather that Perez

Verdia had said: “Don Agustin will pay me in a future trip when I go to Jonuta”, since it is near El Peal, about half an hour horseback riding and it belongs to the state of Tabasco, where this man enjoyed immunity. Since he was a murderer, my dad was sure that he would do it. So your grandfather kept a boy on the outskirts of Jonuta so that, when Perez Verdía arrived, he would let him know. Then my dad would go to Palizada by land, about five hours horseback riding, as long as he did not go by the river so he would not hunt him. These two reasons were what caused El Peal to be sold, coupled with the desire that your grandmother Maria had, to leave the ranch and that Chole and I could have the opportunity to attend school in the city of Campeche and develop in a more refined environment, as she was.

... after it has boiled for a while, for about half an hour, add the carrots, chayotes, squash, cabbage and plenty of momo...

He sold El Peal and the two thousand heads of cattle, he was paid with gold; prevailed over all the gold standard, it was the twenties. We went to Campeche and there we lived for five years or a little longer. There were no banks in the city, capital of the state. Some acquaintances tried to convince my dad to engage in usury, but he did not want to and much less your grandmother. Grandfather Agustin was born, grown and lived always in the ranch, he did not know anything more than about the field and cattle; that was how Doctor Camara, his friend, convinced him to put his money to work on the mortgage of an important ranch called Polvoxal. I do not know how this financial operation worked, apparently it was an investment. The doctor was married to a daughter of Don Lucas Sanchez and Mrs. Edelmira Repetto, who was the owner of the Polvoxal Ranch and had died; he was the executor.

While Dr. Camara was in charge of the operation, he religiously paid the interest, until his nephew, Luquitas Sanchez, a very pampered grandchild of Mrs. Edelmir, and his cousin Jesus, returned from the United States, where they had gone to educate themselves. Grandmother sent them, but they were useless, they did not know how to do anything, the only thing that they learned were vices. They stopped paying what was stipulated to my dad and they were spending the inheritance, squandering houses and properties, until they started with Polvoxal: they started removing the French tiles from the houses of a part of the ranch, to sell them, and finally, before finishing with everything, they took out for auction Polvoxal; the agrarian movement was beginning, for that reason nobody wanted to buy land. This was an area of thirty-five thousand hectares, located on the banks of the Candelaria River, an inhospitable territory in the jungle where there were precious woods: cedar, mahogany and, in addition, palo de tinte, ceibas, immense trees called pichis, chicozapotes and, therefore, gum; finally, even petroleum. And, as if it was not enough, it was said that, also, there was gold buried. Your grandfather Agustin had to accept Polvoxal as liquidation of his investment as a bad business or he would have lost his money.

Sebastian Llado, former administrator of Polvoxal, whom my dad had as a very honest person, told him that he had bought a ranch and that he was leaving the ranch, because he was going to work his own. My dad decided to go to live in Palizada and to spend only the gum season on the ranch to keep on exploiting it. It was the time of recession in the United States, they only bought to the old costumers, and the gum from Polvoxal was only under the name of Sebastian, the administrator, so they did not want to buy from your grandfather. The same happened with the wood. Things started to get complicated, there was no liquidity, we had to go live at the ranch. He was followed by some old workers, as well as Lugarda, who was already with a son. He assigned as a house to her the one that had been the administrator's house. When we arrived, it had been abandoned for about thirty years old or more. I was going to turn fifteen years old.

The place was, in spite of its abandonment, extraordinary. It was a ranch that had reached its peak in the mid-nineteenth century. In its beginnings it was dedicated to the agriculture and to the cattle ranch, later it was only used to extract from it palo de tinte, mahogany and cedar. The property had a house of masonry with profusion of wood inside, delicately worked. Polvozal had had a blacksmith shop, a sugar mill, a bakery, a carpentry shop, a chapel, a shop for workers where they exchanged their salary (*tienda de raya*), several dozens of houses for the workers and it did not lack anything because it was surrounded by vegetation so exuberant that it made it look like an earthly paradise. Unfortunately, and despite its abundance, the paths started to close for your grandfather.

The means of transport was still by the river, now the Candelaria. The property had a pier on the river and, below, throughout the area, there were oyster banks; every determined time they dynamited to be able to navigate. There was a motor boat that made the journey to sell some goods, such as fruit, fish, salted meat; move passage or carry the mail. On one occasion that your grandfather was returning from Palizada, the boy who was manning the boat, son of an old boatman from the zone, said to him:

- I was told that you used to say that my father was a thief... Your grandfather, astonished, answered him:
- No way, I have always said that your father was a very honest man, like few others.
- Do you really think that about my dad?
- I have always said it.
- Well then, in gratitude, I am going to tell you something. I found the Xet (*that is how they call the person with a cleft lip in mayan language. The Xet was the son of Crecencio Lopez, a loyal employee of grandfather Agustin, who had been born in El Peal and who followed him to Polvozal with his entire family*), in Jonuta, raising the people to come and invade. He said that he also had two very young daughters.

My dad responded:

- Do me a favor, when you come back from your trip, you stop at the pier and blow the sea snail shell (*it was the way in which the boatman announced his proximity, and in the same way he was answered from the house when they wanted him to stop, either to make a purchase from him or an errand. Chole knew how to play the sea snail shell very well*) In the meantime, do not tell anyone anything.

When arriving at the ranch, he told your grandmother what was happening and, in a very discreet way, so as not to attract attention, prepared everything to leave Polvozal in three or four days, as soon as the boat returned. And that is how we did it, we practically went out with what we were wearing. Dad, mom, Chole and me. We were only there for a year and a half.

All this forced your grandfather, with all the pain in his heart, to put on sale the ranch; he was already very old and sick. Diabetes was declared in him for all these anxieties. He always told us: eat land, but promise me that you will never sell it”, so being forced to do it was a very tough on him. We stayed in Palizada, while the situation was resolved, another year and a half, before finally returning to Campeche. Agrarianism was at its best, nobody wanted properties. He squandered the ranch to Uncle Carlos Garcia, because there was no one who would pay him more, it was almost as a favor; he was his cousin, and brother-in-law because of aunt Charo, your grandfather’s half sister. He only sold him the surface, but he reserved the sale of the subsoil, since it was in process with a company, apparently an American firm, for the exploitation of oil; he already knew that there was oil because he paid for the study of the land, that is why he was sure that there was. It is paradoxical that our ruin would later become others wealth.

... when the meat is soft, the pot is ready to enjoy...

Once the operation with uncle Carlos was over, your grandfather started transacting with the engineer Emilio Monsonyi,

specialist in oil and mines, who had made the study of the land of Polvozal and was living in Mexico City, the certification of the property of the subsoil of Polvozal by the Department of Petroleos of the Secretariat of National Economy, to continue the negotiation with the oil company. He also asked the engineer to help him contact a device manufacturer to locate minerals and metals, hoping to find the hidden treasure. Both procedures lasted for several years. The coup de grace was close: Lazaro Cardenas nationalized the oil and applied the constitutional article 27 (*... it belongs to the Nation the direct dominion of all the natural resources of the continental shelf ... the petroleum and all the solid, liquid or gaseous hydrogen carbides...*), with which he lost the right to exploit the subsoil. Oh! by the way, your grandfather never found gold, but there were those who found it.

When a cousin of my father was in Polvozal, I do not remember if it was Salomon or Carlos, one night he had an appearance that called him, the specter of the famous white woman who wandered in and out of the house, according to the locals. He got so scared that he slept with the gun under the pillow, to which the other brother told him not to be stupid, to follow the silhouette in question. Apparently, he did and found the famous treasure, because he found out that one of them was selling old gold coins. However, they justified all the excavations by saying that they were already there when they arrived, that Agustin had made them; they even had the gall to say that my dad was the one who had found the money, because next to some empty clay pots that were in one of the holes, they had found some metal boxes from the pills of Dr. Ross that he was taking. As stipulated in the deed of sale, no one other than Agustin Lastra was entitled to everything that was in the subsoil, but apparently they did not respect the agreement.

While we were in Palizada, your grandfather Agustin liked very much to buy the strained tamales prepared by Mama Lofa (*Eulogia*), a black woman similar to Aunt Jemima from the hot cakes. The tamales were in banana leaf, huge, she added a complete turkey leg, and if not, the pig's chin, those were the fascination of my dad.

We returned to Campeche to settle permanently. My dad was losing everything. His health was deteriorating more and more; however, he did not lose his sense of humor.

On one occasion, already living in Campeche, the cook was preparing the juech stew pot with momo, because your grand-dad Agustin ate it very often, when she left the kitchen a moment to attend a call. The kitchen was connected to a second courtyard of the house full of flowerbeds with plants and, at the background, a chicken coop, as in the houses of those times, with laying hens and chickens for the domestic consumption. For some reason, the henhouse had been left open, the hens went out, they went into the kitchen and began to peck the juech stew, they shook the piece of momo, they ate a part of it and the rest fell to the ground. The dog that my father had, a German shepherd named Kaiser, began the feast of everything that the hens threw and ate until the satiety, which left it a sensitive disgust for this stew, to such a degree that, on subsequent occasions when they prepared it, just by feeling the smell of the momo, the dog would lay down on the ground and with its legs, the dog covered its nose so as not to smell it anymore; My dad enjoyed this attitude of Kaiser and celebrated it with such tasty laughter that it was contagious.

... it is served with white rice, in a deep dish, can be added lemon drops, to taste. And bon appetite.

CHAPTER 5

FROSTED GLASSES

From your grandmother Maria I inherited the passion for gathering recipes, I still keep some manuscript notebooks of her, and she was also the one who gave me my first cookbooks. You could not take your grandfather Agustin out of his stews, but she always had the restlessness to dispose, in addition to what your grandfather liked, more delicate dishes, and the frosted glasses was one of her favorite desserts; for important dates and posh meals, it looks magnificent and it is delicious, for that reason it received many compliments from

those who savored it ... Mmm! I still seem to perceive the aroma that the cinnamon gave off while preparing it:

... To do this we need: four cups of natural milk, four tablespoons of cornstarch, five eggs, three quarts of cup of sugar, one teaspoon of vanilla and one hundred and fifty grams of sponge fingers...

When your grandfather Agustin died, grandma came to Puebla to live with us. From her you may only remember her affection and consent; she was a pretty old lady, but it was not much you could enjoy her. You were barely three years old when she fell, she fractured her femur and never walked again; she was soon triggered by senile dementia. She used to call you Polincita for being Polin 's little sister. It seems to me that I can see her: after eating, she broke the crumb of bread on the table, then took it and went out to sit, in an armchair in the dinning room, next to the door of the house, to feed the pigeons of the temple of San Agustin.

Your grandmother Maria was very short in stature, but she bragged about it saying that fine perfumes came in small containers. She had beautiful eyes, framed by eyebrows, outlined like with a paintbrush; with small and pouty mouth, with a profile that was all her pride. Very intelligent and sensitive woman, her godfather with affection used to call her graduate 's head. Cultured and refined. Prudent, but dominant. She was the eldest of the four daughters of Don Joaquin Zuluaga and Mrs. Pepilla del Rio. She was born in the city of Campeche on July 27, 1874 and was baptized with the name of Maria del Buen Viaje, advocacy of the Virgin Patron of San Juan de los Remedios, Cuba, homeland of her mother.

In Campeche, at that time, there were still airs of bonanza and prosperity, in spite of being already independent and erected as a

state a few years ago (*on April 29, 1863*); continued the inertia of having been the most important port of the Yucatan Peninsula, the commercial movement was very intense. The City of Campeche, founded a little before Merida, had lineage, tradition, many lovers of the culture and a large established European population.

Your grandmother's childhood was spent in Campeche, in a family composed by dad, mom, aunt Concha, Conchanquito, sister of Pepilla; Maria and Estela, a sister one year younger than her; time after, already in Palizada, Sara and Josefina would be born. From the anecdotes of her childhood I remember one that she always mentioned: during the course of her schooling, during an examination that she presented and that was presided over by a jury, one of the synods tried to confuse her. At that moment, another of the teachers came to her defense and said to the synod in question: "An exam is for the student to show off, not the teacher", enough comment so he would ask for an apology and correct his attitude; after this incident the process continued. Your grandmother was a dedicated person with an enormous inclination for reading, a habit that she cultivated; in his father's house there was an extensive library where she could satisfy her anxiety to know.

... You have to liquefy the five egg yolks with two cups of milk and the cornstarch, the egg whites should be reserved for the meringue of the crest...

Uncle Alejandro del Rio, her mother's brother, noticed her musical sensibility and taught her how to play the guitar and the piano, she learned very well and did it with great skill; this was the reason why he gave her a beautiful lacquered piano inlaid with nacre shell, which accompanied her throughout her youth and with which, already in Palizada, she would entertain her father's meals; when he died, she never played again.

For the gatherings, the uncle made her learn some simple pieces of music that, in its interpretation, seemed much more complicated, he liked that his student was shown, occasionally she played the piano accompanying Estela, who possessed a beautiful voice.

Mariquita, my mom, always claimed to have been the favorite of her father. She had true veneration for him. Every morning, just before twelve, when the ravages of the suffocating heat began to be felt, she would prepare for him a soda water that, moments later, she would take to the store next to the house where he was working. To prepare it, she mixed a small measure of seltz salts with natural water, which made it effervescent and very refreshing, sometimes she perfumed it with lemon or orange peel. For this purpose, her father ordered to make a measuring spoon in silver with her name engraved. She kept this utensil with great affection for the memories that it evoked.

Your grandmother traveled to Cuba frequently, during her childhood and youth, to visit the Del Rio relatives; besides them, grandmother Francisca already a widow, aunts Carmen and Ana, uncle Fernando, mom and brothers of her dad, had gone to live to Havana. Fernando was posthumous son and, therefore, spoiled by his mother and sisters; Mariquita was the spoiled granddaughter, so they had the project to arrange the marriage between them. Your great-grandmother Pepilla intuited this and, in a very diplomatic way, she avoided it by returning to Palizada, where they had been living for a few years before.

Havana was the gateway to everything European to cities and countries of the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean, a cosmopolitan city and with great commercial movement. Estela and Maria, as young girls, spent long periods with the family, and on one occasion they took high fashion classes with a French woman living there. Among the many things that she taught them, they learned to cut the ham sleeves, the latest trend in fashion; later, their father ordered from France fashion models, to know what was used and not to seem to have just fallen from the moon. They took a lot of advantage from these classes, especially because their mother always tried to make

them busy, because she used to say that: “idleness is the mother of all vices”. Later on, when they were already living in Palizada and as merchant blood ran through their veins, they made custom-made dresses with simple cotton fabrics, and at fairs in nearby towns, where El Brazo Fuerte, their father’s shop, was also present, they exhibited them, and they were sold very well, and if not, as they had made them to their taste and measure, they would keep them to wear them daily.

... Place the liquefied in a small saucepan and set over medium heat, adding the sugar and the other two cups of milk, moving always so it does not stick or make lumps. Remove from the fire as soon as it begins to boil, add the vanilla and continue moving so that it does not form the cream from boiled milk, until it is only lukewarm...

Your great-grandfather Joaquin, seeking to diversify his market with new suppliers and, at the same time, promote his merchandise, attended the Chicago’s World Exposition (*World’s Colombian Exposition, Chicago*), in 1893, accompanied by his two older daughters: Maria and Estela. The great-grandfather had friends in the state of Illinois, because he had studied in the Jesuit School in Springfield, near Chicago. The trip was very pleasant, they did not lack of invitations of all kinds: to dine, get to know this or that place, or to the theater. Once finished their stay at the Exposition, they made a more extensive tour of the state of New York, they visited Buffalo and the City of New York, where weeks later they embarked to return to Cuba and, later, to Campeche. In the house of Palizada, in the living room, there was a very peculiar little table (*that little table was in my house, granny gave it to me; now it is in Polo’s, your brother*), with numerous turned sticks and different levels to put ornaments, it could be completely disassembled; your grandma brought it from the Chicago fair. Many years later, already in the twilight of his life, the three cats

that your grandfather Agustin had, would lay down on that same little table to take a nap.

Two trips that they made to Cuba were vividly recorded in their memory, because they were very special. Of the first one that she made to that country with her family, when she was about nine years old, she remembered how, upon arriving at the Havana dock, a copious group of black people who were there to receive them swarmed with great cacophony. The other, also to Havana, in 1898, was when they attended as guests of the Cuban Independence ceremony.

Very young, your grandmother initiated a courtship. His name was Francisco and they were engaged. Ten years passed. The three younger sisters had already married, when someone informed her that Francisco had a wife and children in Campeche. When your grandma found out, she cut off the relationship, with everything that was involved at that time for a woman her age. She was thirty years old and it was very likely that she would no longer marry. Francisco's mother, being a very close friend of the family and being very mortified by what had happened, she had lit for her, day and night, a lamp of oil to the Sacred Heart and said to Francisco: "This is so that Maria finds a good husband". It seems that it worked: she met your grandfather Agustin in Palizada and, a year later, they got married on September 27, 1905.

... Put in each cup, using those of the size for water, two tablespoons of the cream, one and a half sponge finger, in several pieces, on top of these one more tablespoon of cream; they come out around twelve or thirteen glasses, but if there is something left of the custard, distribute it equally in each one until it finishes...

In Palizada, when your grandmother was single and still without commitment, there was an older man, Don Nicandro Salas, who had some difficulty in pronouncing the r. He pretended all the young girls of the town and so he did with the four Zuluaga. As none of them gave him any attention, he commented: “The little Zuluagas are very delicate, barely blows a little wind from the north and they get stiff”. He was very gallant and, in one occasion when your grandmother Maria passed by his store and it started to rain, as she did not carry an umbrella, he ran with one to cover her and accompany her to her house. Soon, she got engaged to your grandfather. When Mr. Salas found out, he said: “another day ... umbgella! Umbgella! ... cgap!” Your grandfather Agustin, already married, showed up at Don Nicandro’s store to buy some item. He let him in. Inside the store, under the chair where he used to sit, there was a monkey at night sleeping in a drawer, it was his pet. With all the intention that your grandfather would listen to him, he began to hit the drawer with the foot so that it would move and he said to it: “Magia! Maguca!”, wake up! Of course, my dad could not help laughing loudly whenever he remembered it.

For your grandma, her new life passed between Palizada and El Peal. It was not until seven years after she was married that she gave birth to Jose Felipe, who died at two years old due childhood cholera. Aunt Charo, my father’s half sister, moved to the ranch and spent several months with her to accompany her in that painful trance; then Chole was born and then I was born.

Life in the ranch was very quiet. Your grandmother, after accompanying grandfather for breakfast, went to bed again and, around seven o’clock, she got up. You had to wake up at that time and have breakfast as usual: a couple of fried eggs with fried tortilla and coffee with milk; sometimes, peeled oranges for sucking, it was not yet customary to have juice and fruit for breakfast. Afterwards, your grandma arranged the meal with Lugarda; Velia, another woman from the ranch, was indicated the clothes for laundry and was in charge of heating the water for the bath, while we played for a while. The bath was about ten o’clock, and once our hair was dry,

Mariquita combed our hair before your grandpa arrived from the fields.

The food was served at one o'clock. The most usual thing for granny, aunt Chole and me, was chicken. Your grandfather had more than two hundred hens for consumption in the house; sometimes, when the cayucos (*type of canoe*) passed by selling, it could be: mojarra or pejelagarto or turtle; all, usually, accompanied with white rice and fried bananas; fruit at the end of the meal. During the afternoon, your grandmother gave lessons to Chole and me.

... to make the meringue we will beat the five egg whites with a pinch of salt and a sprinkle of water. At four or five minutes, one begins to incorporate, by little, three quarts of a cup of sugar without stopping beating ...

Granddaddy took the night snack earlier, the rest of us ate our night snack at seven o'clock: sweet bread, pancake bread rolls from Campeche made with raw dough tortilla, beans, fried dogfish and another dough tortilla; it closed and fried, it was served with its onion sauce and vinegar; turrets with honey, of French bread, a type of hotcake, recipe of uncle Juan Fernandez who had been in the Guatemaland and knew many recipes; chayote flip flops, pumpkin or chayote or potato cake.

What your grandfather normally bought every Saturday in Palizada, was meat for about two days, rice, beans, sugar, panela (*fresh cheese*), bread, butter (*canned dutch butter*), cheese (*red wax Dutch ball*). Your granny Maria used to always have cheese and butter in the ranch in case that someone came to visit, which was very common in that era, because there was no food service or lodging (*if it became dark or if they were too tired to continue, they would stay in cabins, ranches or settlements on the road*), on the way to other places they went to eat at El Peal and with this she could improvise more elegant dishes for those

who arrived. Sometimes she prepared a delicious cake with the chestnuts that gave the wild chestnut that was in El Peal.

... when we begin beating the egg whites, apart, in a wide casserole, start boiling a regular amount of cinnamon with a cup of water. When this liquid is reduced to the third part, add four more cups of milk and a quarter of a cup of sugar ...

The Peal had the living room in the center, through it the rest of the house was accessed; in one corner of this was a console with a very thin mirror. The door always remained open. On one occasion a donkey escaped from the corrals and went into the living room, the donkey saw himself in the mirror and got scared, it kicked the reflected fellow and shattered the console and the mirror. Your grandmother Maria almost killed the donkey. So, since then, they put a half wooden fence in the front door, in case an animal escaped again, it did not get into the house.

One day when the revolutionaries arrived at the ranch and your grandfather was not there, Mariquita took Chole and me by the hand and, as always, we went at full speed to the mountain to protect ourselves; in this occasion, grandmother Pepilla was visiting, who also took the road. Suddenly your grandmother starts to hear someone yelling at her: “stay there!”, but she did not understand what he was telling her and saw the machete that waved a person in the air, she did not recognize who that was, until a little closer she recognized the old man Gabriel who was saying to her: “Stay there! Stay there! I go with you! What would my boss say if there is not a man here to defend you, if he is the only one, if there are no others?”

Your grandmother Maria, as well as grandfather, practiced medicine with the ranch workers. Crescencio Lopez, a worker who was born in El Peal, and who later followed your grandfather to Polvoxal, had a granddaughter: Tomasa (*the daughter of Xet, who*

wanted, further on, to invade Polvoxa), Maxita, was xet (*in mayan, cleft lip*), she was very weak and, therefore, she still did not walk. When your grandmother arrived, she began to send her milk, to care about her so that she would get stronger and that way she made her walk. In Polvoxa there was a family named Galvez who lived in the “champon” (*simple construction with four sticks or trunks, in square, with roof of guano or tiles; palm roof*), behind the corral. Everyone suffered vitiligo, and your grandmother knew, by Dr. Melo, that it could be cured by taking some shots of Epsom salt dissolved in boiled water, an ounce in a liter; on an empty stomach, a glass everyday. They had almost no spots when we had to leave the ranch.

At the time when Tomas Garrido Canabal governed Tabasco, my cousin Cesar Lastra and him became enemies and he had to leave Villahermosa because Tomas threatened him with death. He was hidden in El Peal; your grandfather hid him in a “champon” that was half closed. Only your grandmother or Velia would take him food in the afternoon, when the workers were already resting, to avoid everyone else from finding out. Cesar would tell your grandmother: “Aunt, I am going to marry Maria Luisa”, a second cousin who had grown up on the ranch. “If I bring her to you, would you do me the favor of teaching her more refined manners?” Mariquita said yes to him, although she doubted that she would want. One day, it dawned with the news that Garrido had given amnesty and there was no danger. Cesar, no matter what, had his doubts, so during the night he went to Villahermosa, fixed some issues and planned to return immediately to El Peal. His friends invited him to a party that was to be held in the village; he did not want to go, but they began to cheer him up by saying that he was no longer in danger, that nothing would happen. He finally accepted and went to the jinks. During the dance there was a blackout, the disorder began and, when the light returned, Cesar had been stabbed, they took out his intestines. No doctor wanted to attend him because of fear of Garrido. He died an hour later...

... On having begun boiling, bring down the flame, but always let it boil on a soft fire. In this milk we are going to be placing pieces of the meringue, by tablespoons, to boil in the milk, turning it so it cooks both sides ...

Your grandmother always had great patience to your grandfather. She said that he, having been orphaned of mother so young, he had no one to pamper him. In the same way, with her sister in law, aunt Herlinda, she had a very diplomatic relationship because she considered that she had been almost a mother to your grandfather; that is why she forgave her for all her oddities and even lack of courtesy, such as the invitations to eat that she made to her brother when he was in Palizada and that she did not invite the family, only him, and she would hold on to him for a long time, because in the afternoon she took out the card deck and they would play until she commanded it. Your grandmother Maria kept an eye on Aunt Herlinda when she fell ill, until one day when she arrived as always, she measured the medicine that she had to take. With a very haughty gesture, uncle Panchin, her husband, snatched the medicine from your grandmother, he threw it into the patio, approached Aunt Herlinda and said to her: “Who knows what they are giving to you, my queen. From now on, it is going to be me the one who will take care of you”. Your grandmother told my dad: “Well, I will not come back here”, and grandfather understood. What happened was that Aunt Herlinda, since she had no children, had named Chole and me her heirs, something that Uncle Panchin could not allow, so, as soon as she got ill, he picked up the keys of all her furniture and trunks and started selling all her clothes and properties, so that there would be nothing to inherit. And so it happened, but little lasted his joy. Some time after widowed, and determined to conquer women, he had an intervention to get rid of his belly. I imagine that at that time this type of surgery was still in diapers, and ... he died ...

I was eight years old when we went to Villahermosa because of the death of great-grandmother Pepilla. She had entrusted to your grandmother Maria that, upon her death, to give each of her daughters her inheritance, in addition to her jewels which she had distributed in four parts and placed in four closed bags. When she fulfilled her mission, Sara said that they should open them to see if the distribution was fair, to what your grandmother opposed and she told them that if her mother had arranged it that way, it was because she wanted it to be like that and that her will had to be respected. She did not allow her. Maybe Josefina's bag seemed more voluminous, maybe your great-grandmother favored her because her economic situation was very difficult. That is why Sara jumped, she was always the most ambitious and arrogant. She said that her greatest pleasure was to caress the box where she kept her coins; together with her husband they were the height of stinginess. But it did not stop there...

... It is removed with a skimmer, draining it well and placing it, very carefully, in a container so that it releases the leftover milk. The cinnamon slits can be removed or left, to taste. Continue until finished. If necessary, add a little more milk or add the one which is releasing the boiled meringue ...

During the funerals, uncle Pancho Trujillo (years later he was Governor of Tabasco and, further on, Minister of Work in the government of Manuel Avila Camacho), aunt Estela's son-in-law, told granny:

- Comadre - his wife, Nela, was my godmother of baptism -, Sara says that they are going to impound the trip and put a lawyer so they can render accounts about the cattle that belonged to Mrs. Pepilla ...

To which Mariquita answered:

- When ever they want, Agustin has nothing to lose: he will charge them for rent, vacherage, pasturage and, also, he took care of it as his own and he never charged him anything of that. So in fifteen years, who owes to whom?

They remained silent. For them their accounts were: there had always been born cows, they had had several offspring, none had died or become ill... and with those accounts, the money that your grandmother Maria had given them seemed little to them. Great-grandmother and aunt Concha were paid an old debt that someone had with their father, and with that they bought cattle for your grandfather to handle; Pepilla said that he was the only son-in-law who she trusted. Grandfather Agustin expressed the convenience of being present, when marking the cattle, the two oldest grandchildren: Enrique, son of Sara, and Chemo, son of Estela, so they would see that their young cattle were marked with their iron: a horseshoe. She replied: "Agustin, you do not have to render accounts to anyone but me."

Aunt Estela was already a widow. When her husband died, he was ruined. During the First World War, a ship with a shipment of thread, row and other merchandise for the store, was sunk. That was the cause of his ruin; it was paid in advance. For this reason, Mariquita gave him the part of her inheritance.

... Finishing the process of boiling the meringue, join the milk that was left with the one that drained form the meringue and, already lukewarm, put by spoons in the glasses, to moisten better the sponge fingers ...

Your grandmother Maria lived with great dignity all the obstacles of life, she was also a woman of faith. She had the habit of praying the rosary; the place that she chose to do it was in the shade,

behind the shutter, to get fresh air, many times she would get sleepy, she would fall asleep and the rosary would fall down. When grandfather heard it fall, he noticed that and, always joking, would put into practice his analogy with the animals and said to her: “Shit, Maria! That is why the saints do not pay attention to you, and that way, hidden in the darkness, you look like a goat with worms (*Cattle and goats are attacked by the worm borer, often in the navel, so it lays in the shade and licks it constantly*).

... Finally, place its crest of boiled meringue to each glass, placing a cherry on top of it. Refrigerate before serving and, if possible, make them one day before ... they are delicious ...

CHAPTER 6

(from this narration I will leave the voice of mom and I will be the one to resort to my memory to recreate it; however, it will be her voice that will continue until the end transmitting the recipes, except for the chapter, Tamal of platon, in which is Carmela who teaches me)

ASTURIAN FABADA (*ASTURIAN BEAN STEW*)

Since the previous night, wash and soak the large white beans (fabes) in plenty of water. Place them in a large container

because they grow a lot. The next day remove the ones that float because those do not work and spur a little the others...

When a stew is prepared, the aroma of seasonings and spices is impregnated in the clothes and on the skin, in the same way it happened in my interior with many of them, and now, when capturing this recipe, surged the memory that took me to the many times that, in family, we enjoyed the fabada (white bean stew), and the reference in which it became among the members of the small domestic world in which I grew up, was leaving a mark and modeling my life.

Therefore, to talk about my father I chose the fabada, the first reason is obvious: he was Asturian, and another is that he did not like it as a child, and this became a source of conflict with his father, to such an extent that one day he said to him: "I give you a "duro" (*coin of five pesetas*) if you eat the fabada". Child at last, he felt tempted: he ate the plate that was served to him and, immediately, he ran up from the table and vomited it. His father gave him the promised coin and relaxed his position to realize that the kid did not like at all the potage and never again forced him to eat it. The years passed, dad left the house, left Spain, left for Cuba and, months after, missing home food, he wrote his father telling him how much he remembered his mother when she gave him what he liked for meal: steak, rice with chicken, chickpeas and fabada. His father replied: "What we miss is that now you like the fabada, which is what you never ate here". The place where he ate his food, which usually was with the same person with whom he worked, it is possible that it was from a Spanish living there. The Spanish population was abundant and diverse, there were Galicians, Asturians and Leonese, so the type of food was similar to that of their homeland, and there was only that, without an option. He was only fourteen years old and very likely that the distance and the sadness were relieved a bit with the taste of home. From that moment, the fabada was added to his menu and he ate it frequently. Sometimes, when it came to account, remembering his beginnings far

from home, he pointed out: “the bread from some else makes the son be good”.

To talk about my dad envelops me in nostalgia, but at the same time it is a pleasure. On one occasion Lolita (*my mother-in-law, mom of Alvaro, my husband*) told me: “if I had left my parent’s house so young, now I would bite anyone, and your dad is not like that, on the contrary, he is a person who reconciles you with life”. I feel an immense admiration for him, he left the nest as a child and forged himself. He finished primary school at Don Floro’s School (*at present, it is read in a bronze plaque placed on the door of which was his school: Florentino F. Carbayeda, “Don Floro”, 1891-1965: here the exemplary educator served as a teacher, until his death*), the Barbucas, in Aviles. A primary focused on practical aspects, since fourth grade there was taught simple interest, compound, percentages, pragmatic measures and Spanish grammar, with it, in a special way, the inquietude for reading was sowed, something that he never stopped doing; he covered a broad spectrum of literature, he read from classics to the moderns of his time, so he could be asked about any topic and he knew. He had the habit of reading at least three newspapers a day, the editorials of the Excelsior and Novedades, and in the afternoon Ultimas Noticias, he said that they were the best, for that reason he had a well-formed opinion. He felt fascinated by the zarzuela and the serious theatre, and also that of magazine: the shows, anyway, he possessed a huge culture acquired, as he said, at the University of Life.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, France ceded part of its possessions to Spain in the Moroccan territory, that added to others that it already possessed since the first half of the nineteenth century; in that place a protectorate was established. Did not expect that would find resistance (*Rif War, 1911-1927*) on the side of the rifeños, tribes of the region of the mountains who opposed to the occupation. The Bereberes, knowers of the region, established a fierce defense and caused innumerable casualties among the Spanish troops; the continuous attacks forced them to reinforce their ranks. The bloody war that was waged in Morocco demanded many troops,

for this reason it began to use the reserves of the army, among whom was the youngest blood in Spain: the kids who were doing their military service. This was through a system of fifths (*the name comes from the contribution of blood or obligation of military service that John II of Castilla (1406-1454) imposed during his reign, according to which one in five males had to serve in the army, a provision that Felipe V resumed in 1705. In Josep Cusachs and the military service in Spain, Ministry of Defense, Madrid, 2001, pp. 7-19*), which was established by raffle and in which played those who were about to be full age. A very bloody war, with continuous killings of Spaniards, motivated in much part by the obstinacy of Spain to maintain their colonies, what forced parents to find a way to prevent their offspring from going to Morocco. That is how they started to emigrate, almost children, at the most at the age of fifteen, to avoid being held near the date of the draw. The destination was diverse, some remained in Europe, but an immense majority chose America.

Two uncles, brothers of my grandmother, had been living in Havana for several years, they had made the America, and for that reason, my father's two oldest brothers had left to go to that point, a comfortable and safe place with the uncles, avoiding the war and with the intention, in addition, to look for a job and learn how to work. When dad finished school, the uncles offered him an offer to pay for his engineering studies in England, because he was very smart. He was twelve years old, and the idea of going to an hostile country and the difficulty of the language made him refuse flatly. Two years later it was his turn to go to Cuba to work. Before leaving for America, to the majority of those who were going to travel, were given an accounting course for two or three months so that they had some weapon to start working. I think that Dad really wanted to fly and he had a huge adventurous spirit, because he chose Cuba. And that way began the adventure of his life: in the port of Gijon, on October 19, 1916, he embarked on the steamer Infanta Isabel.

When reading the letters that my grandfather Pablo and my grandmother Maria (*Also my dad's mother was named Maria*) wrote to my Dad, I see what was happening like in a mirror. When embarking, other older acquaintances were asked, because they

traveled in groups, to take care of the younger ones; this was the case of my dad. He was commissioned with Laureano, Celestino and some others, but what happened as I read: “we feel very sorry when you say what happened to you in the steam, it seems that they did not treat you well and they remembered very little about you, but what I feel sorrier about is that you had had a hard time by not asking Laureano for money, that you knew that he had it, since he did not take care of you”. The young people who emigrated traveled in third ordinary because they tried to adapt to the economy of the group: “You tell us that the bed was worse than those of the pigs, that I already supposed”. That is how he was inaugurated in his new life.

In my romantic imagination I always assumed that he had arrived at the uncle’s house and that there, in the heart of the family, he spent the years he was in Cuba, but none of that. The uncles, the only thing they did for him and his brothers was to find them a place in the trading business of some well-known Spanish. The rest, home, clothes and food, nothing, it was not their business. The placement included lodging and food, on account of salary and learning to work. There was only a little left for him. The bedroom was in the cellar or in the tapanco, they slept on cots; the time to get up was at five o’clock in the morning. Whoever fell asleep would have the bolt from the scissors of the cot removed and would fall suddenly, for that reason, he always got up early. When I found out, not many years ago, that the uncles did not look after them, I could not believe it. How was it possible that the children of her sister, young children, were having needs with family there and, besides, in a magnificent economic position, since they were prosperous tobacco merchants?

The first place where he worked was in Pinar del Rio, in The Colosal, a store of everything (clothing, tailoring, shirts, perfumery, headgear, furriery, pottery, ironmongery, silk, hardware and furniture in general), as the ones from before, a kind of general store without food. From here he went to Camagüey, a while to Banagüises and, eventually, to Havana. He also horseback rode to sell in the countryside, something that did not please my grandfather nor my uncle Jose, the older brother.

... the white beans (fabes) are boiled with plenty of water. When it begins to froth, it is removed with the skimmer; boil over medium heat and add a whole onion. Carmela removed it before adding the stumbles. In Asturias, Aunt Avelina used to add to it chopped onion ...

The letters of the grandparents are wonderful, in them I glimpse a worried father for his son to learn to work: “That they teach you to work well, which is what you need, that the main thing is to know to work and do not let them to give you little to eat, it is the first thing, do not let that happen”, but above all, in each one they transmit him, advice and principles: “I tell you to be obedient to your elders, do not lose respect, do not get involved with anyone so that you are loved by everyone”. Also, whenever he could, he sent him some books; he told him about the country and its land: “there is a lot of dry, little grass, the harvest of potatoes seems good, a lot of apples; pear, regular; figs and cherry, the harvest is well prepared, that according to the climate”, also of the animals: “I sold Lindo, the one that you rode so much... the horses are very expensive and also the cattle, we do not know where the value of everything will get to, and the damn war is slow to end (*in 1918 continued the war with Morocco. Those were times of the Great War, but Spain remained neutral until its end*). His mother wrote less, she no longer could see well; nevertheless, she remembered him at Easter: “I remember a lot of you with the buns that you liked so much ... I am sorry that my children go through feeling the need to eat because there is no bread, I pray to God in my prayers that this will not happen ... wishing you to come to see that you have become a good puppy ... receive a big hug from your mother who wants to see you more than to write to you”. They reflected being, at all times, loving parents and concerned about the children who had to leave.

In 1918 the epidemic of Spanish Influenza that claimed several million lives around the world was unleashed. My father contracted it and got out of it, in his father's house they suffered it: grandmother, Avelina, his sister, and Manolin, the youngest. Something exceptional in their organism existed that protected them. There were many dead around, but none of them. My father, not to worry them, never told them that he had also suffered it. In Cuba, he told us, there was no more black fabric to cover the coffins for the innumerable deaths it caused. He considered himself one of the few lucky people who could tell on having suffered it and survived.

Avelina was his only sister, four years older than him, and she adored him. On one occasion that he sent them a picture, she wrote: "We received your portrait, which I never get tired from looking at, although you are something very serious to what cheerful that you are ... the brother so kind and so affectionate to everyone that when you were at home it seemed that the house was full". She told me, when I met her, that: Poldo was the most *salao* (*funny, smart, timely, bright*) of his brothers.

Grandfather Pablo was interested in the economic situation in Cuba, which was beginning to be difficult: "They say that it is very bad in that country and you do not tell me if it is true that the working people are very hungry, that they have no place to work, that the pound of sugar is worth only one cent and the banks, almost all went bankrupt". A great majority of the Cuban sugar mills were in the hands of Spaniards (*among them was the father of Fidel Castro*); around 1921 a rumor (*from the United States*) was spread that the sugar was going to rise in price: the owners of the sugar mills began to accumulate it to sell it further on; they went into debt up to their necks, they did not sell and the price of sugar did not increase. One day it turned out that the price fell to the minimum, all the owners went bankrupt, and it was then that those who had spread the rumor, acquired at a price of joke the mills.

In Spain, the war in Morocco continued. Dad could not go back, he was approaching twenty years old and they were taking more people: "They asked for three fifths and they already suspended the

emigration ... the best boys of town march ... the Infanta (*the Transatlantic*) wipes out most of the youth”. Uncles Jose and Arturo returned to Asturias; my dad decided, without telling anyone, because they would not have allowed it, to embark for Mexico, which was also going through the final crises of the Revolution. When he disembarked in Veracruz, he telegraphed that he was already in Mexico. His father, when he found out that he had left Cuba, worried a lot about the news that came to them: “What I feel the most is that you are at a point where there is no peace; what you should try is not to go where the enemy is ... go carefully, do not fall asleep, you already know what happened to the owner of Camagüey and therefore you must be suspicious that it is sad when someone works and another one takes it”.

When he arrived to Mexico, my dad lived in a guest house that was opened by a Basque family (*Gurtubay Leturio*) that came on the boat that brought him to Veracruz along with other companions and that, from that moment on, they would be dear friends until their last days. During the trip, it occurred to Don Felipe Gurtubay that, while he was getting a job, it would be a good option to start with guests; he was a hard worker, so was his wife Mrs. Raymunda, who also cooked delicious. She was the niece of a former butler of a Spanish nobleman, who had inherited him, and with this small fortune he opened a magnificent restaurant in Spain, where she worked in her youth.

Shortly after dad arrived in Mexico, my grandfather told him: “you know, you already played the fifth and you got a good number that was one hundred and nine, I think that you are surplus of quota and I asked for an extension so you have time to introduce yourself to the consul so that you can carve yourself and so that they do not put you as a fugitive and so that the consul certifies to this council of having presented yourself”, however, it was not so simple: “You tell me that the consul is making it difficult, could it be that he wants money”.

By then, my grandmother Maria’s younger sister, Antonina, was already in Mexico. She had married a mining engineer, also Spaniard,

who was hired by an English company established in the country. Aunt Antonina was a very fine and distinguished woman, she had studied in Switzerland, she had been sent there by the older brothers who lived in Cuba; she was very well prepared, she had six children, the last of them was born in the boat that brought them from Spain, that is why she named her Marina, also because the zarzuela Marina was on top of fame. My dad looked for the uncles and, as the cousins were more or less his age, they had a very good relationship. He frequented his house a lot, he said that his aunt Antonina had polished him with *garlopa* (*big carpentry brush to polish wood*), and if so, she did it very well, because he always behaved like a gentleman in the full extent of the word.

With yearning, my dad asked grandpa apples of the Barrero for him and for the aunt, he answered his request: “I send you a box with the test of apples and chestnuts with a man who goes to Veracruz”, and shortly after grandfather pleased wrote: “You tell me that the box of apples that arrived in time for Christmas Eve and that you ate compote that your aunt made ...”

While he lived in Mexico City, he played soccer, a sport that fascinated him, he was always proud of having belonged to the reserves of Asturias, the legendary team of the Asturian Center. I still have a picture where you can see him in uniform and in company of all his team.

Some years later, my dad teamed up with a friend, Jose del Rincon, and founded, supported by Jose´s father, Las Novedades de Paris, on the corner of Ayuntamiento and Dolores, in the heart of Mexico City. Pepe would further on marry Tonina, the eldest of his cousins: “We heard from your cousin Bernardo that your aunt Antonina´s first daughter was married to your partner”. When he worked in Rincon and Leguineche he got very involved, he met a group of friends of his cousins and they organized walks and parties; one of the first September 15 that he spent in Mexico, he was invited to the celebration, to be at “El Grito”, and since he was so enthusiastic, he accepted. He asked them:

- Where are we going?

- To kill gachupines, they answered. He accepted happily.

Among those who were part of this group were the brothers Humberto and Miguel Agustin Pro, as well as Leon Toral. He had a photograph of them all sitting on the train tracks in Huixquilucan, where they waited for him to return from a field day. On that occasion they came to arrest them because a fire had started in the forest, apparently generated by a lit cigar that they had thrown away. After paying a fine they had no problem. He told us how among these acquaintances there were some with religious concerns. Those were times of persecution and they made the propaganda of their movement arrive in a peculiar way: at night they raised balloons of Chinese paper, all at the same time. He said that it was a beautiful sight to see them rise up enlightened, and when they burned, somehow the leaflets fell and, in that way, they informed about the activities of the movement.

... Usually the chorizo, bacon. Ham and blood sausage are put directly in the pot. Carmela used to fry five or six cloves of garlic in little oil. Once well browned, right here she lightly fried the pieces of bacon and, later, the chorizos, following with the raw ham or serrano ham, soaked from the previous night; the water is reserved and it also is for the stew (if it is obtained, use the lacon (*foreleg*)). In Asturias it is not common, but at home we put pieces of pork, because your dad liked it. Add water and leave in the fire to boil ...

During the cristero War, on several occasions, some of the confronted blew trains with dynamite, something that worried my grandfather: "That you are traveling, I think dangerous because of the assaults of trains and explosions, that you know better than me". Dad also saw cristeros hanged, hanging on the telegraph poles between Guanajuato and the Altos of Jalisco, since the line stretched along the side of the road. During the various wars and guerrillas that he lived,

he was in three places, two in Veracruz and another in Pachuca. He lived through times of curfew, twice he was forced to stop and they cut him cartridge because he did not hear the “Who lives?”, to which it was necessary to answer: “People of peace”.

In bureaucratic procedures of paperwork here and paperwork there, he could not fix his situation of fifths, the grandfather reminded him: “there I send you a piece of paper in case you need it in the state you are now in fifths: City of Castrillon, province of Oviedo.

Replacement of 1922, young man number 109 of the draw: Leopoldo García Valdés, son of Pablo and Maria was declared a fugitive. Stamp of the City Hall ... the one that comes to this one and has not fixed it, can not embark again”. Finally, two years later and after many comes and goes, he managed to reverse his status as a fugitive and finally solved his immigration situation.

When dad started as a traveling agent, he told us that it was hard, but someone advised him to always tell the truth to the clients. It was very important to never lie to them about the goodness of the merchandise, thanks to that he became of good reputation and respect. He was a wonderful salesman, he had a gift for it.

The routes (*in Esperanza he took the train: Tehuacan, San Antonio, Cuicatlan, Oaxaa, Parian, Huejutla, Puebla, Tehuatepec, Pinotepa Nacional. Other: Tapachula, Arriaga, intermediate points, Papaloapan, Blanco River, Veracruz, Alvarado, Perote, Jalapa, Coscomatepec, Veracruz. Poza Rica, Papantla, Tuxpan. Other: Guanajuato, Queretaro, Guadalajara, Michoacan, all the Bajío, Anganguero, El Oro, Toluca. Other: Puebla, Izucar, Chiantla de Tapia, Tlapa, Chilapa, Chilpancingo. And by boat from Veracruz to the mouth of the Grijalva River, to Villahermosa, Palizada, to Ciudad del Carmen, Campeche, again by train to Merida, and intermediate towns.*) that he worked were diverse, he knew almost the entire national territory, except for the north, of which he visited few towns, sometimes by train and sometimes by horse; he also traveled by plane to San Cristobal de Las Casas. Once, it was already dark, the sky was thick with clouds that prevented visibility to land because the hills surrounded the town like a bullring. The American pilot was spinning and turning, the fuel was running out. Meanwhile, the clouds opened on the side where my dad was sitting, behind the pilot. Since he did not know how to speak

English, he touched him on the shoulder and with signs he showed the pilot the clear side. Immediately, he nailed the plane among the clouds and landed. It was one of his many wanderings that he thought that he would not be able to tell.

The route that could be done by rail, was done to the point where the train arrived; there he hired horses, mules and muleteers. With them, they carried huge cubic leather suitcases with the swatches that hung on the sides of the back of the mules. They traveled in groups, for safety, because they had to protect themselves from muleteers, bandits, rioters, soldiers and animals. He did not panic and was cold-blooded to deal with problems, he carried a gun. On one occasion when they were heading to Teziutlan, shortly before arriving, on a hill was a sheaf of bandits who watched them. They asked where they were going. The group began to worry, and prepared the guns, but dad told them:

- Calm, calm down, do not be fools. We do not carry money; they do not attack us because they know that we have not yet collected money.

They usually picked up the order and on the next trip they collected the money.

- Where are you going, friends? - they asked.

Dad answered cordially:

- Hello, friends? How are you? We are going to Teziutlan. See you later.

And they let them pass without setbacks.

They visited their costumers, they sold and they collected the money. My dad told one of them what happened. He indicated another way to go down to Veracruz and avoid them. Dad ordered to buy lard cans and, the next morning, he and the other agents put the money - gold and silver coins was what was handled - into the lard, and that way, when the muleteers arrived to load the mules, they loaded the cans like any other merchandise. While it was still dark, before dawn, they left through Jalapa without incident; It was very likely that the bandits had someone watching to give them the whistle. There were also funny situations, like when they passed through

Tehuantepec. It was quite an event to see, from the train, the Tehuanas bathing naked in the river. Once again, in Tlalpujahua, they lost the train, but there was a doctor who had just bought a car. For that place was the novelty. They asked him to take them to the next point where they could reach the train and they convinced him by telling him that they would pay him for the service. It was an odyssey on a dirt road, here he said it was his first car (Mexico already had a lot of convertible Ford TS, they were called “fortingos” and commented that Ford meant: “Fabrication ordinary, reparation daily”, because Ford was the first car manufactured in series, with less quality than an European car, what made it of an accessible price) trip by road. At that time there were only some secondary roads. It was, more or less, until the time of Cardenas, as in 1936, when the Mexico-Puebla highway was built.

They slept in large populations, as it was risky not to do so. When by some circumstance the night reached them in a small place, they spent the night in the house of someone they knew, regularly some Spanish customer. In one occasion, they were later than usual. When they arrived at the client´s house, it was already closed with stone and mud. They began to knock but they did not open the door, the people inside thought that the ones outside were a sheaf because they had heard the animals´ hoofs; they tried again and nothing, until dad started talking loudly, they identified, and that was how they were received. Another night they had to stay in Huamustitan, a place that attracted attention because most of its inhabitants had vitiligo (mal del pinto); as the origin of the disease was not well known, it impressed them. There they were given a jacal with a bed of otates to sleep. Like these, he lived many adventures in a politically and socially agitated Mexico.

In the country, the recession of 1929 was already being suffered, things were not going well neither in Spain, according to what grandfather wrote: “You say that in there it is very bad, well, in here it is too ... because some factories are closing and also many mines are closing that the poor workers are begging since they do not have a job ... The situation for the farmers is difficult, they put many burdens on

them, in a hurry to pay them, the cattle go down on price and the feed does not. The laborers do not have work”.

In Spain the war in Morocco was ending, but the startles previous to the civil war began. From the 1934 uprising, Uncle Arturo reported: “December 16, 1934. Here we had luck because the army arrived soon, they just had time to burn seven houses, but the idea of the rebels was to burn Aviles completely ... In Oviedo they burned many houses and very few were left with healthy cristals; later on, the revolutionaries shot many people, among them were several priests. I had seen three revolutions, but like this one, none of them. This one reminds me of what the press said about that one in the times of Pancho Villa”.

The anarchist uprising of the miners in northern Spain, the Revolution of the thirty-four, was a result of the terrible working conditions in which they were. Those who had nothing could only aspire to be miners from childhood, a poorly paid job, in conditions of very high risk due to frequent explosions by accumulation of gas firedamp, since they were coal mines. What was extracted went to the Basque Country and to England. The miners died young of silicosis because of the dust that they breathed in the mine, all this exacerbated the spirits of these groups, and if we add the unemployment of a large group of miners and workers, the perfect breeding ground for the insurrection arose.

Although Asturias was not a place of large landowners, as in the south of the country, but rather of small landowners, for the miners, in their precarious condition, they did not stop being bourgeois, so they rose up against them and they treated them very badly. Even with all of this, this revolt was repressed.

While this was happening on the other side of the ocean, my father here, in Mexico, continued with his life. In his stage as a traveling agent he met many people, among them Mr. Eugenio Herrero, a Spanish merchant, owner of a fabric and gift shop in the city of Campeche. Mr. Herrero told him that he had difficulty with the person in charge of the place and suggested that he be the manager of that store: Casa Herrero, which was located next to the

cathedral. Dad accepted because he was already tired of so many years of traveling, that is how he came to Campeche. Grandfather commented: "September 19, 1935. You tell me that you have been in that house for two years and you tell me that until today that it is going well for you, this news is a joy for us who always wish for the good of our children". There he met my mom. My grandmother and she were regular customers, the store had a variety of genres of very good taste, as well as gifts and diverse merchandise. They married after a courtship of a little more than a year. My grandfather Agustin did not allow it before, Aunt Chole had just married and he argued that he was not putting on sale his daughters; they had to wait a few more months. Two years after they were married, they went to live to Merida, because then, it was the store there that had problems: Las Novedades, also from Mr. Herrero. With this motive my mother asked Carmela Perez to go with them to help her with the housework and, from then on, she always accompanied them. Carmela was a young woman who had worked with my grandparents washing and ironing.

... when the white beans are already half cooked, the compango (*bacon, ham, sausage and blood sausage*) is added, along with a ham bone and, if you get them, some pieces of Iberian bacon to give it a better flavor. Keep it boiling on moderate fire. Add hot water whenever it is necessary.

My dad's family, predestined by its condition of small landowners, had to fall into the bourgeois group opposed to anarchism and be on the side of the nationals. There was no choice, society was polarized. Both sides were heterogeneous groups (*among the nationals there were Moors, Italians, Germans, clergy, monarchists, civil guard and others. Among the republicans, socialists, republicans, anarchists, communists, masons and more*). With the sad experience of the thirty-four, Asturias and the Basque Country were the first to fall under the

control of the nationals. However, dad was never radical, he had great Republican friends, he always respected his way of thinking. My grandparents and uncles lived this stage like this:

February 9th, 1936

You ask me about the situation where this is now, it is quite bad, on Sunday sixteenth the elections will be held and there are two parties: one of right, the other one of left. If the right wins, we will be calm, but if the left wins, we will have communism, which is what they want, because it is the doctrine that they preach, people are afraid, there is great panic because in Asturias it was seen in October of 1934, when the revolution, that in some points were given vouchers to go to look for food and that is what is feared; but I think that they will lose in the election, although there are many, we will endure everything that comes because we have no remedy ... in this one all is paralyzed, there are no jobs and there is a lot of hunger, workers every day come here asking for charity and others stealing, this is very bad, the year 34 was fatal specially for Asturias, in October the revolution and in November bankruptcy of two banks: one the bank of Maribona and the other one of Gonzalez de Valle de Madrid, these, as they were born here in Castrillon, many had with them because they were trusted.

Gave notice the grandfather

February 11th, 1936

... you know that we are on the eve of elections and the spirits are very excited, but I think that nothing will happen because the army is very prepared, in case there is any disturbance; you can not imagine by the trance that we are going through, this does not seem to be elections

for deputies but it seems a war of classes, because it is so much the hatred that there is between the worker and the capital, that if the socialists get to win, poor for those who have something to lose.

Uncle Arturo notified him.

April 14th, 1936

... about what happens in Spain we do not know, because the newspapers do not say what happens because they are censored, we do not know anything but that it seems to be quite upset, so we will have to wait for everything that comes. About what happens, you must be more aware ... you know better in that than we do ... for the 26th there are elections for president, presumably one of the left, as they are in power position, it is easier for them to be ...

His father updated him.

November 19, 1937

... we already assumed that you would remember a lot of us knowing how harassed we lived for fifteen months under the red domain, they have assaulted our store taking everything we had, not satisfied with that, they climbed our house, took some clothes and everything we had to eat, but at last we saved our lives, which was what we asked to God and now to work and to start life again, we have already been with the store opened for fifteen days, although with little stock to go on living as we can ... We are very happy for not having misfortunes in the family, both in my wife's and in ours, this seems to us like a dream after so many calamities that we have gone through, so now we will not get tired of saying: Hurray for Franco! And Up with Spain!

Uncle Arturo

My grandfather wrote:

November 21, 1937

... from your last letter before the war where you told us that you were going to marry by the end of September ... we did not receive that letter, we found out through Arturo ... I am going to tell you about the consequences of the war, first they detained Jose, on the eighteenth day of August of last year and he was detained for fifty-one days because they took many prisoners out to kill them, you can imagine how disgusted he would be...

Dad commented that as every day they threatened uncle Jose with taking him out for a walk - that is how they said when they were taking them to execute them -, after so many shocks, on one occasion he felt that something cold ran down his back. The consequence of this anguish made him sick of syringomelia, which years later would be the cause of his death

...second, they took two calves, horse and saddle, brake and leggings and they did not give me a peseta for them, they gave me a fine of five hundred pesetas and they requisitioned the car and the cattle to go to work wherever they ordered. And then call the fifth of Manolo and have to go and be on the forefront for eight months, after all we are satisfied that nothing happened to him, he is at home with us, but he has to go back, first with the reds, and now with the militaries that is what he wanted, with the others he was bored, he was assigned to the disciplinary battalion with shovel and pickaxe, or battalion D and they looked at him with contempt.

There were long periods of silence, dad did not receive letters from Spain since the civil war had started; from then on, every day he listened on a short - wave radio to a station in Barranquilla, Colombia, which was quite objective in the information it transmitted from both sides, and on a map of Spain that was hung on the wall, he pointed out, according to the military part, the advances and places which each one of them seized. During this time, my dad, along with other Spaniards based in Merida, formed a group that showed sympathy with the side that had party, but without entering into ideology, it was more solidarity, and they looked for a way to help or to raise funds or merchandise, or just by sending newspapers so that the relatives there could find out what was happening; as my grandfather used to say, the press was censored there.

Dad, via New York (*somehow, it is likely that with one's own he made that the packages and correspondence could get to the port of Veracruz, these were taken to New York, from where they departed to London, from where they sent them to the Spanish ports*), sent what he could. Mexico had broken relations with the government of Spain because President Lazaro Cardenas supported the Spanish Republic and did not recognize Franco. Grandfather Pablo informed: "1939... There was an advertisement in the Post Office that said: no correspondence for Mexico is allowed ...". After the civil war ended, there was a boycott against Spain with the intention of overthrowing Franco; everything was scarce, from food to fuel. In those moments my dad supported his family a lot, generosity was a feature that always characterized him. He sent to the women of the house stockings, at that time of silk, very appreciated, because there they could not get them; he placed them, carefully folded, inside the pages of the books that he sent them; since they were so fine, they did not make a bulge, they did not detect them. Uncle Arturo's daughter was starting to study a commercial career and she told my dad that she could not acquire a portable typewriter, there was not one. So my dad sent it to her, as well as some gifts...

I received your letter and a newspaper package and the clothes that you sent for Josefina, which by the way are very beautiful, you had great taste, they are so fine that here they attract a lot of attention ... You were very risky by sending them in the newspapers, it is true that here they do not check the newspaper packages as much as in Pillarno...

June 29, 1939

... Greetings to Franco, Up with Spain! (Year of the Victory)
...Manolo is with us that a month ago he came licensed from the front and thank God he came fine that nothing happened to him during twenty-five months that he spent in the front: eight months with the reds and seventeen with the nationals, when it was bad, it was with the reds, he was in a disciplinary battalion which was in danger of being shot by them ... as they did to many ... With ours, very much in danger, but he was defending the homeland to expel communism from Spanish soil and he was lucky nothing bad happened to him thanks to God ... We are happy that the reds did not take over because they were thieves, they robbed, they requisitioned everything and threatened to cut off everyone's head ... and thanks that they left us alive...

Grandfather participated.

When the war ended, grandma Maria became ill. Aunt Avelina wrote to my mom:

Our mother has suffered a brain hemorrhage, although her members have total mobility, she has lost a lot of memory, but despite everything, she is contemplating daily Leopoldo's portrait saying that

it is what she has to conform, so I would really appreciate if you could send portraits of your wedding that will help her in much joy. The day that she received your letter she did not get tired of having it in her hands.

Months later uncle Jose informed:

I received your portraits and if you could see the joy that it caused to our poor mother, who never got tired of contemplating them, but little time she had that satisfaction, since the next day, after eating with much joy, she went to nap as usual every day, right after lying down she called Avelina, telling her that she had pain (*she suffered from angina pectoris*) ... and twenty minutes after the damn pain began, she suddenly died, hugging your pictures ... Today your letter was received with the body of our mother present, that this is the real misfortune. Tomorrow at eleven o'clock will take place the burial and funeral ... whose obituary accompanies...

...almost at the end of the cooking of the white beans, add the blood sausages in wholes, because if not they get empty, these can be onion or rice blood sausages, depending on the taste of each one. At home we also like to put small pieces of cooked potatoes. Let it thicken ...

Mom and dad continued in Merida, which at that time was one of the most important cities in Mexico, since it was still alive the bonanza of henequen. The more than five years that they lived in that city were full of activity, my dad was very sociable, he was the president of the Spanish Center and it was the time of the great dances, he loved to dance and he did it very well. The Gurtubay lived there, the Basque friends who came with him from Cuba; on the weekends they used to go to the beach together, either Progreso or Chicxulub and, of course, they could not miss their afternoons of dominoes. Unfortunately, he had a disagreement with Mr. Herrero,

and his high ethical-moral sense and his strong character led him to decide to resign. Then, he began to plan to leave Merida and to settle in another part of the Mexican Republic. Meanwhile, mom returned to Campeche.

Dad came to Puebla, which was the third city in importance in the country, looking to make a society, which he did with some poblanos. He returned to Campeche for mom and Carmela. Dad did not see profits in that business, he asked to dissolve the company and to have his investment returned. He began again to look for where to settle and went with mom to Mazatlan, which was beginning to stand out, Guadalajara, Oaxaca and Mexico City. Finally, they stayed in Puebla, rented a place from Mr. Nacif, in the 6 East almost corner with the 2 North. In the mezzanine he placed a sewing workshop and began producing men's underwear, shorts by Pitorre, as well as camisoles and overalls pants, workwear for workers made with thick gabardine, in colors dark or light gray and khaki. Below was the fabrics store. This business did not last long.

Shortly after living here, my grandfather Pablo died. Dad did not see him again, uncle Jose reported: "As an extension to my cablegram, notifying you the death of our beloved father ... the burial took place on Thursday at eleven o'clock in the morning".

Dad founded Las Fabricas de Puebla (Puebla's fabrics), in the 4 East, with two other Spanish friends. He was still producing Pitorre. It was a prosperous business, everything was going well. The eldest son of one of the partners, who also worked in the store, married the other partner's daughter. Then, the boy's father retired from the business, he did not want to be there after the marriage so only the son remained there. Maybe my dad did not feel comfortable anymore and he sold his part to the partner who was left. When the business was liquidated, he wanted to buy uncle Arturo's chocolate factory, La Avilesina. His idea was to buy it and to return to Spain with his family; however, it never materialized.

After several years of living in Puebla and fifteen of married, my brother, Polo, was born; after a year and a half, me. Of course, this maddened him with joy. Between him and us existed the gap of a

generation. He was energetic, he reproduced in us the way he was educated, but he was a great father, very affectionate; the most important thing for him was mom and us. My dad would tell me that I was his paxarin, which means little bird in bable (*Asturian dialect*), because I am very cheerful. He had enormous spiritual strength, he was a man of faith, he was not bitter nor grumpy, he was jovial, effusive and very prankster. I talk again about his generosity, as I still remember that as children, in November, at the end of the school year, my dad used to send gifts for, in addition to the teachers of the school, the drivers of the bus, the assistants and to Santita and Virgencita, a kind of caretakers-janitors of the school. Always, as long as his economic situation allowed him, he was very splendid.

Here in Puebla he remained very active, he was member of the National Chamber of Commerce and, on the other hand, of the organizing committee of the Spanish Circle and the Spain Park; of the Meeting of the Celebrations of Covadonga, La Santina is the patroness of Asturias; as well as of the Spanish Welfare Board. Here he also had several groups with which he played domino, since it was another of his passions.

The Spanish fair arrived to Mexico City and my father went to see for machinery, he had the idea of making socks. He started looking for other options. We began to eat our capital. As the owners of an accredited fabric factory knew him very well, they looked for him and he decided to retake the representation, promote it again in the market where he had worked, especially towards Veracruz. When my mom remembered this time, she would tell us with a lot of feeling: “Poldito thought that he would always be young and strong”.

The production of the factory was in Atlixco, Puebla, and the finishing, as well as the administrative offices, in Tlatelolco. The modernization of that area was beginning and the owners decided to move the factory to Celaya. Much of the old trusted staff did not want to leave, so almost everyone who was left was new and young, they had a different mindset and different ideas. Disagreements began and they started to put him obstacles to get him out of the way in a disloyal

form. He was displeased and he separated from them; it was a very painful blow for him that, above all, he was straight.

He kept fighting and tried to get ahead trying other options, the sales relationship had been reversed, Mexico City had ceased being the center, so he sought to take goods from Puebla to the capital. Even so, he could no longer raise his economic situation, he always provided and worked until the last day of his life. He never gave up, he looked for one way or another. Invariably cheerful, although he carried the music inside. An assault to which he was victim in Mexico City, since he collected cash, made his health to diminish. So he was decaying, the years were thrown on him, and he had a very severe pulmonary infarct from which he did not recover completely. A short time later he died, still strong, he was going to be seventy-five years old. From the bottom of the soul, the painful feeling of my mom was: "Another strong tree that I see falling, another impressive oak...", and it also resumed her belief that having lost the economic bonanza, as it happened to his dad, was the consequence of the biblical sentence: "The sins of the parents will fall on the children until the third or fourth generation (*num. 14, 18 and Ex. 34, 7*)".

Dad was of regular height, thin, gray-haired, that is why I used to tell him that he was my silver fox; small and very cheerful eyes and a furaquino (*dimple, in Bable (Asturian Dialect)*) next to the mouth, just like me, but on the opposite side; well planted and with a lot of poise; he dismissed the subtle scent of his neatness, he liked to dress well, always in a suit, tie and scrupulously clean shoes. When we were kids, Polo and I, every Sunday, we went with dad to mass to the cathedral, after that we would go to take a walk to the Zocalo, from there to get an ice cream and, finally, on the way home, he took us to buy some stories (*comics that were sold in the 5 West, close to the house*). He was very proud of his children, to the extent that a photographer from the cathedral found his little gold mine, because every week he portrayed us, and every week, religiously, dad would buy all the pictures when he took them home; this happened for several years.

My dad was very fond of Mexico, he said that it had given him the best of life: his wife and children; at the same time, he kept great

love for his country, which he always remembered with pleasure and longing. It comes to my memory when I was a child and he talked to me about the delicious brevas of his house and I craved them when he described how the honey dripped; it was a joy for him and he enjoyed doing it, as well as remembering the jokes that he played to Uncle Manolo, seven years younger than him. On one occasion, when dad was four or five years old, some neighbors had gone to visit the grandparents and he was not allowed to go to sleep until the guests were gone. As he was very witty and almost falling asleep, he took the cat, threw it on top of them and, of course, they understood the hint. They left and... dad got a good beating.

He said that nowhere did he eat better than his house. Since he arrived in Cuba and until he got married, he ate at restaurants or guest houses, that is why he was not attracted to eating out, only when it was strictly indispensable. Besides, Carmela cooked delicious, there is no doubt. Before the meal, dad would drink a glass of brandy, and at the end he smoked a cigar. When he had a cold, he also cured himself by taking his brandy dram.

Along with that charming and optimistic personality of my father, sometimes explosive, a believer was throbbing, he valued deeply the family and home, he enjoyed eating and did it with great pleasure and it was he who taught me to enjoy everything that life offers us, no matter how small, and given the experience of having lived alone as a child, when to food he referred he would say to us: "Hunger is not felt by who is waiting to eat ... bread is not denied to anyone". When he became ill, with some many medicines he lost his appetite and taste for food, that way I understood the message of living in full every moment of life because, as he always said: "It is the only thing that you take with you".

When he met Alvaro, my husband, he liked him very much and soon he was fond of him. After I got married he said to mom: "I can die peaceful now, I know that Fatima is in good hands".

The first Christmas being married; Alvaro chose the gift for dad: a trip to Spain. He was deeply moved, unfortunately he was not able to do it: "He died without returning to Spain", as the lyrics from the

song of El Abuelo, by Alberto Cortes say, and that when I listen to it I seem to be hearing about my father. By the year and months of my wedding came his death, sudden and painful, the oak fell. Two days before it happened, I saw him. From Mexico we came to celebrate my birthday. With the rush, when we were leaving, he said in a joking tone: “Aren´ t you going to say good-bye to me?”

I approached to him, who was laughing, I hugged him and kissed him. That was the last thing that he left to me: his smile.

A few months later, a great happiness followed: I was expecting my first child, a fact that I attribute to the blessings arranged by my father there in Heaven. He was very happy when he had children, he liked children very much and he regretted that I had not been pregnant, I guess I feared that the story of mom was repeated, , so he interceded for me; I am sure of it because I felt it. Alvaro was born on July 27, ten months exactly after his death. A person so optimistic and cheerful could not allow us to plunge into sadness and to a such painful step, he sowed a great joy.

... To serve, put everything in a bowl or place the compango separately in a platter and the white beans in a bowl. Eat it with a good bread and wine ... Enjoy your meal!

CHAPTER 7

CHESTNUT CAKE

The chestnut cake is a recipe of granny Maria, a very fine dessert with a delicate flavor, she prepared it with the wild chestnuts of the tree that was in El Peal. Splendid to crown the Christmas Eve dinner...

It is required to cook a kilo of chestnuts; this is done by removing a piece of shell before boiling them. After half an hour, try one and if they are already cooked, peel immediately, they have to be hot so that they peel well; do not throw the water away, if necessary, heat a little bit more...

The chestnut cake transports me to my childhood Christmas. It was a rite that began with the month of December, as soon as the

chestnuts arrived to La Sevillana (*grocery and ultramarines store located in the corner of Reforma and 3 South, in the City of Puebla*), where my parents used to buy the food that was consumed at home. Carmela, Carmen, my nanny, and my mom, shelled kilos and kilos of chestnuts, which Carmela then ground finely in a grain mill, which eventually served for various foods. On some occasion that the mill broke down, the crushing was done in metate. Mom made several cakes that she used to give to her friends, to people she liked or as thanks to the doctors who took care of us: grandma´s, hers and our pediatrician; and, of course, the house´s, which would be consumed at Christmas Eve dinner. My mom was a very devoted and giver friend, as splendid as my dad. She did not mind getting into such a laborious task in order to treat well. I seem to see her cutting the crystalized fruit with all meticulousness to decorate them and, with the same care, softening the butter to cover the miracle mold where the cake would be baked.

Mom had the soul of an artist, great skill for drawing, with great taste from birth, very careful, always looked for perfection and possessed the necessary patience to achieve it. She had a gift with people, she always liked to talk, she was an extraordinary conversationalist and, nevertheless, measured and prudent. Very proud of her origin, and whenever there was an opportunity, she loved to talk to me.

She was born in Palizada (*in 2011 it acquired the title of Magic Town*), Campeche, a coastal town that the same year released the title of free municipality, on September 27, 1916, in the house of her maternal grandparents, for being the closest civilized place to the hacienda where her parents lived. That day marked her life: my grandparents, eleven years earlier, had been married on September 27; later my mother would marry on September 27 and, forty years later, she would become a widow on September 27. She was baptized with the name of Elizabeth de la Luz, because of her father´s idea of not repeating names of ancestors. And although in those moments in the country one lived in the middle of the revolutionary agitation, the isolation of the place, of scarce and little trafficked communication

routes, so alien to the center, kept it away from the reigning unrest. Her childhood was between Palizada and El Peal.

Grandma Maria had a goddaughter in Palizada who was a teacher and gave her the lessons and the material of the school program so that, in the evenings of those eternal days in the hacienda, in those where time does not seem to run, grandma would give classes to aunt Chole and to mom. As children, their lives were always determined by the river's rise and frequent floods; in rainy season they returned to Palizada and went to school, which was located behind the house of their grandmother Pepilla, and this way they did not fall behind so much. While they were there, one of their favorite hobbies was spying on Pepilla, because it seemed funny for them to see her wash her socks: she would put them in a basin with soap and water and with a stick she moved them to wash them, she did not wet her hands; that was one of the reasons why my grandmother Maria did not want to make her daughters useless, so she said to them: "If you want a glass of water, go for it, nothing will happen to you", she did not want them to turn into petty queens, incapables of doing things by themselves.

When mom was a girl, in Palizada the waterway was the only means of communication and, therefore, it was widely used. There used to go by: Cayucos, rafts, boats and even small boats that sailed from Carmen Island to Tenosique, almost at the border with Guatemala, before the dangerous rapids of the Canyon of Boca del Cerro, where the rivers are no longer navigable (above the canyon there are other navigable sections from Piedras Negras, Guatemala, to beyond Yaxchilan, on the border with Guatemala). At least three steamboats, with their shovels in the back and two stories, in which one could be transported comfortably, were: The Clara Ramos, The Sanchez Marmol and The Carmen (it seems that it is still preserved, for tourism, in the Laguna de la Encarnacion, in front of Villahermosa, Tabasco)

Grandma made them their clothes. She knew how to sew very well and applied the knowledge acquired in Havana and her good taste. She made them with cotton fabrics, preferably thin, like

patterned muslin, which, with much creativity, complemented with lace, embroidered strips, applications, tucks, trimmings or washers. I keep a picture of mom and aunt Chole dressed in a red dress with polka dots and biases, also white, showing a schoolgirl neck; the edge of the sleeves at the height of the elbow and the low rise topped with a coquettish button on the left side. The low waist was fashion – were the twenties –, the length of the dress was at the knee; always with sleeves, from Japanese or mid-arm, to the elbow or to the fist; they wore stockings or yarn socks, closed shoes with a belt and huge bows that emphasized the hairstyle. And just as the grandmother strived in her works, she also taught them to be very careful and she kept this habit throughout her life. When they arrived from the street with their Sunday or party clothes, grandma would send them to change clothes and to put on clothes for home, she would say to them: “You are not Felipa’s daughters, so go change”. Felipa was a woman from the hacienda who would buy a dress for her daughters for the day of the town party, they wore it for the first time and then they would sleep wearing it. The next day they got up and they still were wearing it, they did not change, they played like that, they would go back to sleep, until the dress was filthy and turned into rags.

...already peeled from both shells, grind them in grain mill; for grandma, in the ranch, they used to grind them in metate...

As the grandmother as always working, she did not like that her daughters be without doing something at the hacienda and she marked them tasks that they had to fulfil: mom and aunt Chole had chickens that had to be taken care of, had to be fed and, in the afternoons, had to be kept in the chicken coop. They should not be free, so they had to be put in some wooden boxes made for that. On one side they had wire cloth and on the other side they were opened, through there they put the chicks in and then they put that side towards the wall and they would put a heavy stone on it to secure it so

at night the badger or the raccoon would not be able to take them. The next day they had to be taken out and released until bedtime.

My mom was horrified when one of her chicks got warts or something strange. She quickly would give it to Aunt Chole and she had the patience to cure it. Inside her lived a healer's soul. On one occasion, a hen that had been pecked by another, lost an eye, and as a remedy my aunt applied an ointment with her finger in the empty basin, before the repulsive look of Mom. My aunt identified herself fully with my grandfather, she always liked everything related to the field; even my grandmother feared that she would become an Aunt Ambrosia (*Ambrosia Lastra, cousin of my grandfather*), who was a countryside landowner with a full beard, of strong character, mounted astride and with cigar in hand; even my grandfather had also named Nieves (*snow*) to Tia Chole, who was a character of the area who had a lot of power, energetic and hard, however, aunt Chole, thanks to her strong temperament, survived all the tricks that fate played on her. In contrast, my mom identified herself more with my grandmother Maria. The countryside stuff was not her thing, she preferred the activities for girls, perhaps because she was more docile and soft in mode; for her sweetness, my grandfather named her Turrón (*nougat*). Of course, she did not stop getting into mischief. On the ranch, on one occasion, when playing hide and seek, she climbed up on a chair to look out the door of the room to see if Chole was not coming, she slipped and got hung from the earring on the door knocker, her earlobe was torn and, although it healed, she was left with a very large hole.

Moving from El Peal to Palizada, sometimes it was complicated, it had to be done by river, but if the bad weather did not allow it, it was necessary to wait until the weather improved. Once, the gifts from the three wise men did not arrive at the ranch. Grandma, displaying her creativity and to avoid the disappointment, took some eggs, decorated them with colorful paintings and in the evening she placed them, along with a can of sardines, near the little girls' shoes. Mom said that the next day, for them, it was exciting to have for breakfast the decorated eggs, scrambled with the sardines that the Kings had left

them, they tasted delicious; they were still very young. I still keep a little letter from Mom to them:

Holy Kings, I beg you to bring me a celluloid doll that is not so big, and a little piano and a box of chocolate candies, asking you: Elizabeth Lastra Z., your granddaughter who never forgets you, if you do not have what I am asking for, give me whatever you want, Elizabeth Lastra Z (1926).

She was ten years old. Here, the prudence that would always distinguish her was already reflected.

Mom was very observant. She retained even the smallest details and, reliving some childhood memories, she said that she clearly engraved the image of Lugarda, the ranch cook, chopping the venison meat to make salad (*salpicon*), with a huge knife, very long, and on a thick plank of cedar of more than ten centimeters thick; I guess that at her age she was impressed to see that huge woman with such an instrument. On one occasion when Lugarda, along with other girls from the ranch, were making tortillas, aunt Chole and she, wanted to do the same. Aunt Chole quickly found the technique – she was two years older than mom –, and mom did not; she started with a lot of difficulty and they started to laugh at her because she could not. She got upset, left the dough and left angry. As she was very sensitive and proud, she disliked the fact, so she decided not to go back to the kitchen at all. Despite the above, she was passionate about collecting recipes, such as my grandmother Maria and, already as an adult, what she did elaborate were desserts or cakes, but, for everything else she was lucky to have Carmela always at her side.

On one occasion, when Tomas Garrido Canabal (*Governor of Tabasco*), went to Palizada to visit my grandfather, Chole and Mom were girls. When he arrived, their father sent for them to say hello, and he immediately sent them away. He did not want them to have any relationship with him for any reason. My grandfather was fond of him, and Tomas was fond of him too, but maybe instinctively he felt distrust.

In the rainy season that passed in Palizada, on Saturdays when grandpa arrived, he sometimes took Nieves and Turrón to walk to the new park, the one that had been dedicated to the America's hero (*Benemérito de las Américas*) and where they placed a pedestal with a statue of Benito Juárez in the center. On one occasion, grandfather found himself to an acquaintance and began to talk to him; distracted as he was, he forgot about the girls. When my grandmother realized that it was too late and they had not come back, she went to look for them. She saw my grandfather in great conversation. She did not say a thing to him, she took the girls by the hand and took them home; he did not even notice. After a while he arrived, happy and content. And my grandma said to him: "And the girls, Agustín?" he got white from the scare and already he was running back to the park, when my granny informed him: "Do not worry, they are already sleeping".

My grandfather was a strict man, he was direct and did not care about anything else. When mom or aunt Chole were sick and one of the two resisted to take the medicine prescribed by the doctor, he warned the aforementioned: "Don't you want to take it? Do you want to die? Well, die!" With the seriousness of the tone and his imposing figure, the admonished, with all submission and without a joke, agreed to take the remedy. Another of his demands was that they should walk upright, because if he came to see that they stooped, he would take them by the shoulders and, without any delicacy, he would fit the knee in the back to make them straighten up, so they had to be careful to be straight.

The great-grandma Pepilla had a property in Palizada, which was called "El Solar de la Pavita", which she rented to a jeweler named Manuel Palacios who paid part of the rent with jobs that she entrusted to him. She always liked the jewelry. For both reasons great-grandmother told her daughters to have their garments made by Don Manuel. My grandmother Maria gave constantly to aunt Chole and to my mom, some small ones; she used to do it for their birthdays and in some special dates. When they were already older, she started giving them what she had inherited from Pepilla.

Ordinarily, to the one that she gave a choice between similar garments, was to aunt Chole, because she felt her less close to her; what Chole did not want was for mom. In this regard, she told me that, since both had such different tastes, what was for her was what she wanted. When she told me about it, there was never a reproach, she adored her sister, and the comment was for the curious fact that they always gave her what was her taste. Chole preferred something small, discreet, unlike her that she liked the showiest.

Once my grandfather sold El Peal, they moved to Campeche. They left Palizada one dawn to avoid the midday heat, in one of those motor boats of which they had a canvas awning supported by a frame of poles, similar to the western carts, where they could sleep and protect themselves from the sun. It was a trip accompanied by the sounds of the jungle: monkeys, birds, insects and beasts. They arrived overnight to Ciudad del Carmen to sleep and, the following day, they embarked on their way to their final destination: the City of Campeche.

Once the family was established, Chole and Chabel were registered in the Campechano School, of the RR.MM. of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. There were two nuns whom mom always remembered: Mother Margarita de la Cruz, who was very beautiful, she played the piano and the harmonium and with the music she accompanied aunt Chole, who had a very good voice and, singing, she led the line to enter the rooms. The other one was the Mother Margarita de Jesus, who was in charge of teaching all the tasks: to embroider, mesh and lace. After having entered the school, both made the first communion; they were times of religious persecution (*June 25, 1927*), and they were living the Cristera revolution. For that reason, granny had to take shoes, stockings, dresses, and all the necessities, hidden in a bag, to the school, and the mothers made them some little flowers as a headdress to put on the veil. When mom saw the portrait, she made the observation of how the dresses were wrinkled because they had been folded in a package.

In the season that they lived in Campeche, the Lastra Zuluaga sisters finished their primary education. Chole was already the

girlfriend of Gustavo Berron Carpizo, son of a friend of my grandmother Maria. After some years, five or six, they had to leave the city to go to live in the Hacienda of Polvoxal; shortly after arriving at the earthly paradise, as she defined it, mom turned fifteen. She described it that way because the exuberance of flora and fauna was so great that, according to Don Tomas Carvajal, the caretaker until my grandfather arrived, from the window of his house he could hunt deer.

During her stay in this Eden, mom, following her custom, devoted herself to observe nature, especially the monkeys that came to the trees closest to the house. As there had been many years of abandonment of property, at least thirty years, the jungle had regained ground. She marveled at the way they protected each other: when one was wounded, the others, from the trees, in group, continued to shout with fury at the intruder who hurt their partner and rushed to nibble some plants to introduce them in the wound of the injured monkey. Even jaguars that used to haunt the house would come down. The ranch dogs, on occasions, went hunting. After several days or weeks, they would return, fat, pot-bellied, like little dogs from the cornfields, because of all the delicacies with which they had fed on the mountain. Mom also commented that the grandfather, sometimes, took to the house wild turkeys that he had hunted, the meat was very tasty because they ate the wild peppers of the place. Nicolas, a worker from Polvoxal, brought to aunt Chole, as a gift, small nests from various birds of the area.

In the afternoons, to keep themselves busy, they were engaged in sewing, such as tablecloths, bedding or whatever was needed for the house. Mom remembered especially when it was their turn to make bed sheets, because to make them, they had to join the fabric, by hand, with English stitching. My Granny, Petronita - a little girl from the ranch that she had picked up - aunt Chole, and mom, used to meet to work in the living room or in the corridor if the heat was suffocating; to make the time while they worked more enjoyable, one of them would read a book. Aunt Chole did not like to do it, she preferred to sew, but mom did like, so she always asked to read.

Reading was her fascination. At night, with her candle on the bureau, near the window with wooden grilles from which she got some fresh air, she remained reading until late when she was in suspense with the plot of the story, she could not leave it, until the end or when the candle was finished.

She acquired the habit of reading from a young age. This began when my grandfather, in Palizada, gave to Chole and her some treats (*the legend of the stamp on the back cover of the small copies: Sweets and Chocolate Factory La Suiza (The Switzerland), Lodigiani Bros., Degollado 195, Mexico, 1926*) that included a short story as a gift: Collection of one hundred small works, under the title of “Cuentecitos morales e instructivos”; others that came to her hands were a gift from “Dr. Ross ´ s Life Pills” (*the Sydney Ross Co., New York*) which my grandfather was taking; some copies that he acquired to give to them, also small, from Spain, published by S. Calleja, editor, and some more that aunt Herlina gathered for them, courtesy of Gonzalo Cervera B. (*Campeche, Camp., Mexico. Deposit of the famous German Dyes for hair in black, chestnut or blond. Price \$2.50 box*), she devoured all of them with avidity.

Later on, this practice was strengthened in the great-grandmother ´ s house, where there were several boxes with classic books that had belonged to great-grandfather Joaquin. When he died, and having the need to vacate the store to rent it, the copies were stored. Many of them, with the humidity and a leak, were spoiled. In spite of that, she was able to rescue enough and to have knowledge about his stories; from these she remembered several titles, among them *Fabiola (Nicholas Patrick Stephen Wiseman, “cardinal”, 1854)* and *Quo vadis (Henry Sienkiewicz, “Imperio austrohungaro”, 1896)*, the first ones she read. She kept this custom until her last years; besides reading everything that fell into her hands, she shared the newspaper with Alvaro, my husband, always reading it from beginning to end.

... I have always made it in a miracle mold (ring-shaped bread), smeared with half a stick of soft butter, so that it is thick, and sprinkle with soda biscuit powder or Maria: with bread powder, it sticks ...

In her nocturnal readings at the hacienda, many times it dawned, and after time passed she learned that there, where she slept and stayed late, the silhouette of a white woman vanished. People said that it was the spirit of Mrs. Edelmira Repetto, the former owner of Polvoxal, who supposedly went down the stairs that led to the tapanco, crossed the living room and followed to mom's room, where she disappeared. According to the stories of the place, she led to the buried money that, by the way, my grandfather never found. On several occasions, the image of Mrs. Edelmira had visited Petronita, who slept in the room that had been the administrator's office and was used for the payments, where the tapanco staircase was located; the white woman had grabbed her by the wrist, but she never got up, she would close her eyes and covered herself with the bed sheet, she did not tell anyone. One day, for no apparent reason, she moved her hammock and went to sleep near aunt Chole; this caught their attention, but they did not ask her why. After leaving the ranch, she talked about it. Mom never saw a thing.

Shortly before leaving Polvoxal, Gustavo's mother, Mrs. Conchita, was there to formalize the commitment with Chole. They still lived a season in Palizada; mom was seventeen years old. For a party in Tabasco, Tomas Garrido Canabal sent a plane to Palizada to take to Villahermosa all the girls of his family that were invited to the festivities, but really he was excited to meet the daughters of uncle Agustin, who, of course, no way did he allow it and they were the only ones who did not attend.

They returned to Campeche again. After much struggle, mom learned dressmaking. My grandfather maintained that idea, so common in the past, that his daughters, for being women, had no reason to study, they did not need it if they had a large patrimony. What a wrong mentality! It would have been better for the two of

them if they had been more prepared to defend themselves in life!
Especially aunt Chole who had such hard times.

Already integrated to the rhythm of life in the city, they began to participate in the usual celebrations and events. One of them was the carnival, perhaps the most significant because of the tradition it contained. As my grandmother Maria, during her youth, she used to participate in it, she was enthusiastic about the idea of her daughters doing it too. You had to choose a costume, trying to be original. From the photos that I keep, mom was once a geisha and in another Louis XV; it is likely that there were other characters, but I do not remember it. Dr. Nazario V. Montejo, a prominent man of the Campeche society, who liked to write verses, used to make an allegory about the carnival mentioning everything that made it up: the joy, the casino, the music and the young women who took part in the party. In that immense rhyme, he dedicated a verse to mom.

Which Canefora is beautiful
and slender like a palm tree
that of the Nile in the riverside
flaunts its figure, graceful
Elizabeth Lastra is rose

of perfumed corolla,
is pure and delicate flower
that our meadow embalms:
this beautiful and gente lady
was born to be loved.

The preparation for Chole's wedding began. Mom did not have a boyfriend, but a good number of suitors. One of them, of surname Sierra, he used to bring serenade with a piano on top of a truck. According to my father, Sierrita was a man lacking personality, who also dared to complain about him having stolen the woman of his dreams. Ricardo, brother of father Martin Palmira, also wooed her. The priest was an institution, he belonged to a lineage family from

Campeche. They called him Father Bicycle because, when he studied in Rome, he got used to this vehicle to go from one place to another. When he was young, the old ladies from Campeche said, he looked like a Saint Luis Gonzaga. Over the years he gained weight and lost his charm, but not power. All the brides in whose ceremonies he was to be the celebrant, had to show him the model of the dress for him to approve it; if it seemed indecorous to him, it had to be modified.

In the pre-wedding shopping of Aunt Chole, grandma and mom frequented “La Casa Herrero”, and my dad started wooing Mom. Soon after they were engaged, but they had to wait to get married because my grandfather Agustin asked him to; Chole had just married.

Aunt Chole was a woman of great beauty and strong personality; high, more of the Lastra type, said mom; she had straight, blond hair, as well as the eyebrows and the trunk of her eyelashes; honey-colored eyes, like my grandfather, with a penetrating gaze that expressed vivid emotions. When he got angry, they said that his eyes looked like those of a ferocious tiger (*jaguar*) for being so bright, brave and of the same color. I know for a fact. She had a mole next to her mouth and another on the chin. Her hands were pretty, like those of a Madonna. She was not of many makeups, she did not need them, she was very beautiful, an authentic natural beauty. The photographer who portrayed her for her wedding kept the photo for years in the shop window of his business, saying that it was very difficult for a couple, the groom and the bride, to be equally handsome. Uncle Gustavo was also very handsome.

About a year later, the preparations for my mom’s wedding began. My father ordered the trousseau to Mexico City, with the fashion designer Luis Jimenez, who had his workshop on Alvaro Obregon Avenue 162, Colonia Roma. The dress was made with lace and a very heavy silk that, by its texture, was called elephant skin. Two days before the wedding, he sent her by air the bouquet of natural flowers: white roses and, for the groom’s lapel, a camellia, which - I suppose - it seemed exaggerated to my father, because what he used were orange blossoms. All this was very extravagant for Campeche.

The fashion designer Jimenez asked mom that as soon as possible, to send to his workshop a photograph dressed as a bride for the newspaper. Mom did so, and in October 25, 1936, it was published in the social section of the sepia Sunday supplement of Excelsior, the newspaper of national life (*number 826*). In front of this section of rotogravure appear three very special photos that give the historical context of the difficult time that was approaching: Franklin D. Roosevelt, candidate of the Democratic Party of the United States to the presidency of the Republic, and Alfred M. Landon, candidate of the Republican Party; but, above all, an impressive image that says at the bottom: "The resurgence of Germany. One hundred thousand soldiers lined up by commanding officers in Nuremberg, to listen to the chancellor, Adolf Hitler, on the occasion of the anniversary of the Nazi Party". My parents were starting they new life, while tragedy was brewing in the world.

Once again there was religious persecution in Campeche, very influenced by the mentality of the governors of the neighboring states. The wedding was held at the house of Aunt Chole's mother-in-law. Father Martin Palmira was confident and without worries to celebrate Mass at the house of Mrs. Conchita Carpizo de Berron, because, in order to avoid any setbacks, she would notify the governor's wife, Mrs. Margarita Hurtado, her half sister. This was a secret, , but Mrs. Conchita knew it. In addition, the grandmother of Father Palmira was Mrs. Concha Berron; for all this the authorities respected the place. The Father was not sympathetic to my father, he did not see him with good eyes because he was Spanish and, according to him, all Spaniards were freemasons. That was his argument to clear the way for his brother because he always wanted mom to marry him.

... in a deep bowl mix the ground chestnuts with a cup of sugar, cup and a half of milk, eight or nine eggs beaten as for omelette and one bar and a half of melted, cold butter. If it is wanted, add chopped crystalized fruit, I do not usually....

They went on a wedding trip to Chichen Itza, which was already an attraction for international tourism. They stayed at Hotel Itza, in the Palenque bungalow. Dad had bought for that occasion a German camera Vollenda, model 1930, a novelty, small and with bellows. With this camera he captured several moments of the trip, like that one on the upper platform of the temple of the Thousand Columns, where mom is sitting on the head of one of the threatening rattlesnakes, which form the portico of entrance to the temple, behind the great Chac Mool; dad is leaning at the side. She commented that happily she climbed up to the castle, the pyramid of Kukulcan, but when descending, she almost started crying. She was drawn to the void, she did not know what to do, and so backwards, holding the chains, almost on all fours and with the help of my dad, she managed to get down. To finish their trip, they went to Chicxulub.

After a week they returned to settle in Campeche, where they lived for two years, after which they went to Merida. Since newlyweds they established the pact that he would take her to the movies twice a week, and the rest of the days he would go to play dominoes at the Spanish Casino. My mom loved the movies and my dad did not, so he said to my mom: "Well, let us go to the movies, but to the Cantarell Cinema, which is the one that has air conditioning and it is where you can sleep the best".

In the White City they formed a group of good friends (*Mr. Felix and Mrs. Raymunda Gurtubay, with all their offspring; Emma and Ramon Martinez, the Chata and Inocencio Cuevas*), with whom they used to meet or go out for walks. At the weekend they went to Progreso or Chicxulub to enjoy the beaches where the Caribbean begins to take shape or to visit the surroundings. Dad and mom invited them to attend with them to the celebration of the IV Centenary of the Foundation of Campeche (1940) so that, in addition to participating in the festivities, they would know the land of my mom and meet my grandparents. As they say, it was an unforgettable trip.

On this season was when mom became fond of the magazine "Para Ti" (*For You*), edited in Argentina. Its content did not have

waste: the cooking recipes, very good; the novels published, many of them English, excellent; it also had a large fashion section.

Mom was of average height, with a beautiful smile; white complexion, rosy and enviable skin, like peach skin; light brown hair which darkened over the years; brown eyes and eyebrows, delineated, dark brown, like my grandmother, more Zuluaga. Mom always liked to strive on her arrangement; she liked to makeup herself, she traced her mouth with a brush so that it would be perfect; on dressing, she was one of those who imposed fashion, aware of what was used; different, never common; meticulous, very aware of her qualities and defects, she did not like the angle of her face, she sought to conceal it. Of delicate movements, elegant and with an enormous weakness for fine things, she said that she preferred less, but of better quality. Her vice was embroidered handkerchiefs and stockings, on those times of silk. She opted for perfumes with dry aromas, sweet aromas gave her a headache. She had an abundant mane which with the humidity and the heat got sponged, and she never liked that, so, since her youth, she combed her hair holding it on the nape. She practiced different types of pigtails holding them with two large silver hairpins.

Time passed and there was no family, so she divided her life into attending and consenting dad, her house and herself. The house was located on the top floor of the store. She personally took care of the various porcelain figurines that she had, ornaments that she dusted with great care, using a broach so as not to break the delicate parts. On the table in the dining room and the living room she liked to put vases to brighten up the place; she carefully attended to several birds that she enjoyed hearing sing from the corridor. There could not miss the company of Borrás, a brave German shepherd and a kitten, who by mistake my dad named it Pancholin, it was white half of the body and dark by the hind legs, it seemed that it had pants; this cat arrived already big, as it was fed there, it stayed there to live with them.

On one occasion when mom played with Pancholin, it occurred to her, without shame, to put as a necklace her bracelet which she wore everyday. Of course, the animal was enraged and ran out the

window towards the store's roof. Realizing what she had done, mom began to worry thinking that she would never see again the cat or her bracelet; luckily it was not like that, one of the employees of dad, caught it and gave it back to her, a bad experience that she never forgot. Carmela was in charge of the kitchen; she also did laundry, starched and ironed dad's shirts.

While mom lived in Merida, from time to time she went to Campeche, by rail, to visit her parents and Chole. When my father decided to settle in Puebla, mom and Carmela traveled by plane from Merida to Veracruz, where he reached them, and they all took the train to Puebla. They arrived at their new destination at nine o'clock at night on March 23, 1945, Friday of Dolores, in her sight, in contrast to the cheerful campechan character, it seemed to her a monkish city; most of the women wore black; the shops and restaurants, all of them closed at eight o'clock; at nine o'clock at night there was no longer a soul in the street.

She did not return to Campeche until four years later, when my grandfather was already very sick and, after a short time, he died. Grandfather Agustin died during the procedure to amputate a leg. A long time passed before the body was handed over to the family. When they finally brought him, mom came over and kissed him on the cheek ... the unpleasant cold sensation that she felt in her face kept it on her lips for many days and in her memory, always. It was June 11 of the Holy Year of 1950. She waited for my grandmother Maria to recover to start the trip back to Puebla. From then on she would live with her.

She said that my grandma asked her when she was going to go out: "Chabel, did Leopoldo already give you a license?" my mother had to live a very dependent stage. My dad bought the bread, paid the phone bills, the electricity, went to the bank, none of these activities were carried out by her; if they went for a walk, my dad was still in charge of disbursing what was necessary: movie or theatre tickets, taxi, coffee or whatever. She had little money in her purse, her logic was: if I go with Leopoldo, I do not need it. She had to be home before he arrived, because if not, there was scandal. If the food was not ready

the instant he sat down at the table, he would get up and leave. However, I never saw my parents arguing. It is said that in order to exist a fight, there have to be two; mom would stay silent and, when my dad's anger passed, she was the first to put things in place, with all restraint and without fuss she took the situation where she wanted. She was very intelligent.

Twelve years of marriage and there was no offspring, mom thought that it was something that would never happen to her. Gynecology at that time and in Mexico was in diapers, however, in the group of Spanish professionals who arrived in exile to Mexico due to the Spanish civil war, came a doctor named Alejandro Otero, an eminent doctor with a very broad knowledge in that speciality, which very quickly led him to acquire fame in Mexico City. An aunt of mine, Nela, had consulted him and was the one who recommended him to my mother; she agreed to visit him for a routine checkup. And that is how, after several years of treatment with cobalt radiation she became pregnant, not without suffering a huge terror every time she attended a session when they left her alone inside the machine and thinking that if there was an earthquake they could forget about her. Finally, close to turning fifteen years of marriage, she gave birth to a child, my brother, who was baptized with the name of my father and my maternal grandfather, who had died a year before: Leopoldo Agustin. They almost go crazy of happiness.

To satisfy her joy, after a few months she became pregnant again, and it was then that she offered the Virgin of the Rosary of Fatima, whose devotion had just arrived in Puebla, that if the child she was pregnant with was a girl, she would name her: Fatima, Maria Rosario de Fatima.

When she attended her appointments in Mexico City, she carried in her briefcase all the makeup she used for her arrangement, which was a ritual. One day, when she placed them on the dresser in the bedroom that she used in Aunt Nela's house, one of the girls from the service came in and, astonished at seeing so many bottles and powder puffs, asked her: "And what are all those `cebitos´ for?" Mom did not imagine that those routines were coming to an end.

Once we were born, her life was completely disrupted. Starting with the pediatrician who received us: Jesus de Miguel, who told her that she had to bathe us with boiled water. Faced with fear and inexperience, she succumbed to excesses in care, as expected. So she forgot about the `cebitos` because of the fatigue. She transferred her dedication to our arrangement and composure.

On Sundays, to go to mass, she combed us and dressed us without forgetting any detail. She liked that, if possible, we were perfect. She could do it with Polo, he was the first one to be ready, he was quiet and very clean; on the other hand, I was restless, mischievous and messed myself very easily, so I was left at the end. She ended up exhausted and she had to finalize her arrangement as she liked ... but there was no time, my dad was very punctual and began to pressure her to be on time, she started to get nervous and I had already disheveled myself or stained the dress and ...to start again. Dad despaired, and then mom said to him: "Better go with the children and I will go later". So she stopped going with us to Mass, but, of course, Polo and I, as a friend told her: "your kids look like dolls that have just been taken out of their boxes". With that observation she was satisfied; once again she had succeeded, that was the important thing. There was a habit of dressing in gala on Sunday, with propriety, people went out very dressed up.

My daily dresses were made by my mom looking for, as always, original models, displaying creativity and great ease for design; she also made my petticoats for the week and for Sundays, very broad, it was fashion, with tucks and embroidered straps, with a lot of starch. She continued receiving "Para Ti" and also now "La Familia", which included models of children's clothing and tasks for the house. The Sunday dresses were ordered to be made with Aurelita, a Spanish lady who lived in Mexico City, she made precious things and, occasionally, she also sold some that were brought from Spain. My elegant dresses, mom washed them, starched them and ironed them; those for everyday and my petticoats, Carmela did it.

... pour the mixture in the miracle mold buttered and sprinkled with cookie, decorate over with cherries in syrup, cut into four, forming Easter flowers, putting in the center a wheel of crystalized fig and with slices of this too, place the leaves...

I was three years old when my grandmother Maria fell down, she fractured the head of the femur, and although she got well from the surgery, she did not walk again because she was not able to do it with the crutches, she had rheumatism in her shoulders. Mom and Panchita, the lady who looked after her, tried to help her, carrying her, so she could try to walk again. Then, mom began to have problems in the column and they had to stop. So, in addition to us, Polo and I, now she had to also attend grandma. Little by little, mom stopped going out, she did not have enough time for everything that she had to do, besides, my grandmother was dominant, and every time that she heard that my mom was going out to the street, to attract more the attention, she started to feel ill, she would get sick, and we had to run to the church of San Agustin, which was around the house, for a priest to impose her the holy oils. This was repeated several times, in addition, soon after, she was triggered by senile dementia.

Mom stopped going out and little by little she separated from her friends. This situation lasted eleven years. When my grandma died, it can be said that mom no longer had friends and that she had become accustomed to confinement. The only one that she kept, in spite of everything, was the very dear Lolita Gonzalez de Gomez, who was unconditional in the good, the bad and the worst; dearest friend, one of those chosen to whom she gave chestnut cake, always very affectionate, she was my first communion's godmother, and for my birthday she always gave me a pineapple Carlota. With her she shared many recipes, Lolita made delicious dishes. She died several years before her.

Mom was very sweet, a loving and protective mother; for me, she became my best friend, there were no secrets for her; she had a lot of common sense and great tact to give advice. Polo, as a man and

already a teenager, because of his explosive and complex nature, she always respected a healthy distance, but when he needed her, she was always at his side. She continued advising me and she helped me choose my clothes, I liked her doing it and that way was until the end, I always let myself go. She pampered us in everything she could, whatever we asked her for and if it was in her hands, she would do it; when I was going to get married, she helped me making tablecloths and everything I could think of. She lived for our lives, she had forgotten about herself. When I got married, I went to live to Mexico City, it was a difficult time for her. When it was six o'clock in the afternoon, time when I returned from work, mom hid herself to mourn with sadness; little by little she overcame, she went out more with dad, but a year and months later he died ... the same day that they were celebrating forty years of marriage. Mom, with deep pain, lamented: "I have lost the other half of my life". She continued to live with Polo and Carmela; Carmen had gone with me to Mexico City.

At this stage of her life, she began, with more effort, to write my cookbooks, sitting in the dinning room days and nights, making a meticulous organization and selection of her recipes. And later, would do it for Silvia, my sister-in-law, and for her granddaughters.

When Alvaro, my son, was about to be born, she made for him a beautiful bassinet, which would also be used by Juan Pablo and Fatima. She embroidered bed sheets for her grandchildren, like the ones that she had made for us. My house in Mexico was very cold, so she wove them, crochet, many little shoes. With these activities she kept very busy until Polo got married. Polo and Silvia went to work to Campeche; mom and Carmela went with them. They lived there for several years. They returned to work to Mexico City and then to Puebla.

She was a loving grandmother, very tender and warm. She liked to read stories to her grandchildren. There was one of animals in which she showed them the sounds they produced. They, fascinated, asked her again and again to repeat them; sometimes, with enough dexterity, she also drew little animals for them.

In the course of that time, she lived twice with me in Puebla; where I had lived for several years before; it was shortly before she settled with Polo in Mexico City, and the other, in the last stage of her life, when with Carmela, already very old (*August, 1998*), they moved to my house. Alvaro treated her affectionately all the time and she did too, in addition, they sympathized; always reserved, unable to make a judgement or comment out of place. At that time, I was dedicated to sewing and, as always, my mom helped me: “If you could make me the hem, baste it, over-stitch it, stick the buttons for me”, she had been through a cataracts operation and her vision improved. It was a wonderful stage that I enjoyed her company, while I arranged myself or sewed. She would sit down and talk to me and it was there when she would go on explaining many anecdotes of her life that, incidentally, I thought it was exciting to have developed in an environment and circumstance very different from mine, that made me anxious to write them.

During her last years, she set the table everyday. She said that she liked feeling useful and that she could still do something; she retained her perfectionist spirit. I still seem to be seeing her how she measured, with her fingers, the distance between the plate and the edge of the table so that each one would be in the exact place. She was always very attentive and perfectionist. During the Christmas times that she spent with me, she helped me by setting an exquisite table in every detail.

Already grown up, she commented that, by her short-sight expression, she resembled an old Chinese woman; to me she looked gorgeous. She was a sweet-faced person, who transmitted peace just by looking at her; she was good, hated the conflict, she was conciliatory. In the afternoons she prayed the rosary, with all generosity she asked for everything and for everyone.

Due to the experience that I had with my grandmother and fearing a similar end - the senile dementia -, she prayed to ask God, with all her heart, to preserve the lucidity of her mind and to be able to fend for herself until the end of her days; not a single day passed without her doing it, and with so much faith that He granted it. When

she died, Alvaro said; “Mrs. Isabel was prudent even to die”. It was sudden, something that I feared could happen at any time despite her iron health, she was already ninety years old, but it irremediably happened, and then the emptiness can be felt...a huge gap, the unconditional love professed and expressed every day will no longer be. It is at that moment when the words make sense, no matter the age, nor hers nor mine, I will always need her. How many things would I tell her, she loved when I used to tell her everything, and now... the silence... However, she left me full of her presence and her kindness, at every moment I trip over something that reminds me of her... and she is still there, she continues.

... Put to the fire, on its base, the mold with the windows closed and with very low flame. It takes about two hours to cook; in the oven in the same mold, uncovered, it would be ready in about one hour or less. Try it always with a knife, if it comes out clean, it is ready... unmold until the next day, already cold.

CHAPTER 8

(In this chapter, is Carmela who gives the indications of the recipe).

TAMALE IN PLATTER

Notice well. In the mortar you put a clove of garlic, once ground you add half a pill of achiote and disintegrate it with a bit of vinegar, around one or two tablespoons, here is what I use, I do not get sour orange; not more than it is because it gives bad taste...

I was about to turn thirteen when I was attracted to the kitchen, perhaps motivated by my good appetite. During the holidays of September 1965, with notebook and pen in hand, I was getting ready to receive the first teaching, taught by Carmela, in the kitchen of the house. Being an incipient apprentice, Alita, with much love and patience, explained to me how to put into practice some recipe, whether it was one of the many that mom had, or the traditional ones of her homeland.

Of short stature, brunette and of Mayan features; thin, graying black hair, combed in a braid; with her essential apron, one of those which have squares with bib and pockets in the skirt, of those which were sold in the market; always very covered, one or two sweaters, and in the winter she could not miss her shawl on her back and head. Here, in Puebla, she felt very cold, since she was from hot weather. Carmela cooked like the angels, even if it was a scramble egg, she had a wonderful seasoning. Hardworking and restless, she was always thinking about what to prepare for dinner, if she made us a pancake

or some “gorditas” of cream or beans ... and while she cooked, she showed her devotion and unconditional loyalty, there was no rest. Polo, my brother, baptized her as Ala or Alita, when he was just beginning to talk and it kept on.

She was born a Sunday, May 5, 1901, in Guayamon (*indistinctly: Uayamon*), an important colonial hacienda of the eighteenth century, north of the state of Campeche, near Edzna. According what she talked, his father had been Spanish, probably the foreman of the place, whose last name was Perez, and her mother, Mayan. The second surname that stated her origin, she did not like to say it, I only heard her mention it one time and I regret having forgotten, the only thing that I remember is that it started with “Z”, which she used to place, followed by a full stop at the end of her name. She became an orphan very young, from father and mother. She only had one brother who left with the group during the Revolution and she did not know anything about him again; she grew up with her godmother, who cared to feed her well and since a little girl she started working. I do not remember in detail when or how she arrived to the City of Campeche. There she worked in washing and ironing.

Carmela used to say that, serving in a house of much lineage in Campeche - ah, because she had her pride, she said that she liked serving people who were people, not resuscitated lice -, the lady asked her: “Carmela, make the petticoats taste starch”, that meant that, after ironing, letting them loose, they would stand rigid on the floor. What were used then, were still coal plates, I imagine the hard work that it was and the care it should need when the clothes were usually white and made of cotton; moreover, I am overwhelmed by the thought of that climate, the heat that was generated by the burning charcoal. A very hard, exhausting work; however, despite this, she had a long life.

Her job was not exclusive just in one house, she lived in a place other than where she served, and for many years she lived in the house of Mrs. Juanita Ayala, an elderly woman, widow and childless, who also washed for someone else and whom she had met at work; she was a good person with whom she lived in harmony. Carmela was

a prudent person, she did not like conflict; they organized very well in everything to divide expenses. Mrs. Juanita lived in the neighborhood of San Roman. As was the custom then, in the house they had laying hens and they raised chickens for their consumption, each had their own. They had agreed that one Sunday Carmela would kill one and the next one Mrs. Juanita would kill another one, that way they shared it. For Christmas Eve, they ordered a braided bread, a traditional party bread, fine, made with eggs and butter. And after attending the midnight mass, that was what they had for dinner accompanied by chocolate from Campeche prepared with water.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Juanita, in addition of being authoritarian, already had some obsessions as an older person. In a Christmas Eve, Carmela was picked up by her friends in order to, after dinner, go to spy the dance. Juanita told her that if she left, she would have to look for a place to sleep, since she would not leave the door unlocked so that, upon her return she would enter, because that frightened her somehow, and also, she would not stay awake waiting for her because the next day she had to leave early for work. Carmela had no choice but to desist. As a result of some similar situations and the insistence of her marrying her nephew, who she did not like, caused her to go and live elsewhere. Carmela esteemed Mrs. Juanita and she, on the other side, saw her as the daughter she did not have, so, despite the harshness, she kept an eye on her. Shortly before Mrs. Juanita died, she gave her a medal from her property that had enameled the image of the Virgin of Carmen (*the dedication of the Virgin of Carmen is very popular around the southeastern area*) and her initials, very peculiar, that later, when I was young, Ala gave it to me.

She had her campechana suit, with a satin skirt and a beautiful white blouse embroidered in black, a very elegant suit; the mayor pride of the attire was the salomonic chains with which they were adorned and the beautiful filigree earrings, all in gold. She liked to attend parties, she knew how to dance the tap dance (zapateado) very well. She was very devoted to the black Christ of Saint Roman.

... add salt and pepper to the chicken or pork, loin or meat alone, brown in hot oil. Already browned add the condiment, let it cool a little, add hot water and ...

Because of those twists of fate, Carmela began to do laundry in the house of my maternal grandparents, who had recently returned to settle in the City of Campeche; my mom was a teenager and she was still single. At that moment were in full swing the preparations for the wedding of Aunt Chole, the eldest of the daughters. A short time later, dad and mom engaged and got married; they lived for a time in Campeche, and two years later, because of dad's job, they had to go to live to Merida.

Asuncion, the person who worked with them in the service of the house and kitchen, had family and could not move to another city. It was when mom proposed the job to Carmela. She thought of her because, in addition to knowing her well, being single would make it easier for her to settle elsewhere. Carmela accepted and that way, in the White City, she began to be part of the Garcia Lastra family. Before, Asuncion had warned her: "The man is very demanding about food and let's see if you have no problems". In this regard, mom explained that dad did not like tasteless stews, he preferred that the stew juice be seasoned, reduced, something that Carmela put into practice right away; my dad never complained, on the contrary, he always praised her good seasoning.

The shop in Merida that my dad managed was called "Las Novedades". The house was on the top floor. Carmela, in addition to the kitchen, was the one who washed, starched and ironed the shirts of my dad, who bathed and changed clothes twice a day because of the intense heat.

To keep an eye on the door of the store's warehouse and where the employees entered, they had a german shepherd dog called Borrás, which they let loose at night in the patio in the back room. Only Carmela and dad would go down to feed it, no one could do it once it was loose. She liked a lot to tell us the adventures of Borrás.

An employee had taught the dog how to eat lemons. The ones that the tree that was in the yard threw, he picked them up from the ground and put them in its snout, he pressed the jaws without releasing, until the dog drank all the lemon. It was a very brave dog, and when I placed clothes or shoes in good condition to give away, on the trash can, your dad or I had to go down in order to give it away because the dog did not allow anyone else to take anything but the trash can; with delicacy, without biting, would take their wrist with the snout and would not let go until things were placed back on their place.

Carmela was very fond of Borrás and Pancholín, the cat. Six years later, dad and mom moved to Puebla. Carmela came with them; it was the forties. When they just arrived they stayed at the Gran Hotel, on Reforma Avenue. They lived there for several months until they gave my dad the house where they would live in and which was located in the center of the city, in the 5 Poniente 514, letter D, behind the church of San Agustín.

Carmela, in her youth, frequented the cinema, she always liked it. In Campeche and Mérida on Sundays she went to the afternoon function. When she went out, she would go to a coffee shop to have a snack and then home to rest. When she arrived to Puebla, she resumed this habit, either to the Reforma cinema, which was at the corner of the hotel, or to the Coliseum cinema, two blocks away. On one occasion, she had a discriminatory incident when, after leaving the cinema, she went into a coffee shop and they did not want to serve her. For her, it was a difficult experience after having lived in two cities where society was more open and inclusive; something painful and enough reason to never do it again.

After this, her outings only included going to the market, to mass, to the Letrán Bookshop to buy a book; if anything, from time to time, go to a store to have a soda or a beer. And later on, when

Polo and I were already there, to take us, in the company of Carmen, to the playground of Paseo Bravo or to walk around the Zocalo.

... slice two or three red tomatoes in quarters and one medium onion in rings, and this along with a branch of well cleaned epazote, put it in the stew. Let it cook over low heat to form the sauce which you will need for the dough.

For Carmela, reading became the only hobby, she liked it a lot, especially reading novels. She had great variety, which, when I was already of age, she lent me and then, we commented them. There was among them a magnificent Russian novel, called Raisa; I remember that we both loved it, she had already read it twice. She had also a preference for gardening, she took care of her flower pots and contemplating the garden attracted her a lot. Every time she could, she bought a little plant in the market, and when we lived in El Carmen, there was a dealer who, every certain time, he would sell to her: dahlias or roses of different kinds and colors. She kept these two passions practically until the end.

Before we were born, my mom had several canaries, she was delighted hearing them and, together with Carmela, took care of them. When Polo arrived to this world, Ala was a great support for mom, to whom sky and earth joined. Carmen, my nanny, came into the house a little before. Their relationship was very respectful and they got along very well. Later, when I was about to be born, once again my mom had to go to Mexico City, since the doctor who attended her was in the capital. Carmela accompanied her to take care of my brother, while they were staying at the house of Aunt Charo, sister of my maternal grandfather.

She loved all of us, but especially Polo, who was her adoration. He was very picky to eat, but that did not matter because the instant he said "I do not like this", she quickly presented to him a number of

options for the child to choose what he wanted. That was for sure true love.

Around nine o'clock in the morning, Ala prepared breakfast for Panchita and Inesita, the caretaker of my grandmother Maria and the woman who was in charge of washing and ironing, respectively. She usually cooked Mexican style eggs, and spicy. I was very young, but attracted by the appetizing smell, I showed up at the kitchen and she shared with me a little taco, that is how, thanks to her, I learned to eat hot spicy.

With her I went to the plaza for the first time, she bought me my little basket and, when I accompanied her to La Victoria, so happy she would put in there some of the vegetables that she had bought. Throughout my life I have enjoyed going to the markets, I love them, and this is something thanks to Carmela. With her I began to like and care choosing each of the ingredients to prepare a stew; I experienced how, through the pores of my skin, penetrated the heat generated by an activity as human as buying and bargaining with dealers; and in turn how that warmth is forging the soul of the stew.

When Mrs. Lily Mena published her book “Cocina Campechana”, it became the handbook of all women in the city of Campeche. Carmela was no exception, she also bought her own because, although her job was to wash and iron, she was attracted to the kitchen and thought that maybe, later on, it could be useful. However, Carmela being already an experienced cook, made severe criticisms of the book because she said that Mrs. Lily gave excessive explanations: “If you are going to kill a chicken, start by tying a thread to the door knocker and then chase the chicken and...”, Alita said jokingly, and in one occasion that a friend of mom was visiting, Judith, Mrs. Lily’s niece, mom arranged to feast her with a stew of the book and Carmela told her: No, Mrs. Chabela, Mrs. Lily “se chuma” (*gets drunk*). To which Judith, who was a little naive, frightened replied: “Oh, no! Carmela, my God, my aunt Lily does not get drunk”. That was Carmela, witty and nice.

... buy a kilo of dough, disintegrate it in water with the hand, until it becomes an atoll that can be percolated. Strain it and put it on fire, keep moving it because it becomes balls. When it starts to boil, add about half cup of oil or a little bit more, you check it, you intercalate with tablespoons of the achiote marinade sauce...

There are so many the fantastic memories that I have of her, like the one, when Polo and I were kids, in which if she saw us barefoot, she chased us holding a kitchen fork with the wooden handle that she used to cook the meat, making the mime as if she was going to pinch our feet with it. Or when we were bothering a lot and we did not let her work, she would send us out, clapping and saying: “Go walk `tuchos´ (*tucho: spider monkey*), because you are `muchos´ (*too many*), this last one was a saying of her homeland. And it also made us laugh when she looked out the windows of the house. She liked it a lot and she said to us: “I am socheando” (watching, spying. In the southeast area there is a little animal with eyes very open, very fixed and attentive gaze that is called soche or soch, so it refers to it in this expression).

She also enjoyed telling us about her homeland, anecdotes and legends, like the one of the the Warlock Goat (*although the leyend is colonial, it took a boom in the nineteenth century because of the need for a strategy to introduce smuggling without being seen. It should be remembered that in the mid nineteenth century the smuggling was a necessary evil because of excessive taxes and lack of vigilance. It can be said that in those times almost all the great traders of the Yucatan Peninsula were smugglers”, p.27 (Luis F. Sotelo Regil, Campeche en la historia)*).

THE WARLOCK GOAT

This is the story of the warlock goat, who frightened the population in the times of the Spanish colony:

It is said that during the colonial era, during the time of piracy, it appeared in the city a demonic being with the appearance of a man, but with the head and legs of a goat. This entity of hell, as grandparents call it, attacked the inhabitants of the city, who lived with the constant terror of meeting him.

The entity had a human body with a very hairy chest. His head and legs, as already mentioned, were of a goat; the first with large, twisted horns, red eyes like burning coal, long beards and a destructive look. Its strong legs resembled the legs of Satan, , it had thick and dirty hair, large and powerful legs and could destroy stones with one kick.

This is the description that for a long time had the inhabitants of Campeche of the warlock goat, name that was given to the wonderful being that for many was the son of Satan. The men hated it, the women feared it and the children were controlled by threatening to leave them in the street at night, time in which the warlock goat appeared to frighten the neighbors of the port.

Poor who dared to leave his house after closed the gates of the wall, about eight at night, it was likely to meet with the warlock goat, feared perhaps more than Black Beard, Pie de Palo or Lorencillo.

One day, when opening the doors of the wall to start the sales in the market, the body of an unfortunate man was found, horribly mutilated and beaten. His remains were taken to the main square so that his family would recognize him.

“Without a doubt he met with the warlock goat”, “poor man, he could not stand the death look of the warlock goat”, “he was killed by the warlock goat”, these were the comments that were heard throughout the square, comments that lasted until the dusk and did nothing but to scare the population even more.

Nevertheless, one of those days when God is not there to make miracles, a being who looked pitiful appeared chained in the door of

the police residence. “They caught the warlock goat”, “they captured the warlock goat”, they caught it, they caught it”, the women who saw them shouted.

The famous warlock goat turned out to be an arms dealer who carried out his plans at night, but the fear of falling into the hands of the police forced him to create a plan to distract them. What better thing than to take advantage of the superstition of the population to create a disguise that was capable of frightening even the king himself? Still a long time later, the villagers tell the most incredible stories of this supposedly supernatural being, which creates fear among the unbelievers, the fearful and the elderly.

(“Gente y Tradicion de Campeche. Leyenda del Chivo Brujo”, an article of “Conociendo Campeche, Mexico, 2003)

She narrated us how this character disguised himself with a huge turtle carapace on his back; on the covered head he tied two very polished machetes so that they would shine under the moon’s light; he was

dragging chains and, through a large pipe leaning on the floor, he shouted, the floor rumbled, in the silence of the night it caused terror and the inhabitants retired early in their houses; this was the time that people took advantage of, to smuggle their carts. Of course, they had some deals with the garrison of Santa Lucia to enter late at night, because the City of Campeche was walled. We listened without blinking, and when it was over, we begged her to tell is another one. Carmela was a very sensitive person and, therefore, with a certain predisposition to paranormal experiences. During her life she had several; we loved that she talked about them and shared those experiences with us.

... when it has a little color and the dough does not taste like raw, the salt is rectified and, if necessary, add a little bit more, it has to be thick. It is placed in a casserole or in a platter, and when it is ready to be served, put the meat and sauce over it...

On one occasion, still in Campeche, the lady of the house where Carmela was working went out with her children, and the other young lady from the service said goodbye to Carmela warning her that she would be alone to finish her job, and that upon her return she would pay her. When she finished, waiting for them to return, she lay down. She was tired and fell asleep. Suddenly, she felt that someone took her by the ankles, squeezing them; she woke up, but did not open her eyes, she supposed that it was the other young lady who had already returned, so she ignored it and continued with her eyes closed; she kept lying back and once again they squeezed her ankles. Time later, she heard them said: “We are here, Carmela!” At that moment she got up bewildered, asked them if they had just arrived and if it was she who had squeezed her feet. She told her it was not her, that they were coming in and that, what had happened was that she had used the

hammock of Mrs. Tona, who had died a few months ago and who did not like anyone else to lie down on it... And as this experience, she had several, she sensed especially when someone was going to die, because she told us that they came to say goodbye to her.

As a person of the coast she liked beer and, from time to time, enjoy a drink, whether anise or brandy; more so, if it was cold or she had a cold: “Let ´s see, give me my pixoy” (*a drink*). My dad used to share with her when he served himself his appetizer. Carmela said that in Merida, on one occasion, she drank Xtabentun (*liquor of the region with anise flavor*). Oh! And she also liked to smoke a xastup (*name given to the cigar. This was derived from the name of the cigar that was made in the region. Instead of wrapping tobacco in paper, they did it in holoch, totomoxtle or corn leaves, the finest of all*) after eating. Already very old, after the bath, she also drank a glass of anise so she would not get cold, she was a personage.

Tireless as she was, on Sundays afternoons she prepared steak in casserole for dinner, because aunt Estelita and my cousins, the Piluchas, used to stay for dinner. Aunt was mom ´s cousin and she would go visit my grandmother Maria, who lived with us.

Aunt Chole, mom ´s sister and who lived in Campeche, when she visited us she brought - or she sent to the house, when there was an opportunity, with messenger because there was not other way - handmade chocolate made at home by Maria, the person who helped her with the chores; preserves of nance or ciricote; cashew raisin; pulp of soursop prepared by aunts Ferrer; small achiote tablets that were not available here; banana leaves, avocado from the region, slightly sweet, very large, with green skin, yellow pulp, very different from the ones here; smoked dogfish, etc. With the banana leaves and the achiote, Carmela made small torted tamale, pibi-chicken or tamale in platter. In my mind I have engraved the image of how she prepared the chocolate from her homeland: in a campechan chocolate pot of wood from guayacan, she put some chocolate chips, poured boiling milk and, with her grinder made of the same wood, she whisked it up until it is foaming... Mmm!, delicious.

After Polo's marriage, mom, who had already widowed, and Carmela, stayed living with him. They accompanied Polo and Silvia, his wife, to the different places where they settled. Polo was her adoration and, in addition, she had a great affection for Silvia from before they got married; ; later on, she would feel the same for their three children: Polo, Luiseli and Chivis. Eventually, mom and Alita lived with me.

She was playful and very sweet with the children. My children also enjoyed her, although very little. Her last days she lived them here, in the house; she enjoyed sitting near the kitchen window to sunbathe, contemplate the flowers of the garden and the birds that stopped to drink water in the water fountain ... the great souls are pleased with simplicity. Very reserved, she talked little about her personal life, I do not know why she did not get married. We were her family and owners of her affections. Loving, faithful, good and helpful. Of stealthy walking, soft voice; if she got angry, she kept silent, never went out of her way, generous in the extreme.

Alita was mom's life partner, she was one of those few kinds of people who make life lighter. When Carmela was already very old, mom said that she had always even served her with the thought, so the least she could do was to take care of her and care for her with the same affection as Ala did for more than sixty years; when she died, she was going to be one hundred and one years old. Alita, thanks for you and for your legacy.

... Extend a banana leaf to the casserole or platter, enough for you to cover the stew after, first clean it with a damp cloth and grill a little so you can handle it, this gives it a better taste, but if it is not achieved, serve directly on the platter.

CHAPTER 9

CHRISTMAS APPETIZER

This is the entry that I used to put in the Christmas Eve dinner and the Christmas meal; to introduce a delicious menu, it seemed to me ideal from the beginning to exalt the palate to pleasant flavors...

Usually, mom and dad's guests were adults at the Christmas celebrations, except for Gustavo, my cousin, still a teenager and who lived with us for a few years when aunt Chole was recently a widow; then came Eduardo and later Zoila, Gustavo's siblings, also teenagers; so, when Polo and I started to be part of the formal Christmas celebration, we were the only children. In order not to get bored, our places at the table were placed together, and that way, between us, we entertained ourselves without paying much attention to adults, and the appetizer led us to become accomplices by sharing its content. At that age, Polo liked strong flavors, not to me, so, without the guests nor mom and dad finding out, everything that I did not like, I would give it to him, and the other way around, because of that, to write about him, the appetizer seemed very appropriate because of the bond that it established between us.

A quiet, conservative and traditional city of Puebla; population that in the fifties had just something more than two hundred and ten thousand inhabitants; its extension, on one hand, did not extend beyond the airfield (*24 South, where the Ecologic Park is now located*). To get there, you had to cross a bridge over the San Francisco River; on the other hand, the hill of La Paz; the border gate and the municipal pantheon or the colony America, behind the hill of Loreto there was nothing. However, it was a metropolis with intense commercial

activity and a very strong textile industry. Here was the place where we lived our childhood.

It comes to my memory a brick and tile bench surrounded by ivy, embedded in the wall that enclosed the closed street where we lived; yellow flowers like little bells, some bougainvillea and a huge plumbago from the house next to it, that you could see over the wall; tiles on the ceilings and cement floor, the ocher wall and the windows with black bars of wrought iron; the church of San Agustin, its bells that resonated constantly, the doves torcacitas of the temple that made: uuuu...uuuu and the rumble of some thunder that fell in the lightning rod of its tower; at the bottom, closing the street, the wall of a house, part of what had been the convent and, at that time, used as a corn cellar. Here was located the house which mom and dad rented since they settled in Puebla, this was the childhood paradise where our first years of life went by.

Shortly after my grandfather Agustin had died, dad was graced with a car in a raffle of the Chamber of Commerce, a 1950 Cadillac, which he had planned to sell and go with my mom for a trip to Spain, but she got pregnant and plans changed. Spain could wait, and if she had waited so long, it did not matter a little bit more. Dad felt lucky: a child at his almost fifties and, if that was not enough, he had come with a prize, although a bit earlier: the car.

Dr. Otero would take care of mom in Mexico City, that is why, the last month of pregnancy she went to the Federal District to wait for the arrival of “the stork”, staying at the house of Aunt Nela, her cousin. At last the desired day arrived: April 27 ... His firstborn was born!... A boy!... Mom did not get tired of thanking God for holding a healthy and beautiful baby in her arms; she watched him, for her it was a doll, bald, rosy. Dad was in Puebla. As soon as he was notified, he immediately moved to the capital, where he stayed until Mom and Polo left the hospital and installed them again in the aunt’s house. The doctor did not allow them to travel immediately. Before they were discharged, he made all the preparations for the baptism. It was celebrated three days after he was born in the chapel of the Spanish sanatorium and he was given the name of Leopoldo Agustin, the

names of my dad and my maternal grandfather. His godparents were Aunt Nela and Mr. Felix Gurtubay. In the celebration, they drank a toast to the baby Asturian, said dad proudly, with cider El Gaitero, could not be otherwise. Forty days later, my father returned to pick them up, to move Polo to his new home.

The arrival of the firstborn had driven the whole family crazy with happiness. Full of hope, my grandmother Maria, during the waiting, she had dedicated herself to cross-stitch several bed sheets made in opaline so that they would be very soft; she wove some little clothes and shoes; mom made the covers for diapers with dimity (*thick cotton plush fabric, similar to flannel on one side and, on the other, similar to pique, texture in setoff*), very warm, embroidered, with shell buttons and, on the edge, with a crochet finish; granny also collaborated in them. He was such a wanted and beloved son that there were no limitations for his arrival. In January, four months before the baby was born, mom looked for another person to help her with the work that was coming, that is how Carmen, the nanny, arrived to the house.

A year and months after the arrival of Polo, when mom still had not finished adapting to the new life, I was born. Dr. Otero said to her: “You are luckier than a devil, after so long a boy and now a girl”. Mom said that when they took me with her for the first time, she was very pleased when she saw that I had a furaquino (*it means dimple in bable*) next to the mouth, like my dad’s, it was so tiny then, that it looked as if they had done it with the tip of a pencil. The process was similar in waiting for my arrival. Mom moved to Mexico City, this time she stayed at the house of Aunt Charo, half-sister of grandfather Agustin, and Carmela accompanied her to look after Polo. In the same way, I was baptized three days after I was born in the chapel of the Spanish sanatorium. My godparents were aunt Avelina and uncle Jose, brothers of dad, who were in Spain. Carmen and Antonio Gurtubay attended in their representation.

Since I opened my eyes, Polo was there. The age difference was little, only one year and five months. This closeness made us perfect companions, we were very close, ideally we complemented each other to play. I was a soccer goalkeeper; I led several armies: little lead

soldiers and then, of rubber, from Romans, Crusaders, from the first and second World War, jeeps and tanks of war; sometimes we entertained ourselves for a long time with the electric train, a Lionel, which the Kings brought to him on one of his first Christmas; we shared a fire truck with pedals, tricycles, bicycles and also a slide that was placed for us in the corridor of the house; I participated in the life of Hercules, who disguised himself by crossing through his breast, like the skin of the Nemean lion, a fur coat that belonged to mom, knotting it with sleeves, to resemble the mythological character seen in the movies, it was not far for my mother to have a heart attack when she found us in full romp rolling and tugging her super fine coat. I used to set my conditions, if we played the Brave Prince, I would have the princess Aleta and the castle, and if not, I would not play; I had a spear, a sword, a pistol, a machine gun and everything that was necessary to share in the game. In the afternoons, with mom and Carmen, we played the Oca (*the goose*), Snakes and Ladders, Lottery, Burra (*donkey*) with Spanish deck, etc. Sometimes mom would romp with us by carrying us on her back and then throwing us in bed, she said that she was carrying us on cuspach (mayan word: carry on the back), it was hilarious, we loved it.

Like all the brothers, we fought, yes, but quick reconciliation always came. When I was older, there was the blackmail and hypocrisy; at the same time that I hit Polo, I would scream and this incriminated him, and who was scolded was him for hitting the girl. I must confess that I abused the privilege of being the baby girl, in the late snack I always beat Polo, who was very picky and I always grabbed from him his favorite sweet bread.

On Saturdays, when the order from La Sevillana arrived at the house, Polo, following his inclination as a builder, made towers with food cans. Among the merchandise that they delivered, were candies and chocolates for us. Mom distributed equally and in such a way the chocolates of Turin figurines, as well as the Laposse of Perugia candies, that they had to last for a week. Each one of us had a can where we kept them, these had been of cookies or English candies (*Peek, Frean & Co. Ltd., Biscuit Manufacturers, London*); Polo's can was

octagonal, white with black and with Chinese figures in gold; mine, square with the corners in a chamfer, white background and oriental flowers in orange, red and blue. They were the repositories of our treasure that we afterwards exchanged in a similar way to the appetizer; I liked to taste the candies, instead Polo loved to chew them. We rarely fought for these, only when one of us finished its ration before time and did not want to be left with the craving.

For each commensal put on a medium platter: two or three moderate slices of Gruyère cheese and Dutch ball... When the government policies became more rigid by preventing imports, it was very difficult to get them, so I started using the Carracedo and the Rosatta; they were the first Mexican cheeses that tried to imitate the European style...

Of the first shared pranks, I remember an occasion in which we locked ourselves in a bathroom in the house. Polo let his architect's spirit escape once more, he played with the soaps stored in the cabinet, he removed the wrapper and made towers that defied gravity, while I smeared the creams of Elizabeth Arden from my mom and I painted myself a huge mouth with her red lipstick. When they noticed in the house, chaos began. We could not take away the key, mom tried to tell us what to do, but we were so entertained that we did not pay any attention to her. She looked for the copy, but in the other side of the lock was the key inside and she could not introduce it. Gustavo was very tall and tried to get through the bathroom window, but it was very high, he could not do it. Mom phoned dad, who was in the store. When he arrived, Mom, Gustavo, Granny, Carmen and Carmela were still at the bathroom door on the verge of a nervous breakdown ... the children could not get out! So my dad went for a small ax that was in the house for different uses and, with a firm voice, he ordered us to get into the tub and to put on as many towels as possible of those in the cabinet, to bent down and to close our eyes so

that the jumping splinters would not hurt us. After two or three powerful hits, the door broke, he reached through that opening and turned the key. That was how they got us out. We never got scared, there were too many things to play with. As the scare was huge for them, they did not scold us for all the mess that we had created in the bathroom and not to mention the trail of creams, soaps, shampoos and etcetera that we made to mom.

Dad was a great soccer fan, he had played it as a young man, he was a reserve player of Asturias, the legendary team of the Asturian Centre in Mexico City. When he arrived to Puebla, he found that the matches were held on weekends. Every Sunday I attended to El Mirador, meeting place of the Spanish community in Puebla. It was a construction with two circular towers and roofs covered with red tiles, an area with halls where the pilgrimages were held and, in the back, there was a grandstand, part covered and another not, this last one very sunny, and a field where the soccer matches took place.

When Polo was four or five years old, dad decided that it was time to start taking him so he would get involved in this sport. They went by taxi and crossed the San Francisco River through the bridge of the 25 Poniente; in that area there were very few constructions, some textile factory and cornfield. A little further up, El Mirador stood out, which was entered by the back, straight to the wooden stands where dad looked for a good place and they sat preparing for the match. He met with his friends and countrymen and they talked and joked. From before the game they started to smoke cigar; when it started, it was already a dense cloud of smoke. Polo, very sensitive to smells, got dizzy, he did not even know what was happening on the soccer field, it gave him a headache, on more than one occasion, with nausea and the need to throw up. When they left, Polo would arrive home sick. After several similar Sundays, he did not want to go back to any match. I do not know if he was ever interested in football or cigar smoke vaccinated him forever. A few years later, the stands on the soccer field caught fire and, immediately, the construction of the Park Spain began in those areas.

On Sundays, mom would arrange us like dolls to make sure we were perfect and, like every day, after bathing she would put on us eau the cologne Sanborns. With great care she combed our hair, while we were sitting in a little chair of colorful ropes that we both had, using a Jockey Club gel for hair with a scent of lavender or woods, she did not like any other; she had a lot of patience, but when we moved too much, she would hit us in the head with the comb.

Once we were groomed, we would go to church with my dad, usually to the Cathedral, then to have an ice cream and to take a walk around the Zocalo. He also liked to take us to the railway station to see the trains leave; sometimes we walked to where Larin's store was in the 4 Oriente to buy sweets, chocolates or anise palettes, it was the only sweetshop opened on Sunday; we went to the kiosk of magazines and newspapers that was in 5 Poniente, one street away from the Cathedral, and he bought to each one of us a story (*comics*). In the afternoon we went to the movies with Mom and Carmen. There were two films in a function, one more or less bad and the other one good, it cost four pesos. Each week the programming was changed; the cinemas that we frequented the most were the Coliseum, the Reforma or the Puebla; from time to time the Mexico, because it was far and in a not very nice area, the same with the Variedades, which was deteriorating.

The time for breakfast or dinner, for Polo, was all an ordeal: he did not like milk, but he had to drink it. When it was brought to the table it was too hot, it formed cream on the top so it had to be taken away to filter it. Carmela would come back with the milk without the formed cream, but while he decided to drink it, another lighter creamy layer would be formed and it had to be taken away again to be filtered; the milk would come back, but now it had formed little grease dots that had to be taken out because they disgusted him. Alita would come back with the cup of milk that, after all these procedures was already cold! Now it had to be warmed...on an occasion that my mom was not in a good mood, tired of this daily episode, despite being a calmed person, she grabbed the cup of milk and poured it over Polo, who stared at her surprised by her reaction. Could not

believe it. Sometimes I imagine that CRI-CRI was inspired by this fact to compose the song *La merienda (the dinner)*.

When my playmate started going to the kindergarten of the Central School, in the 5 Oriente (now Cordero and Torres Institute), very close to where we lived, I did not want to stay alone in the house. Who would I play with? So I insisted to take me to school. Then it was not common to enter school at a very young age, but mom got them to admit me and I was the happiest. He asked Polo to take care of me, and he really did, he took his role very seriously: as he had been told not to allow anyone to drink the orange juice from my canteen, he protected it with great zeal, and if someone gave me a kiss, he would take out his handkerchief and cleaned my cheek. While we waited to be picked up, as I was very restless, he would hold my hand until they arrived for us.

In the mornings, when arriving to school, in the patio of the entrance, were several religious women receiving the students. Polo was impressed to see them dressed in black from head to toe, with those strange shoes, with thick heels, all combed with a small pigtail. For him, it was an imposing receiving committee...terrifying.

The building where the Central College was located was an old house in the center of the city, behind the Cathedral. On one occasion, being in the classroom, a loud noise was heard. There was an incident in the high school chemistry lab, which was located on the upper floor of the second patio. Due to a slight explosion, and in the middle of the smoke, the students began to evacuate the place by going down the stairs; they took us to the front yard and, in the disorder, I got lost from Polo, who started to look for me very scared. He found me at the incident's place, finding out what had happened, someone was holding me by the arm. Polo grabbed me by the hand, forced me down and we sat in the place indicated by the teacher where we would be picked up. Oh well - I would stop being a woman -, since a little girl, I liked gossip.

Polo, from a very young age, learned to read. Before going to school he already knew the alphabet. We had a wooden dice game that, on each of its faces, had a letter and, with them, mom had been

teaching him to build words. As soon as he mastered the reading, he read me the stories that dad bought for us every Sunday. Because of the comfort that this gave me, I was very vague to learn to read; however, I did very well in the rounds and running games. When at the school we played the chairs game, at the end of the music was the signal to sit down, and whoever was left stood up, lost and had to get out of the game, so I sat down quickly, with my hands I set aside the little chair for my little brother and I defended it as if my life depended on it. We were the ideal complement.

While we lived in 5 Poniente we had several cats. First Bimbo, a huge yellow cat, very fat, an authentic cat of wineries, and later Bimbo II and Bimbo III, very originals, they were also yellow. One of them appeared in the window gate and we adopted it; I do not remember what happened to these last ones. Then came Silvana, a beautiful angora cat, mottled gray, with dark brown stripes and a coral-colored nose. The cats were necessary, because in the house of the corner, the corn cellar next to the church, there were huge rats, like rabbits, or at least we saw them like that then, and through the drainage they went to the patio of the closed street and they came out raising the cover of the strainer. From the window of the house we looked out and it was fun to see how the rats came to eat the red bread, with poison, that the neighbors put there.

... Four or five olives stuffed with anchovies, Serpis. Then were the only ones that existed...

Polo left the Central, only the kindergarten was for boys and girls, the rest was just for girls. He went to pre-primary at the Institute Oriente, a Jesuit school just for boys. The primary building was on the 21 Sur and there was also the pre-primary.

In first grade, Pupe Hinterholzer was his teacher, a friend of the family, and who chose to make a representation, with her students, of the CRI-CRI's song of the dolls, for the mother's day festival. Polo

participated as a chicken, something that made him rebel. He never liked to participate on this kind of festivities, much less with that disguise; he says that he cursed it all his childhood because he was forced and almost dragged him to dress. Pupe contacted a German lady who lived in the 2 Oriente to make the costumes. When it was Polo's turn to try on his costume, the teacher offered to take him to the dressmaker, who was a friend of her family. She insisted that they stay to eat. As expected, Polo did not want to eat, and since he was firm in character, he did not eat anything, which made the dressmaker annoyed, who was bad-tempered too.

Pupe invited me to participate as Little Red Riding Hood, and I, happy. That was my thing. Mom made me the costume. She bought many books of the classic story to get the model and make it as similar as possible. The song said that Little Red Riding Hood was going in a cart and it occurred to mom that I could use Polo's fire truck. For me it was something extraordinary, the only girl in the entire boys' school.

Each time that school began, dad would take us to Mexico City, downtown, to buy our briefcase in the saddlery "El Porto Alazan". He bought to each of us an extraordinary craft, a briefcase of embossed leather. Polo's, usually, was dark brown-colored, and mine was honey-colored. I must confess that now I value the craft work of these briefcases; in childhood I did not like them that much.

By this time, she lived in Puebla, along with her family, aunt Estelita, mom's cousin. Every Sunday afternoon she visited us, with her daughters: Carmina, Pila and Luly; we called them the Piluchas. It was fun. Carmina and Pila were a bit older and they organized original and entertaining hobbies for us. I remember when we played "trip to the moon", it was incredible. While we waited in the corridor, they placed: chairs, drawers, tables and so on, strategically in a room and turned off the light so it would be dark. Then, they blindfolded us and one of them took us by the hand to go up and down, narrating the journey through space, describing the moon and the stars, it seemed so real, that you felt that you were there. An unforgettable experience, especially the first time. The wonderful afternoons of

playing came to an end after a long season, because they moved to Mexico City.

When Polo was eight years old and I was almost seven years old, we began our preparation for the first communion. We attended to the Oasis (*house of the religious sisters of the Holy Spirit*), as it was very close to the house, Carmen, the nanny, would take us walking. Polo, with his huge memory, remembers how the nuns from the convent, during the preparation, scared us with stories about hell, the damn demons and the torments to which the children who were grave sinners were subjected to.

Mom took care of the preparations, she was very busy between invitations and everything related to the ceremony. It was in the convent of the Trinitarians, behind the church of San Francisco, on September 27, the day of Mom's birthday and her wedding anniversary. The Mass was celebrated by the Father Lara, a Spanish redeemer, friend of my dad. After, there was a breakfast as it was the custom: tamales, gelatin, fruit cocktail, cake of the Hermida and chocolate. When we finished, we played happily in the beautiful gardens where, later it was known, it had been the Franciscan cemetery, with tons of tombs underground. It is probably that they were the result of several epidemics over the centuries, but the abundant humus produced by the dead resulted in the exuberance and beauty of their gardens.

The most famous tailor in Puebla: Alfonso, made the suits for Polo and dad. It was an event of great meaning and we had to be up to the circumstances. Mom's outfit was a beautiful dress of very fine wool, a rare shade of blue, which suited her very well, ornamental comb and mantilla, black suede shoes, everything in perfect harmony, as she liked it. At that time, women were forced to wear veils to enter the temple. To attend weddings or special ceremonies it was customary to wear a hat or ornamental comb and mantilla, the Spanish style. When they lived in Campeche, for those occasions, dad had given mom a beautiful tortoiseshell ornamental comb with a delicate carved drawing, like filigree, made by the artisans from there,

and ordered from Spain a black mantilla. It was the moment to show them off.

My dress was of Swiss organdy with lace inserts and embroidery to the shade (embroidery technique used in translucent fabrics), made by Aurelita. The candles were very beautiful, thin, decorated by hand with flowers and leaves also made of wax slats, vaporous and very delicate. I remember going to Mexico to buy them with my parents and my brother. Polo's rosary was silver and mine was made of crystal rock. The stamps were Spanish and very nice, some very elegant for the adults and some colorful for children.

For this event, aunt Chole came from Campeche with her entire petite family: Zoila, Josefina and Carmen Maria; it was very exciting. It was the second time that she visited us, the roads were not many and the trip was not easy. The time that they spent with us was partying, we played for a long time with Jose and Carmen Maria, who integrated very well to whatever it was.

A few months after the first communion we moved from home and went to live in the private street Tamaulipas, in the colony del Carmen. This was a bigger house and with a garden, where mom and Carmela planted lots of flowers and plants which they liked so much: elegant leaf, dahlias, roses, lanterns, night smells, Spanish jasmine, honeycombs, a vine of Mary's tears which grew up to the roof and to which later no one wanted it, because they said that it was bad luck; in short, an enormous variety that they took care thoroughly. The window of Polo's room faced the garden, and when we were about to set up our camp in the garage, we threw everything we needed through the window, of course, crushing the plants. Mom complained bitterly with dad about the salad in which we had converted her crops and my dad answered to her: "The garden is for the children to play; the plants will sprout eventually". Carmela and mom decided to stop buying seedlings and.... let the children play.

When we lived in that house we had two beautiful cats: dark gray and green eyes, Soraya I and Soraya II, again very original, both were a gift from Josefina Ponce de Leon, my friend from Kindergarten. In this period of time I had decided to make dresses

for my dolls, so one day I decided to dress Soraya I as a nun. I made her an habit and, with a little work, after some scratches, we managed to put it on, until, desperately, it ripped it out and fled. Before it took it off, my brother introduced the cat into the cloister that he had built for it with bricks, wood, a drawer and in the front, as the gate of the choir, the grill that had just been changed to dad´s Opel (car).

Likewise, Polo practised with it his armament tactics. He put on it a parachute and threw it from the roof. The cat, a little scared and meowing, landed with enough agility. In addition, he had dug an anti-craft shelter in a part of the garden, where he had taught it to hide when, from the stairs on the roof, he threw bombs - little pebbles or pieces of brick -. On one occasion an impressive hailstorm fell and the cat ran to hide in the shelter, recognizing a massive bombing. This caused great concern to Polo, who feared that the refuge would be flooded and the cat would perish. Despite mother´s scolding, who told him that the cat by instinct would be safe, he insisted on going out in the middle of a downpour, he ran to get it out and to put it in a safe place.

... Three or four rolls of anchovies with caper in the center...
a couple of asparagus...

For the Christmas Season, since very young, they took us to see shop-windows in order to choose the toys that we would ask for to Santa or to the kings, as well as to see the Christmas decorations of the stores and the city, the different Nativity Scenes that are placed in the shops and houses, many of which left their curtains open to show them off. Since I can remember, each year they bought us - because we broke it - a clay nativity scene from Amozoc, of those which were sold in the market of La Victoria; there were years in which two or three times they replaced it, especially the little Jesus; as I liked very

much playing with it, of course I broke its arms or a foot, and since it was made of plaster, there was no way you could stick it.

This custom made mom a lot of excitement and, since we were little, we started to put it with those figures, many animals, paxtle, lama, little lights and mirrors like lakes. When Polo was about nine years old, he was practically the creative one along mom in the Nativity. It was then that she asked aunt Chole to send her a mystery (*The Sacred Family: the Virgin, Saint Joseph and baby Jesus*) that had belonged to grandmother Maria and she had given it to her. They were Italian figures, small, with very fine features: St. Joseph, standing, the Virgin prostrated and the Child reclining in the manger in one piece. Then we started buying more characters; some Italians with a cork base, of similar size, that they sold in Casa Rugarcia; there were also some Spanish figures of similar dimensions on The Card. The Nativity was increasing in size, although not too much, since the figures were small. Later on, Polo increased its realism by painting a linen with the celestial vault and placing a system of rivers, waxing and molding the fabric that would serve as a bed. It was beautiful. He put it in a corner of the dining room to enjoy it.

In childhood, during the Christmas festivities, accompanied by Carmen, we never stopped attending, every year, to the “posadas” of Mrs. Josefina Robles, nor of Chabe Marquez, grandmother and cousin respectively, of Paty Osorio, another childhood friend; there were some other invitations, and the rest of the days we celebrated home. Mom, Carmela, Carmen, Polo and I, sang the posada, and then we broke a small piñata and... we were delighted.

Polo always had an enormous artistic inclination; at the age of nine, he wanted to learn how to paint. Zoila, my cousin, aunt Chole’s daughter, came to Puebla and studied for Teacher in the Esparza School, where she was an intern. She had an excellent teacher who taught drawing and painting, and he also taught at the School of Plastic Arts of the State. It was then that Mom, through Zoila, contacted Professor Jose Maria Perez, who started going to the house every Saturday to teach my brother, who was about ten years old at that time. Professor Perez was a person of mature age, perhaps in his

sixties, dark, thin, with few hair, with a soft and slow voice, which strengthened the clarity of his teaching. He helped Polo to develop his ability to draw and then to paint in oil and spatula, as well as other techniques; the patience and dedication of the teacher and the skill of the student, began to flourish.

It was this way for several years, until, in the second year of high school, the school's prefect of discipline, Mr. Echeverria, a teacher who also was in charge of sports and a fan of the subject, began to demand that all the students attend on Saturdays to do some kind of physical exercise, under the threat of expulsion. Polo talked to him to explain him that it was the day that he had painting classes. Without any reasons, he told him that it was mandatory. There was no other alternative so he had to suspend his classed to comply, more or less, with the requirement; it was against his will, he did not understand that for the prefect the sport was superior to art. My brother always considered him an intellectual denial that, for the same reason, a little later, he had to leave the Jesuit community. For Polo, the sport was not his thing, but the firm character and certain rebelliousness were. He assisted to school, he sat down on the field and, as a peaceful protest, he did not exercise at all, he just did the register, he did not even wear the soccer shoes that were bought for him, he would lend them to the classmates who forgot theirs.

Meanwhile, I was the one who took the drawing classes, hoping that Mr. Echeverria would lower his sports fever and Polo could resume them, which was impossible and he had to continue attending on Saturdays. Definitely, he had to leave he painting classes, something that he regretted a lot, because in addition that he was passionate about them, he had come to have a great esteem towards Professor Jose Maria, who considered him an outstanding student.

When Polo went into high school, for a few months, he still was in the building that was in the 9 Poniente, to go later, to the brand new school, located where it is now (*colony San Manuel*). The construction of the Institute Oriente was one of the first of the recent ranch San Manuel; there were only vacant lots around it. To communicate this new part of the city, they launched a line of

pistachio green buses, known as “the green San Manuel”, which passed by the corner of the house and was the means of transport used to go to school.

With the militarization of the school, a uniform similar to that of the soldiers in khaki was introduced: trousers, camisole, tie, socks, belt with shiny gold buckle and cap, barracks for everyday and quepi for gala, and finally, dark brown half boot. Every day there was revision. The man in charge was Major Narro Flores, and if someone did not wear his clean and entire uniform, or his buckle or boots did not shine; the nails were not trimmed or the hair brush style super short, or if it was not the right size, he had to be arrested, he would not go out to eat and on the afternoons he would have to march. Being repeat offenders, they they would have to do it in the military zone, where they were locked in two small dungeons to carry out the punishment. This practice was suspended after some complaints from the parents.

In high school, my brother had very good friends among the “maestrillos” (applicants to be Jesuits. They are not priests yet, but neither novices, something more advanced) who came to the Oriente to collaborate with the training of the boys. Among them, Carral, Ponce de Leon, Gonzalez Torres, Neftali Perez and Chuche Maldonado, this last two frequented the house a lot, together with a group of classmates who had a discussion group. Polo considers that these two Jesuits influenced a lot his way of thinking. With Felipe Ruiz and Bernardo Murcio we went on missions to Libres; an incommutable experience, of those moments of life in which you feel able to change the world. Felipe and Jose Luis Gomez Gallegos, as they were very enthusiastic, began to organize the group “Up with People” (*“Viva la Gente”*), where both of us participated, Polo was not part of the choir, but a support element - as he would say - and me, despite being very out of tune, I was admitted because I was very enthusiastic and really wanted to be there. Throughout these presentations we had very enriching experiences.

Sometimes he remembers several of his teachers, such as Mr. Mariano Silva, Neron, who taught mathematics, and for which he had

prepared a mimeographed notebook, quite tangled, which he used throughout high school; Mr. Pedro Angel Palau, who taught the best history classes and also spread the pleasure of knowing more; Dr. Arroyo, El Sapo, who I quote: “Recua of mules! They are like the spiders, you just remove your foot from above them and they jump!”, an unforgettable English and Mathematics teacher; the capi Leon, Major Flores Narro. Among the Jesuits, Cano Peon, Lapuente, Migoya, Cervantes, Malpica and Barquera, a bright intelligence as few; and the rectors who were in their passage through the Oriente, Fathers: Figueroa, Alvarez Domenzain, Crespo and Ruiz Ugalde.

On one occasion, my friends Lenis, Gabriela, Celia, Lety (*all of them schoolmates*) and I participated in a rally organized by the Benavente School. We were invited by some friends who studied there: Jorge and Rene. This last one borrowed from a guy a divine old car and we adorned it in a striking way, but we needed help to solve the questions of general culture, so we invited Polo to support those aspects and who, of course, was of much help. We were second place.

...two rolled slices of galantine, mmm! I love it, and others of Dutch ham... This one could be changed with serrano ham, but as well as the cheeses, when banned their importation into Mexico there were not still many people who prepared it. The first person that Leopoldo met was an Asturian in “Las Vigas, Veracruz, that made serrano ham and cider...

Polo’s personality is complex, like that of most intellectuals. He is of strong character, sometimes explosive, rebellious; serious, respectful, reserved, distracted; with an enormous capacity for abstraction and analysis; observer and curious as any researcher, also with privileged memory, indispensable condition for it; he has an extraordinary culture and great artistic sensitivity; sullen, proud and at the same time protective, generous, witty, noble, affectionate. A

complete gentleman, proper, sometimes ironic with whom he has confidence, and when something is funny to him, he laughs richly and contagiously. A very good son and an excellent brother.

Tall, very erect. Mom commented that Polo had the same bearing as grandfather Agustin; handsome, ash-blond hair, now almost gray in its totality, more or less wavy; dark brown almond eyes, when he laughs they get lost; straight nose, side face Zuluaga, like my grandmother Maria; abundant beard, currently he wears it in padlock style; he has a deep and strong voice.

Polo entered the Autonomous University of Puebla to study architecture, it was the only university in Puebla that offered common careers; the University of the Americas was focused to the interests of American students; it only offered careers in the humanities area, such as anthropology, art and literature.

My brother was subject, as all the newly admitted, to the typical hazing. He had his hair painted orange, had to walk through the streets of the city and, in the end, he had to get wet in the fountain of San Miguel; this was a fun tradition that took revenge for the next school year with the first year class. They had just opened the University City, the faculties that were there were few: business administration, law, architecture, civil engineering and chemistry. When he was halfway through his career, within the university the groups between left and right ideologies were radicalized.

The conflict continued for several years. The university was divided by this cause and a new one was formed: The Popular Autonomous University of the State of Puebla, UPAEP. In this one, Polo finished architecture along with Silvia, who had been his classmate since the beginning of the career, originally from Jalisco who, because of her father's job, was living in Puebla at that time.

Polo and Silvia became boyfriend and girlfriend. She speaks the same language as him, they share a taste for art, history and research; they did together the Master of Restoration of Monuments and Studies of Sacred Art; better partner he could not have found. Intelligent, affectionate, simple, good and of enormous generosity. Joker and with great sympathy. Carmela felt special affection for her,

she conquered her since she met her; she always cared for the well-being of mom, both of them professed great affection for each other. She likes to talk a lot, in that, I identify with her, we can spend hours and hours talking, the topic never ends. When my father died, I was in Mexico City, I was not with him; Silvia, being Polo's girlfriend, was accompanying him. The instant he died, she approached him and kissed him in my name... I do not need to say more, this gesture expresses better her sensitivity.

Polo and Silvia married in 1979 and, a few months later, because of their job, they moved to the City of Campeche; mom and Carmela went with them. My first nephew, a new Polo, had just been born. Life went on, every one doing its own. He returned to Puebla and here, Luisa Elizabeth was born. Then he moved to Mexico City, where they lived the disturbing experience of the 1985 earthquake. One month later, Silvia Alejandra, the youngest of the family, was born. However, fate brought him back to Puebla.

During all this time, it was not much that we could hang out together, either for reasons of distance or schedules, which in the daily rush, did not allow us to coincide. Only a few days in the year and for Christmas. Now that the children have grown and life is not going so fast, we have approached again. After mom's death, I felt strengthened the bonds that unite us. I try to frequent him, to enjoy every moment of his company and that of his family, I love being with them. He has been an invaluable support so that I could make this writings, with his enormous knowledge and vast patience, he is my beacon of wisdom. I feel his professional successes also mine, my mouth fills when I talk about him. I respect and admire him, my beloved brother, he is still my favorite genius.

...Four or five smoked anchovies from Malaga... Three or four smoked oysters... sometimes, instead of the first ones, put a couple of sardines in olive oil of Cervera. I remember that the box containing the can, had printed the image of a woman with a Spanish typical costume printed and a small napkin in its interior...

CHAPTER 10

MOLE POBLANO

Mrs. Regina, mother of your nanny, used to make a delicious mole and this is the recipe that she generously shared with me: for two or three large chickens, it is needed: a quarter kilo of mulatto

peppers, three pasilla peppers, seven or eight chipotle peppers, she used chipotle meco; fifty grams of sesame, two large bananas, one hundred and fifty grams of raisins, one hundred grams of almonds, one tortilla, a fist of peeled peanuts, a pinch of anise, two cloves, a head of garlic, cinnamon sticks and two chocolate tablets. Oil, the necessary. Salt and sugar to taste. A large casserole is needed to fry all the spices there...

When I was a child, in the center of Puebla and its surroundings abounded the fondas (*inns*) that exhibited in its entrance, on a burning brazier, a huge casserole with mole, and the aroma that it gave off was the invitation to go taste this appetizing dish, something so ours, so rich and, at the same time, an element of belonging to Puebla, to its flavor and tradition, to its streets and buildings and , for me, in addition, a bond that unites me to my nanny, one more protagonist of that my perfect world that I wished would remain in time. I do not know when did I taste mole poblano for the first time. In my memories, I only see images, where, from a very young age, I try it in different forms; I have always loved it, and maybe it was this one, from Mrs. Regina, the first one. She made tamales to sell and, in many occasions, for birthday snacks or simply for whim, mom ordered some to her. She made the most traditional: sweet with small sweets and raisins, rajas and, of course, mole... and not to mention the snacks that used to send us.

Carmen arrived home for the first time on a Monday, in January 1951. Concha, her sister, nine years older than her, worked with aunt Estelita who was the contact so she could meet mom, who was looking for someone else to help her with the chores of the home when she was pregnant and had to take care of herself by doctor´s instructions. My nanny says that, although at that time she was working with another family, she liked my mother a lot, and for that reason she resigned to where she was and accepted the job that mom offered her.

She was born in Santa Maria Acajete, in the neighborhood of Calvario, on the day on Our Lady of Carmen (*July 16*) and was baptized on the day of San Lorenzo (*August 10*), that is why she was named Maria del Carmen Lorenza. She was the third daughter of Mr. Pedro and Mrs. Regina. Luz and Concha were the oldest of the family, after that her mom gave birth to twins and then to two boys, one after the other, and they all died. Carmen survived after those losses and used to tell to her mom: “Why did not Concha die and one of my little brothers lived?” She even tells that Concha, nine years older, had rage towards her because she had been stronger than the boys and she had not died. The four children were born and died for various reasons. The twins were already walking and one of them was going through the back of the hut where Regina had many chrysanthemums planted and there, among the flowers, she slept. A neighbor used to say to her: “Reginita, you will see, that girl is going to die because she comes here and lies down among the flowers”. And so it was. The cause is unknown, but both died. One of the boys, perhaps a little over a year old, was carried on the back by his mom in the rebozo, when an acquaintance gave him a big peanut, unpeeled, and he kept on licking it. Probably when he softened it, he put it into his mouth without Regina noticing, and it seems that he choked and died. Three years after Carmen, Norberta was born, the youngest.

... Put the chickens to cook with salt and onion in plenty of water, to use the broth...

Mr. Pedro grew up next to his grandmother and his mother, named Luz. He saw his dad only once, when he was about nine years old. When he arrived at his house, he heard his mother cry, he ran to see her and found that there was also a man there, so he tried to go over him to defend his mom, but she said to him: No! he is your dad”. He never saw him again. Nine months later, Porfirio, his brother, was born.

Mr. Pedro, since he was a child he started working in construction. Already a young man, he went to work near Veracruz, where he had to stay for seasons. His grandma sent to him by train, as it was the custom, a basket with fruit and tortillas; a railroad employee wrote on the basket the name of the addressee of the shipment. The workers went to pick up the baskets to the station and did not have to ask which one was theirs, they immediately recognized it by the embroidering of the white napkin. Carmen tells that, in the apples season, they sent them to him frequently, because his granny had a tree of this fruit. The aroma perfumed the atmosphere, so much that they aroused the appetite, many times he sold among his acquaintances some of those that were sent to him or he exchanged them for other merchandise that he needed more. It is probable that he did not attend school, but he was an altar boy in the parish of Santa Maria de Acajete, and the priest who was there then, was a very good person, he taught him to read and write, something he used to do with beautiful handwriting, very stylized, like the writing of that time. He also taught him some Latin. Although strong in character, he was not violent, he never hit Regina. He spoke with bad words and liked the pulque a lot; however, he was very respectful with his daughters. He had an enormous common sense, he was a person with surprising natural intelligence, but above all: honest, responsible and hardworking; all virtues that he inherited his daughters. He always wore huarache made of tires, as our people from the fields usually wore.

... Open and devein the peppers. Toast them without burning: the mulatto and the pasilla, the sesame, garlic and cinnamon. When finishing toasting the sesame seeds, add the pinch of anise and the two cloves, with the heat of the sesame seeds is enough to enhance its flavor. Reginita, as I toasted the peppers, I dipped them in water, and if at the time of grinding them, they were still with much skin, I heated them without boiling, using later this water for the stew...

Mrs. Regina only had one sister, Refugio, two years older. Being still very young, three or five years old, they were lost from their parents in a day in the plaza, they were kidnapped, but thanks to the help of some neighbors, they found them two months later. Don Nicolas, their father, got sick as a result of this and died shortly after, leaving Mrs. Maria Antonia, Tonchita, widow, who died shortly before Regina was married.

Pedro and Regina had already formalized their engagement when, again, his employer with whom he had worked in Veracruz called him again and offered him a new job in the same place. Pedro accepted, that would provide him with means and he could marry sooner than he thought. Tonchita said to her: “Well, Regina, you are already committed to Pedro, so be serious, you have to wait for him”. If she wanted to go to the temple to pray the rosary, she had to ask for permission. Of course, that was the meeting point where the young people met each other, so in a way it was the time of recreation for the young people. Pedro returned to materialize his plans. When he arrived, he found out that Tonchita was very sick, and soon after she died. He told Regina: “Well, Maria, I have some money for the wedding, do you want us to use it for your mom’s funeral?” Regina accepted and they had to wait a little over a year to get married (1917).

Regina prepared Pedro’s meal and took it to him to the field, wherever he was working, whether it was sowing his land or helping a neighbor, when he was not in a construction site. Regina told her daughters that she had had a suitor who owned a horse and Carmen said to her: “Mom, why did not you marry the one with the horse instead?”, to what she replied: “Your dad does not hit me, what if the other had hit me, better that I did not do it”. Pedro was possessive and did not allow Regina to go out much, when Refugio, her sister, went to look for her to go some place, he used blackmail and began to say that he felt bad, he lit a candle, placed near him an image of Father Jesus and went to bed, so she desisted on going anywhere.

Regina, in addition of making tamales and delivering them in the afternoons, also helped her income by washing other people’s

clothes. A Protestant marriage came to settle down in Acajete and they installed a dispensary where they cared for the townspeople. They met Regina on one occasion that she took one of her daughters to a consultation and they gave her the job of laundress. She asked the priest for advice to see if she should work with them and, in the event that someone in the family became ill, to attend the clinic. The priest told her yes, that there was no problem, as long as she continued with her own religion. The patron saint of Acajete is, Father Jesus, the image of a bloody Nazarene with the cross on his back for whom there is an enormous devotion. Unfortunately, perhaps ignoring the fanaticism of the local people and wanting to get followers, on one occasion the protestant couple asked a group of people why so much adoration to Father Jesus if it was just a piece of wood ... Word spread, the bells began to ring, the crowd gathered and went to burn down the house. They were lynched, he died, and the woman, very bad wounded and in secret, was helped by the priest to get out of town.

Carmen studied up to third grade in town. When she was thirteen years old, Luz, her sister, who had married and already had two girls, proposed to her to come with her to Puebla so she could go to school here. My nanny accepted. The fact is that, because one thing or the other, she did not enter any school and started helping Luz at home. Soon after, she began going with the neighbor to throw away the trash, sweep, wash the dishes and entertain the children.

...Fry the chipotle, the banana, the raisins, the peeled almonds, the tortilla and the peanuts...

Carmen remembers that the neighborhood where she lived with Luz was located opposite-corner from the house of the Avila Camacho (*Afterwards, Feminine Social School*). In the afternoons, this house opened a small door near the stables and an employee came out to sell milk among the locals who lined up to buy it, since it was

cheaper than anywhere else. For the festivity of the Kings, by that same door, they gave away sweaters and sweets to the children of the area.

Concha had come to work when she turned fifteen years old. She had to wash brick floors on her knees with a small brush, and sleep on a mat in the kitchen next to the brazier. She started working with people who had very little consideration with the service; however, Carmen says that she was always lucky that, in all the places where she worked, they always treated her well. Concha took her with her to the house of the family Bracho, who ran a grocery business called La Reguladora. They left there to go to work with a family of Lebanese origin in the colony San Francisco; this did not materialize and returned for some time to Alcajete. Concha was already with aunt Estela when Carmen returned to Puebla, she had two more jobs, one of these was in the same building as my aunt, and the one she left to start with mom.

Carmen is dark-skinned, with abundant black straight hair in her youth, which she combed with a braid of two segments. Then she cut it and did anchovies in the front to be able to mold her quiff; now, already gray-haired, she puts her hair up in a small bun. Short stature, now a little chubby; when she arrived home for the first time she was very thin, she liked a lot the bulky dresses; she wore two and even three starched petticoats under her circular skirts and she tightened herself with very wide belts that she loved, as she says, she felt gorgeous. She never liked the uniform nor the apron, and she always opposed using it.

My nanny inherited the natural intelligence of Mr. Pedro, she is very clever and observant. She and her sisters are the classic example of overcoming: they speak with all propriety, they conduct themselves in a correct and respectful way. The nanny is of open-character and quite talkative.

Polo, my brother, baptized Carmen as Comina when she was just beginning to talk, but we had to stop calling her like that because she did not like it. When we were children, we would go out and play for a while in the mornings to the closed street, and the nanny with us;

we loved making cakes with the sludge of the roads; sometimes, sitting on the brick and tile bench, she would start reading stories to us. All of a sudden my grandma would look out the living room window and said: “Wow, girl, those kids are going to have their brains boiled!” I presume that Mariquita imagined the burning sun of her land. Carmen made us stand up from that bench and we changed to another one that was in the back, trying to avoid her. My grandma, when she lost sight of us, restarted the search and, when she located us, now from the dining room window, she would tell her the same thing again. We moved again to another place and sat on the side of the house, in the middle of the two windows, where we supposed that she would not see us anymore, but grandma did not give up and, when she did not find us, she looked out the backyard door of the house; she found us and ... she repeated her same old story; like that, until one of the two got bored and made us come in the house. The nanny comments that she liked Polo more because my grandma Maria used to say: “The girl, with her mom”, and Carmen, who was always rebellious, thought: “Well, let the girl stay with her mom”. Over the years she started liking me more.

...First grind the sesame, the peanuts, the almonds, the raisins and the bananas. Fry these and constantly move so that it does not stick, until it seasons well, when it changes to a darker color...

On the afternoons, the nanny took out the small wooden table and chairs with seats of colored ixtle ropes that mom had bought for us; in them we sat, the three of us, and ate mandarins and peanuts in the season of the posadas; nuts that she brought from Acajete around august, she peeled them for us and put them in a small dish with a little bit of salt. While that was happening, she would tell us anecdotes about her homeland. She remembered the whistling of the air in the

ocote forest that had to be crossed to reach her father's farmland; the howl of the coyotes that they often heard at dusk, when these came down in search of food and that Mr. Pedro scared away with a whistle; and how, after a heavy downpour, from the hay hut, they heard the water coming down the ravine and the beating of the stones that it carried in its flow; when she heard the train whistle, she told us that it made her feel sad, because her mom used to come in it to Puebla to see her sisters, she and Norberta stayed alone in town and this sound reminded her that her mom would leave. At night, when we were going to sleep, she put us in bed, and when she put the bed sheets under the mattress, she said to us jokingly that the chicon (possum) would come out to eat our feet or to pull our legs.

With her we attended to all the children's parties, posadas or first communions; it was usual that the nannies go to all the parties and take care of the children. In the season of the dead, Carmen and Carmela took us on several occasions to 3 Norte, behind the market of La Victoria, where the stalls were placed with merchandise related to the date and, between the smell of incense and copal, we enjoyed buying any number of trinkets. Could not lack a "calaverita" one that had the closest to our name. For Easter, the popular verbena was in the Zocalo and in El Calvario, there, they bought us cardboard masks and helmets, like those worn by the Roman soldiers of the Passion and, of course, some wooden rattle decorated with bright colors. I also remember some tin butterflies, assembled in a piece of wood with wheels that had a stick to roll it and, with the movement, the butterfly opened and closed the decorated wings. In Corpus Christi, you had to take the corn leaf mules and a "panzona" (*potbellied figure*), for me; Polo always looked for soldiers or animals.

The nanny, when she was still very small, being in the field with her parents, she found an "scorpion" (*it seems not to refer to the enormous scorpion, but to a species of poisonous lizard which is called the same way, as she describes it*) that was going to sting her. Her mom noticed and quickly picked her up; this got engraved on her memory and it became a huge phobia of lizards. One day, Polo got angry with the nanny. He was about eleven years old, he took a plastic crocodile

that he had and placed it on the bed in the fold that forms the quilt when covering the pillow. When the nanny was getting ready to sleep, when she removed the quilt, the bug jumped. It was of such magnitude the scare that she got, that mom had to give her a sedative and a scowl to Polo. Despite the scolding, once or twice he did it again, but she was not scared anymore.

... apart, grind the mulattos, pasillas and chipotles; anise, garlic, cinnamon, tortilla and garlic...

Carmen was about twenty-seven years old when Mrs. Regina became ill, and eight months later, she died. Norberta stayed with Mr. Pedro, but not for long, she went to Mexico to work to the same house where Concha was. It was then, that Carmen went more often to see her dad. For Christmas, my mom sent him all kinds of sweets. Don Pedro said that she was as if she was his mother, because she cared for him, and the nanny would tell that to mom, saying that it was that, what her ugly duckling thought. The trips to Acajete began to be more frequent. Mr. Pedro suffered from chronic bronchitis and age no longer helped him. There came a time when Carmen had to stay with him; little was missing for her to disappear from the planet, she lost a lot of weight because of the stress, work and because she was no longer used to the town. There was still no drinking water, she had to haul it daily in bottles. The sisters went from time to time to visit him, they did not stay more than one weekend, they supported with money, but the nanny was totally responsible for the situation. When she saw Mr. Pedro a little bit better, she escaped to Puebla to take a shower, because there, was only by jicarazos (*buckets*), she also would take some clothes and then would go back to look after him. Until one day when Mr. Pedro said to her: “Look, Came, do not cry anymore, I already asked Father Jesus, that if I am not going to be

like before, that he should better pick me up”. The following week, he died.

In her youth, Carmen became engaged to a boyfriend named Cayetano. A man a few years older than her and who liked to drink too much. On an occasion that he went to look for her to go for a walk, he was quite drunk and, when Concha saw him, she told Carmen that she would not go out with him in that condition. This repeated as for three weekends, so, Cayetano waited for Carmen one week-day. Very angry, he complained to her why she had not gone out with him, he approached her and with violence he took her by the shoulders and shook her enraged. As she could, Carmen let go off him and said to him: “Here everything ends and I will not marry you”. He became angrier and rebuked her: “How can you not get married to me, you will see that I will force you”. And Carmen insisted: “Well, I will not marry”. Cayetano went to speak to Mr. Pedro so he would impose himself and force her to marry. He demanded that, if necessary, to beat her so she would obey. Mr. Pedro asked Carmen what had happened and she explained the way that he had treated her, reason why she definitely did not want to marry him. Mr. Pedro told Cayetano: “Well, she says no, she does not want to, and if she thinks that, you should know what you did to her, so, there is no way”. My nanny never regretted not having married him.

After, she was girlfriend of Carlos, a very good boy that worked in a factory and had a motorcycle. He was very interested in her and one Sunday he asked her to accompany him because he wanted to introduce her with his family. Carmen was afraid that they would treat her as if she was less. She admits that she had developed complexes because she was just a “gata” (*maid*), and was afraid that they would tell him that at home. For that reason, she stopped seeing him, she was refusing him or hiding from him. She regretted not marrying him, he was very good. She saw him again after many years, when her aunt Maura was dying. She went with her dad to the neighborhood of Santa Rosa to buy some bottles for the wake. He saw them and followed her to the aunt’s house. He did not speak to her or

anything, but he went behind them all the time. Carlos really loved her, but her insecurity did not allow her to accept him and to form a family with him.

When the economic situation began to get complicated, my mom told Carmen that she could not continue to pay her a fair salary, that in no way she was dismissing her, but she set her free to look for a job where she would be better remunerated, that she knew that the house was still hers and she could consider it as such: return to sleep if her job was in and out, or on weekends if she was hired full time. But in spite of everything, she decided to continue at our side. She replied mom that she preferred to stay because, in addition to the love she had for us, she was treated very well, and for her, that was the most important thing. The nanny has not been greedy; she has been very honest. Mr. Pedro did not want that his daughters to ambition anyone, he told them: “Never feel bad because you are poor. The rich man needs the poor to work for him and the poor needs the rich to employ him. If the rich man has it, it is because he inherited it or because he worked it, and he will have to watch over it if he does not want to lose it. If the big towers fall, which are made of iron and stone, it is easier to run out of money if you do not watch over it”.

When Polo was studying architecture and had to draw plans until late at night, especially if they had “repentina” (it consisted in undertaking a project, with all kinds of plans and models, within a few days), Carmen sat up with him until he went to sleep. He always had a special affection for Polo. When Mr. Pedro died, she brought to him as a gift an ancient Christ that belonged to him.

... when the first ingredients have already been well seasoned and it is already dark, add the other mixture, ground, and continue frying and moving, until, everything together, is already seasoned...

As a teenager, my dad did not like me walking alone on the street, so wherever I went, Carmen was with me. Later, she teamed with me since I got married. My dad asked her to please help me set my house in Mexico City, to stay with me while I organized myself ... she stayed to date. She is a true blessing.

Nanny's sign is Cancer, that is why she loves water and everything related to it. She is extremely clean, she washes perfectly, her mother used to say that Carmen could be given any rag to wash and that, despite how dirty it was, she would leave it impeccable, even if it was in pieces, but...clean. In Mexico, in addition to washing, she starched the carpets and tablecloths, to such a degree of well done that Marilupe, Alvaro's cousin and our neighbor, said to Carmen: "You should teach starching and ironing, you do it admirably".

My children have enjoyed her love, care and company very much, she sees them as her grandchildren. Splendid and consenting. Since they were children, she did not know what to give to them: a pair of tennis shoes, a huge box of coloring pencils that she saw in some place, the soccer ball, etc., until one day my husband said to her: "Carmen, do not spend your money in them, spend it on you". She replied with all respect but clearly: "At the end, it is my money, and I spend it on whatever I want". She has professed unconditional love and faithfulness for all. She has veiled us the thought and, provided to Alvaro and me with the freedom to go anywhere with the assurance that our children were always very well taken care of and scolded if necessary. Rebellious, strong character, easily gets angry, but easily gets in a good mood. Generous and disinterested.

During the adolescence of my kids, Alvaro, Juan Pablo and Fatima, on weekends when they went partying, the nanny did not go to bed until they arrived, and still, very late after midnight that they showed up, she offered something to eat so that they went to sleep well fed.

...already ready this, add the chicken broth, little by little, and if desired, can be mediated with water. Let it boil and season it: first with salt, then chocolate and in the end sugar...

In one of the jobs that she had before arriving with mom, Carmen worked with a woman that had a girl, Chofi, who suffered the effects of polio. According to her, she contracted it a day after they took her to the circus and a monkey had jumped on her lap; she had the fixation that the primate had infected her. When Polo and I were children, the nanny did not hesitate to accompany us to the circus. But with my children, she begged me to please not take them, she was afraid that they would get sick. She tried to convince herself that it was not reasonably possible that the monkey had infected the girl, but that feeling exceeded her strength. Now, Fatima, my daughter, jokingly she accuses her of having a great trauma, blaming her for not going to the circus during her childhood.

She is tireless, she says that she will have time to rest when she dies; what is for sure, she likes to take the lead, like any family institution, something that does not bother me. She even commands me, and also to my husband, when he is not paying attention, but she is always looking for ways to flatter us, what sweet she can do or how to make a gift for us. And she also makes everyday a delicious fruit water for dinner: guava, mango, orange, cantaloupe or papaya, but her speciality is lemon water. From her I have also heard many phrases full of wisdom, some from her parents or, sometimes, she remembers some of Carmela or of my granny. This year she turned eighty, I have no way of thanking God for the gift of her company and, once in a while, continue enjoying this delicious mole.

...when it is just right, add the meats. Many times there is who prefers to leave aside the chicken pieces and, when serving, bathe with the hot sauce and toasted sesame.

Eat it with red rice and delicious tortillas. And now, enjoy it.

CHAPTER 11

ORANGE COOKIES

When it was the saint of Mrs. Lupita or the saint of Carmelita, our neighbors, I went up to give them a hug and to have coffee with them; for those occasions, the nanny Leona prepared some delicious orange cookies, family's recipe that was her specialty, and that she continued preparing them until the health allowed her.

To make them we need: five hundred grams of flour, two hundred and fifty grams of good quality lard, fifty grams of butter, two

hundred grams of powdered sugar, one teaspoon of carbonate, five yolks, the juice of two large oranges, orange zest to taste...

I have always had a weakness for cookies and pastries, so, when I accompanied my mother to visit the neighbors, I ate with great pleasure a good number of cookies and, despite the time, they remained indelible in my memory.

I really like to remember that stage of my life, I confess that I am an absolute romantic, since the place where my childhood went by, has coincidences that were showing my destiny. Within this closed street, sunny and with bright yellow walls, were four houses, two on the ground floor and the other two on the upper floors. Our house was downstairs, and the apartment above us was occupied by Mrs. Guadalupe Blumenkron and Carmen Rivero, her daughter, who lived attended to the thought by the nannies Leonardita and Toñita. Every Sunday they received the visit of Mrs. Lupita's grandchildren, and among the numerous group was Alvaro, who years later would become my husband. The commotion of so many children playing, invited to participate in the fun; in grandma Lupe's house we played with some wonderful wooden squares that she had, and then, they gave each of us a chocolate tablet La Abuelita ... mmm! A supreme treat!... Later on, everyone went down the house to watch on television, which was just beginning, the program: Fantastic Theatre, with Cachirulo: “♪ This is the train of the express chocolate, it is delicious and nutritious and how tasty it is ♪.

I keep a picture of a birthday party of Polo, my brother, in which, on that same bench of bricks and tiles that I have described several times, we are a group of children: the guests, Polo and me. Among them are: Alvaro and his siblings, (Lola, Beatriz, Nacho and Jorge), as well as some of their cousins, the Unanue (Angeles, Javier, Carmen, Eduardo and Chabe), and this leads me to reflect on the mysterious way in which life is woven. All this coexistence was making a strong friendship with all of them and between the families; we

frequented them and, in some occasions, we were invited by them to diverse festivities.

When it was time for Polo and I to have the first communion, dad and mom bought some very nice Spanish stamps in Mexico City, to which we had to put a verse. My mom had kept one that was given to her on one occasion and it had an epigraph that she liked very much, it said: “You know that I love you, but if I could, my God, something to steal from you, only love would I steal from you to love you more” (*I ignore the author of the quote, perhaps sounds like Saint Teresa*). That’s it: that one we should copy and put it in ours and, it is finished. Years later, being already Alvaro’s girlfriend and looking for something among some pictures of various religious acts that had been gathered, I found the engraving from which the verse was copied. It was nothing more and nothing less, but from the first communion of Alvaro, my husband...once again fate made us coincide.

We moved from home and Mrs. Lupita too; however, mom continued visiting her for her saint. At Christmas, to congratulate her and give her a chestnut cake. We stopped seeing Alvaro’s family and many years passed before we heard from them again.

Alvaro, the third of twelve siblings, was a student at the Oriente Institute. His dad, Mr. Pedro, had been a student of the Sacred Heart School (*it was in the 11 Sur, in the building where the State Normal School is now, and that was the Jesuit College before the Oriente School*), so he felt special admiration for the Jesuits. Alvaro carried out all his studies there, except for the pre-primary and the first two years of primary school that he attended to Maria Luisa Pacheco School. From this last one, he still remembers when Mrs. Amanda locked them up punished in the Chinese room; this was a type of little storeroom, in which school material was kept and, where, hung on the wall, was the figure of a Chinese made of cardboard and bright papers, it was likely that it had been the decoration in some festival, but when turning the light on the place, the Chinese shone a lot and scared the children who were being punished there. And so it was, until one day, a schoolmate, Checo Sanchez, who frequently visited the Chinese

room, went over it and by force of punches and kicks, he tore it apart, destroying the worst executioner of punishment.

When Alvaro finished high school, he applied to enter the Tecnológico de Monterrey and was admitted. He moved to that city, because then, it was the only campus that existed. He showed up to do all the necessary procedures to enter, but that day was of extreme heat, unbearable, and it turned off all his enthusiasm to study there. Then, he pointed his batteries towards Mexico City and presented his admission exam in the UNAM (National Autonomous University of Mexico) to study Civil Engineering. Once he entered this institution, he began to look for a place to live, and uncle Pancho, his dad's beloved cousin, offered him his house to stay. He accepted and went to live with them. An indelible stage for the enormous camaraderie that he established with his cousins Fernandez Cueto and that would last for more than ten years.

Alvaro did not stay in Engineering, the drawing was definitely not his thing, and it was fundamental for the career, so he decided to leave it. In this course in the UNAM, Enrique Krauze was his classmate, with whom he and other classmates met to study at his house. Once he had left Engineering, he entered Business Administration at the University Iberoamericana, where he did finish his degree.

My father said that he asked God that I could find a hard-working man who would love me and respect me. It seemed that he was describing Alvaro, because as a teenager, during the holiday season, he worked. Several years he worked in Almacenes Rodriguez, and later in La Galletera of Puebla. When he was in third year of the career, he was hired in La Italiana, in the offices of Mexico, and he would change to Bimbo later, a job in which he stayed for four more years until he moved to Spain to establish the Bimbo project in that country. He lived in Barcelona for eight months and then, in Palma de Mallorca for another nine months. Alvaro has always been very active, responsible, tenacious, straight and honest.

Meanwhile, I was finishing my student phase at the Central School, the only one where I studied and which I thought was

wonderful. It hurt me to leave school, not for studious, but for all the experiences and because getting away from my friends caused me a certain nostalgia, but at the end, life goes on. I started working at Hylsa (*Tinplate and Foil, S. A. Metallurgical Company*), a new cycle, different and very enriching.

In this company the secretaries were the only representatives of the female sex in the workforce, in addition to a nurse, a cashier and two social workers. Everyone else were men. Women could not access any other job, we were promoted at the executive levels in which we depended, but nothing more. Nor were the female employees allowed to continue working in the institution if they got married, they had as an obligation to resign. Only single women entered, but before an applicant could be hired, a pregnancy test had to be done, and if it was positive, there was no employment. All these were company policies. However, it was interesting and was my first approach to the real world, outside the glass cover in which I had always lived, although I confess that they also took care of us a lot, there was a lot of respect and good work environment. Ingrid, wife of Nacho, my brother-in-law, started working here and we strengthened the friendship that we had started at school; she was one year under me. Tere, wife of Jorge, also my brother-in-law, entered there a little later.

... whisk the lard and butter until it is flabby, add sifted powdered sugar, beat until it is creamy...

I went out with Ingrid on weekends, we went to the movies, to have coffee, to eat or to any act that was presented. Once (*March 9, 1974*), having coffee in El Esmeralda, we met Alvaro, whom we had not seen since childhood, and he sat with us to talk. He invited us to go out again, and we both went with him. We did not know in whom he was interested, the invitation was collective, until one day (*March 16, 1974*), he called us to go dancing to the Jean Laffitte and he arrived

with Juan, his friend, who sat with Ingrid and cleared the mystery. Four years later, Ingrid would marry Nacho, Alvaro's brother.

From that moment on, Alvaro started phoning me more frequently; he was working in Mexico City. Had had recently returned from Spain and rejoined the Bimbo organization, now in the Barcel branch. He came to Puebla on weekends, he arrived Saturday afternoons, because he worked half day, and on Sunday nights he returned to Mexico City.

The excitement of seeing us was growing. A month after having met again in life, we went out to dinner and, later, he left me home. About one o'clock in the morning, I heard a mariachi who was chanting: “*♪Canto al pie de tu ventana pa'que sepas que te quiero, tu a mi no me quieres nada, pero yo por ti me muero. Que voy a hacer si de veras te quiero, ya te adoro y olvidarte no puedo ♪*” It was Alvaro, he had brought me gallo (*Serenade*) A serenade that thrilled me like never before, beautiful! (*after Serenade Huasteca followed with Paloma Querida, Hay unos ojos, Los ojos de la Española, Amemomos, Adoro, Café oscuro, Hablame and he finished with Buenas noches, mi amor (Good Night, My Love)*)

The following Saturday (*April, 13 1974*), Holy Saturday, I went out with him all day: to swim, to the movies and, in the evening, to have dinner at Mr. Harris. A dinner full of nervousness and agitation, in which he asked me to be his girlfriend ... wonderful! He gave me his ring with the initials of his name and I gave him mine from school, that, by the way, it did not fit even on the little finger. I had to send it to enlarge, and his, to reduce, because as my father-in-law would say: “Alvaro's ring fit you as a choker”. At night, once again he brought me serenade (*Te traigo serenata, Novia mia, Contigo aprendi, Mujer ideal, Amemomos, Ella, Granito de sal, Paloma querida, and Olvidaba decir que te quiero*), I was happy! I felt that my heart was going to escape from me, love had touched it.

Once in love and immersed in the vortex of the most beautiful feeling in the world, Alvaro phoned me several times a week and came on Saturdays and Sundays. Increasingly happier and surer of wanting to be together forever, we began to plan a common future.

That is how my birthday arrived, in which we had an incredible day. It was midweek, Alvaro dropped by the night before to serenade me (*Mañanitas, Paloma querida, Delirio, Amemonos, Ojos cafes, A mi manera, El día que me quieras and Despedida*), he went back for work and, in the evening, returned to go to dinner to MR. Harris again and to dance in El Esmeralda, those were our places. For this occasion, he gave me a pair of earrings that he had them made for me, his design was very original, three concentric rectangles, very nice. Long, he thought, because I had my hair to the shoulders and, on the other hand, I thought of giving him a surprise and ... I decided to cut it off. He started talking about getting married in June 7, of the following year; two hundred and forty-eight days to go.

In February (1975), he spoke to my dad to formalize the commitment. My dad appreciated him a lot and said to my mom: "I can die peacefully". And mom felt that God finally listened to her prayers so that I would find a good husband.

The first Saturday of March of the same year, he invited me to dinner, of course to Mr. Harris, to remember the day we became sweethearts. This was only an excuse, his intention was to give me the engagement ring, for me the most precious on earth, for its design and, above all, because it meant that I would be the wife of Alvaro, the man I always dreamed of. We adored each other. I had to return the ring, since the marriage proposal would be until March 6, his birthday, and we had to wait five more days.

Preparations for the wedding began; I promptly located my dear friends Josefina and Leonor because I had the hope that Pepa and Lenis, her daughters, be my little bridesmaids; they accepted. Right away I got in touch with Rafa Olvera, a very prestigious dressmaker from Puebla, for me the best. I had the dream that she would make my wedding dress and it came true. I let myself go with her suggestions. With Rafita, the final result was all perfection, down to the smallest detail.

The fabric had to be bought at Casa Armand in Mexico City; I had to ask for Carlotita to help me, since she knew Rafa and knew which material she liked. I had to buy twenty-eight meters of silk

organza, four meters of tulle illusion, five meters of pella for the lining and five meters of alpaca. I seem to be living the scene again when, together with my mom, I took her everything she had requested. She told me that the fabrics had life, that each of them expressed their destiny, asked me to aspire the aroma of the tulle that was made of silk and that I would perceive a subtle smell of honey; that is why the wedding veil for itself expressed sweetness. It was a very special moment, her sensitivity captivated me, I felt great sympathy and admiration for her, from whom, over the years, I became one of her first students and I practically remained being one until she died.

Having been close to Rafita enriched my life because, in addition of having such an extraordinary gift in her hands, she possessed the generosity of wanting to teach everything she knew; she was an exceptional human being, full of experiences, she shared her spirituality and bonhomie equally; her personality, in spite of her short stature, made her grow like a giant, always perfect in her attire of Frenchified influence, because there was where she learned the haute couture, she spoke perfect French; full of coquetry, she always wore a handkerchief tied to the neck artistically placed, very combed and always gave off a delicate aroma.

On Sunday, April 13, we celebrated a year of being sweethearts, and once again, Alvaro brought me serenade (*Paloma querida, Novia mia, Amemonos, Poco a poco, Sin ti, Ojos cafes, Muñequita linda, Dianas, Buenas noches, mi amor and Gema*). Everyday I loved him more, I felt happy, I did not want to change myself for nobody. On the 30th, I resigned from my job, I was moving to Mexico City. A cycle was ending and I felt certain nostalgia. When I arrived home, there was Alvaro with a beautiful bouquet of roses and a card that read: "Miss unemployed, I offer you a job. Company: Alvaro de Velasco and family. Position: Wife. Salary: Love in cash and forever. Start day: June 7, 1975. Please answer". Of course I was melted by his tenderness.

...add the beaten yolks to lace point, mix well. Preheat the oven to medium heat...

On May 13, day of the Virgin of Fatima, in the afternoon, the doorbell of my house rang, Carmen, my nanny, opened the door. It was Leonardita, my mother-in-law's nanny; she hugged Carmen and said: Finally, Carmelita! Alvaro and Faty are getting married". She was there on behalf Mrs. Lolita to bring me a gift. Of course she had offered to bring it, she was anxious to celebrate with my nanny and Carmela, whom she had known years ago, when we were neighbors, and she saw me being born. The whole environment was harmony and rejoicing.

The expected day arrived: June 7. The civil wedding was at the De Velasco's house at five in the afternoon. Rafita was there at four o'clock to perform the ritual of dressing the bride. Alvaro was impeccably dressed in a black tailcoat. Around me, the world seemed to spin and emotions confused. After the photographs and a long ceremony, because we had an endless list of witnesses, we moved to the church of Santo Domingo, where the religious wedding would take place, in the midst of a persistent rain that presaged happiness. Pedro Juan, my brother-in-law, was the celebrant. Maria Eugenia and Marilupe, the bridesmaids; Lenis, Pepa, Loli and Arturin were the little bridesmaids and the pageboy; these last two, Alvaro's nephews.

The invitation said it was at nineteen hours and my dad, punctual as he was, wanted to get on time to the date. I was beckoning Enrique, my brother-in-law, who was driving the vehicle in which we were going, to get there as late as possible, because I knew about our bad habit in Puebla that the weddings always begin half an hour later than what says the invitation. We went around the Zocalo twice, but my dad was firm. In the middle of a heavy downpour, and at that time with the street full of street vendors stationed around the temple, we arrived at the church, which, of course, was empty. This is how the ceremony began. Afterwards there was only a small toast at the De Velasco's house. As soon as we could, we escaped with a bottle of

champagne and the two beautiful cut crystal glasses that Maria had given us. So we started our honeymoon in Cocoyoc. When we arrived at the room, there was a beautiful arrangement of flowers and another one of fruits that, Ale and Pato, cousins of Alvaro, had sent us; with these, the champagne and a small letter full of love that he gave me, we began the adventure of loving each other. The rest of the trip, which we were going to undertake on Monday, was a surprise that he had reserved for me, I only knew that it would be abroad, what an excitement! The most that I had traveled beyond the frontiers had been to San Antonio and Corpus Christi, Texas.

I was jumping from surprise to surprise, on Monday afternoon we got into the flight 066 of Air France with destination to Paris. I had long dreamed of getting to know Europe and it was granted by my unbeatable companion. We stayed there for four days; we stayed at the Regina Hotel, in Place des Pyramides. I could not believe the amazement the City of Light produced in me, its majesty and grandeur combined with the intoxication of love.

On Friday night we traveled by train to Venice. After checking in at the Luna Hotel, we had breakfast at the Caffè Carlo Lavena in Piazza San Marco, no place could be more appropriate for this couple of lovers. Two days later we continued the trip by train to Florence, here we were at the Albergo della Signoria in Via delle Terme; on Monday afternoon we continue to Rome, to the Majestic Hotel in Via Vittorio Veneto. I went from amazement to fascination among so many amazing places, all new to me, and the discovery of an extraordinary man by my side who went out of his way to flatter me and to take me to know as much as possible, what had seemed to him the most beautiful when he had been there. Knowing about my weakness for food, he led me to taste a wide variety of delicious dishes, but I especially remember one afternoon in Rome in a trattoria, where at the end of the meal we were brought a fountain filled with fresh, red, bright cherries ... as love, they seemed made of wax, I was enraptured, because in that time, these fresh fruits did not arrive to Mexico, you could only get them in syrup, something so simple and so beautiful was a true delight.

Alvaro rented a car so it would be easier to move. In Rome I got sick, I came down with stomatitis and had to call the doctor, my mouth was full of canker sores. Something uncomfortable, but excited, I could not stop throwing my coins in the Trevi Fountain, the canker sores were not going to stop us from enjoying so many beauties.

On Friday we flew to Barcelona, we spent the night at the Hotel Colon, located on Avenida de la Catedral. In front of this, you could see people dancing sardanas, very close to the jewish neighborhood, and the city captivated me. On Sunday, we flew to Aviles, we had a reservation in Hotel Principado, in Oviedo. Toni, my cousin, and Julio, her husband, went to pick us up to the hotel and took us to stay with them at their apartment in Aviles. I was with my dad's family for the first time, another great gift that Alvaro gave me; it was very exciting to meet them, they filled us with affection and attention, I was in the places and with whom my dad had talked to me about, I walked his paths as when he was a child and I found myself in the grandparent's house, where he was born. They took us to visit the Santina (*The Virgin of Covadonga, Patron Saint of Asturias*), unforgivable not to do it; then we had a meeting with many relatives and friends of dad with whom we spent three unforgettable days.

On Wednesday, by car, we went to Santiago de Compostela and stayed at the Hostal de los Reyes Catolicos, in Plaza de España. We continued to Salamanca, we stayed at the Monterrey Hotel, and continued towards Avila, San Lorenzo del Escorial and finished in Madrid, staying at the Suecia Hotel, in the street Marques Casa Riera. The next day we went to Toledo and Aranjuez. It was a splendid trip, we enjoyed every moment, Alvaro showed more than I thought, warm, attentive, my everything... two days later we took the plane back to Mexico City, where we settled in a very cute house that would be our home for five years, in which we lived very happy days and also of great sadness.

...add, little by little, the flour sifted with carbonate; the juice and orange zest, alternating with the flour...

We were married for more than a year and my dad had just passed away. I was taking French classes with Madame Silveti, an older woman, a Frenchwoman from the Basque area, in whom I was putting my hope of learning. She had a deaf-mute daughter whom she had taught to speak, not only French but Spanish, so I deduced that maybe I would achieve it. However, I soon found out that I was pregnant. It was such a dream, that I quit the classes, I was no longer interested, I could only think on doing the baby basket. Alvaro was happy with the news, he has always liked kids and he was also very excited to become a dad. God! How your life changes! I started searching what I had to buy, advised by my mom and the young moms nearby who guided me in what was used. I started knitting baby clothing. We were living a very special moment.

Popular belief says that all married couples get their novitiate, well, ours was not the exception. When I was just over seven months pregnant, Alvaro had to travel to Brazil because of work. At that time, he traveled a lot, and he took advantage from it and went to Argentina. For obvious reasons I could not go with him. In Brazil, he began to feel stomach sick, but still he decided to continue. When he arrived to Buenos Aires, he was burning in fever, during the night he hallucinated, so he anticipated his return trip to Mexico. He felt himself dying and decided: "I am going back to my country to die". He took the first flight back that was available, he only found one that had many stops. In the layover in Panama, they made him disembark, they thought he was drugged. They unloaded his luggage and emptied it, they undressed him. With the big discomfort he had, he still had to go through that bitter moment; in spite of having changed his return flight, he arrived only twelve hours before the original flight, it was a trip that seemed eternal to him.

That same day in the afternoon we went to the doctor, he had a very bad typhoid, "that walked several kilometers", said the doctor.

He prescribed him medication and had to measure the temperature every hour, as well as the pulse. The fever did not ease up, it began to complicate with a myocarditis, we had to go to the hospital; he was hospitalized for fifteen days. At home he recovered for two more weeks, he was discharged four days before our expected baby was born.

My delivery date was for July 28, but at one o'clock in the morning of the 27th, I had the first notice. I waited and another came, at that moment my teeth began to chatter, I was shaking like jelly; the fear of the unknown came over me. Immediately Alvaro, in the company of my mom, took me to the hospital. It was a very fast delivery, a baby boy was born who would be named Alvaro, like him. He arrived happily at five thirty in the morning, thank God, whom I always asked in each pregnancy to let them be born well, entire, that they did not lack or spare anything, beautiful of soul and body, and he granted. Alvaro, father, could not be happier, his firstborn son was born, the one who would bear his name.

I got pregnant again soon. When I was six months and some days pregnant, I thought that it was enough time to start preparing the things of the baby that was on its way. When I was taking down from the closet some boxes, I had a contraction and, soon after, another one. I called my doctor. It was Thursday and he had gone to a Congress, he was returning until Sunday. I decided to wait. The contractions continued, it was then that I tracked down the doctor who was in his place and he prescribed me to take some pills and rest. He asked me to go see him the next day. In the doctor's office he commented that the baby could be born at any time and would need immediate medical attention, so it was necessary to induce labor. Out of pure fright the contractions began again and Bernardo was born. He presented some immaturity signs so he was transferred to the Children's Hospital. Unfortunately, the efforts to save him were useless, he died the following Monday; a very painful experience. Alvaro, before taking me back home, making an enormous effort to cope with the pain of the loss and having being alone at the burial of our Bernardo, he picked up everything I had

taken out for the baby. With that delicacy he tried to avoid that I grieved more.

Once this sad episode was over, we moved on. Alvarin was a year old, that helped a lot to distract us, to occupy and... again pregnant! The doctor spoke to us very seriously. He informed to us that it was a high-risk pregnancy and that I had to undergo a small intervention (*cerclage/cervical stitch*) after the first three months and, with this, prevent the baby from being born prematurely. He programmed me for the fifth month. Things did not go as expected. When I was being intervened, the birth began. The baby died at birth. Once again we found ourselves facing this pain and Alvaro again going through the bitter moment, of having to be alone, with great strength, for the burial of our baby girl.

Suddenly...again we were expecting a baby. And to repeat the story. Then, the doctor preferred to make the small intervention at the fourth month of pregnancy, I took great care of myself, this time was a success. One Monday, I began to feel some stomach discomfort, I attributed it to a goat kid meat from the “Correo Español” that we had eaten the day before at Irma and Jorge Xacure´s house, some very good friends. Anyway, I preferred to go to the doctor. Irma, my friend, took me, and what a surprise when the doctor checked me out and informed to me that I was already in labor. It was not the goat-kid, but the brat. I had to go immediately to the hospital to have removed the band that had been placed on me. I told Alvaro to reach me, and soon after... Juan Pablo arrived. What happiness! Another beautiful baby, now Alvarin already had a brother to play with and to accompany in life, and ours was filled now. This new member of the family was named Juan Pablo, we were inspired by the first visit to Mexico of the Pope, who had deeply touched us, and we were very happy and grateful to God for our two little children.

After this fourth pregnancy, the doctor suggested that we should wait a little before getting pregnant again, if we were thinking to do it; every future pregnancy would be just as risky.

...when finished, put the pasta in a duya and form the rings on the baking tins...

We came to settle in Puebla. Alvaro was starting a new business and, meanwhile, we enjoyed our children. However, after two years, we decided to go for a girl... And there we go. I, in particular, wanted a large family. We had no certainty that a girl would arrive, and then Bata - Beatriz -, Alvaro's aunt, told me to ask Saint Beatrice to intercede so that I would have a girl, who was a very good lawyer for this cause, and so I did. Around the third month of pregnancy I had some complications and the cerclage had to be repeated, as in the previous one, so I had to keep repose, not absolute, but to take great care of myself. At this time, already existed the ultrasound, but I did not want to know which was the gender of the baby. Finally, on July 29 our baby girl was born with all happiness; we did not know how to thank God. That day was Saint Beatrice, but we looked very bad because we did not name her Beatrice, but Fatima.

Alvaro was very happy, because besides his two boys, now he also had his baby girl. I enjoyed motherhood a lot, I loved being pregnant even though I had a lot of nausea with Alvarin and vomited for three months in the beginning. I remembered the terrible discomfort which I suffered on a Monday, going to the San Juan Market, as every week, with Mari Lupe Fernandez C., cousin and beloved neighbor; she had to stop the car, I got off, and on the median strip of the Avenue Chapultepec I threw up like a pipe. What a show! I loved the period of gestation, I was excited about maternity clothes, instead of tucking my tummy in, I could show it off.

My partner has been a very good father, he tried at all times to give our children the best education available and now that they have started their own lives; he, under his apparent rudeness, a grizzly bear with the heart of a chicken, is very complaisant, he tries to support them in whatever he can. He is very proud of them. His mouth fills up when he speaks of any of the three, his face reflects a smile of

satisfaction. When they come to visit us, he leaves everything he has to do in order to enjoy them.

When I gaze at my family I feel fullness, I am happy with my life, satisfied. With motherhood many of my longings were filled, three wonderful reasons for whom to live and dream, to whom I dedicated with great pleasure all the time that I could while they were with me; since they were born, or maybe before, I always repeated to myself that I did not want to regret later not having enjoyed them, I was lucky enough to be a full-time mother and to materialize what the thought says “hug them strongly and then let them go” (*Gibran Kahlil Gibran*). This fullness reaches Alvaro, my companion, my friend, my lover; he makes me laugh a lot, he is very witty and accurate in its comments; now, being by ourselves, we look for each other and support more.

We have enjoyed friendship, Alvaro is committed, loyal, a real joker. Over the years, only the true friends have remained, the false ones have vanished along the way; others have left before their time, those that remain are not many, but the ones that are here are authentic.

He has been an outstanding son, always in solidarity with his parents to support his siblings, supporting them financially when necessary. After him, there were still nine to educate. Pedro, the eldest, had already entered with the Jesuits, and Lola, the one who followed, had barely begun as a teacher of the Oriente Institute.

Currently, Mrs. Lolita, his mother, no longer walks as a result of spine surgery. You should see the affection with which he treats her, everyday he visits her, he brings her sweet bread for supper, because she likes it a lot. When it has been necessary, with all tenderness he carries her and lays her on her bed. If any of his siblings has a problem, he is the first to be there to see how he can help.

Ingrid and Nacho gave birth to Pedrin, who was born with spina bifida (*Mielomeningocele*) and they were told that he would not live long. They kept him hospitalized for a while in the Hospital of the Mothers of Charity. Alvaro would visit him at least every third day and he cuddled him with a lot of sweetness. When the accident

happened in which Eugenio, son of Beatriz and Arturo, died, he immediately went to Jalapa to be in charge of all the paperwork and avoid them the pain of such painful procedure. Without making a riot, there he is always to support them.

My mom and Carmela lived with us twice. Alvaro, at all times, treated them with the greatest courtesy and consideration. When he finished reading the newspaper, he would give it to my mom, because he knew that she liked reading it. He never had frictions with her, on the contrary, he always recognized on her the prudence. The day my mom died, I remember the affection and tenderness with which he consoled me, in the same way he did when my dad died. Thank you, my love.

Alvaro is a person with a lot of common sense and very mature. Sometimes he grumbles a little, but he has supported everything that has occurred to me. I always wanted to attend college and study a career; when I had the chance to do it, he supported me until the end. He endured when I woke up at dawn without getting mad for being woken up. The day I graduated, he was the happiest; he took all the pictures of me that he could. He organized with our children to give me a trip to London and Asturias for my graduation, all wrapped in mystery, as he loves it, so that it would be a surprise. As mysterious as when he organized the party, along Alvaro and Fatima - Juan Pablo was in Spain -, when I turned fifty years old. They did it so well, that I did not suspect what they were up to, the celebration was wonderful.

My husband is a very teasing and sociable person; however, sometimes he is quiet and introverted and I would like to read his thoughts; the way he expresses his feelings is abrupt, we are back to the grizzly bear with a heart of chicken. Educated, intelligent, very punctual, here is where we collide, because the management of time is not my strong point. He is tall, stocky, with a sturdy constitution, he has always made me feel safe; with beautiful brown eyes. When I rediscovered him in life, he was already of scarce-hair; since that day I liked that he smelled delicious and his beautiful smile. I admire his perseverance, discipline and, especially, his nobility.

Marriage is not a flat road, many times you have to climb a hill and sometimes a mountain. But if we both agree to go up together and hold our hands, it is easier. Wanting to be and wanting to continue makes us more tolerant. We both have defects; in Alvaro's case, the good things are more. Life is not white or black, you have to go dodging and balancing gray skies and trying to look for the kind side. I believe in marriage because, like any adventure, it is a risk that must be taken if we want to reach the goal: "Three things are permanent: faith, hope and love; but the most important of the three is love (*1 Cor. 13, 13*)".

I want to grow old by his side, I want to continue with my beloved companion and enjoy what life gives us. To experience new and wonderful feelings in complicity, as now that we are debuting as grandparents and have begun to savor the dessert of life (*Caton*). Mateo and Patricio. I like to travel with him, I would love to keep on doing it, it would be great, but if not, the simple fact of being together, in company, fills me with joy, with sweetness, like the orange cookies.

...bake for fifteen or twenty minutes. When removed from the oven, sprinkle with powdered sugar. Mmm!

EPILOGUE

UNCLE MANOLO ´S PUDDING

At the ranch, your grandmother Maria used to make several styles of pudding, one fancier than the other; it was a common sweet in that place in those years. I learned how to make them and then I kept my favorite ones: the royal pudding and this one of Uncle Manolo, to which Mariquita used to call “simple”. I perfected both to my taste, with my measurements, until they were of my total satisfaction. I even had a special casserole to prepare them, in which I had already calculated quantities and cooking time.

... slice five cakes, soak them with six cups of milk in which a cup of sugar has been dissolved. While this is soaking, prepare the caramel of the mold...

This candy was Mom ´s battle horse, she did it frequently. Starting with dad and following with the rest, everyone in the family liked it a lot. Here, in Puebla, it was not customary. Outside my

house I did not eat it anywhere else; sometimes, in a restaurant or with my aunts who were from the same region. Because it was different, mom liked to make it when she was going to receive visitors or just as the Sunday's dessert. Carmela knew how to do it by heart, she mixed it while she prepared the rest of the meal, it always turned out delicious, and when she stopped doing it because of the weight of the years, mom started doing it again. Silvia, my sister-in-law, loves it, and everyone in her house. While mom lived with them, when they were invited to a family meal, she always brought it for dessert because Chata, her daughter-in-law's mother, loved it.

From mom and dad, I learned to love and enjoy friendship, to value it as the gift that it is. Good friends make us enjoy life more; a coffee, a meal, or a glass of water are tastier in their company. I associate friendship with pudding, because besides being a sweet that I have enjoyed since childhood, it was very handy to enjoy it at home, when friends came, or enjoying it with them in other places.

...with eight tablespoons of sugar, caramelize a mold and, when it has cooled, coat it with butter...

I have prepared it to my schoolmates more than once in the reunions that we have held for a long time and, in which once a year, in the month of August, I am the hostess. When I select the menu for that occasion, I try to look for different stews. They like to taste the ones from the land of my mom, because some still are not very well-known around here.

In this group are my friends, yes, my friends, those of the school, those of childhood, the true ones. We grew up together, we played and we shared the dreams of youth. With them I do not need to keep up appearances because we met without masks, with the authenticity of childhood.

When we left school we took different paths, each one of us involved in each one's interests. Sometimes due to lack of time, we

distanced, some more than others; several years passed and a painful event brought us back together: Lety Torrescano died tragically.

Carmen Guzman took the initiative, she suggested not to expect for similar events to see us again. She organized the first reunion with an extraordinary meeting; however, on the next ones and over time, the number was reduced to only ten, which we have not stopped doing since then; after almost thirty years. Carmen went to live to Spain, but when she came, she was reintegrated, until last year when, after a painful illness, she left forever... With God, friend!

...when the bread is well soaked up in the milk with sugar,
undo it with a spoon or fork, stinging it very well...

Among these companions and dear friends are: Jose Ponce de Leon, who was my schoolmate since kindergarten. For the end of the pre-primary course we danced a waltz, dressed as antique ladies in a light blue dress of taffeta and with hellos of organza; for that occasion, they combed our hair with curls, it was unforgettable. Gabriela Oriol was also in this time, then she went to Maria del Rosario School, but came back in third grade. Carmen and Karina Picazo were integrated in first grade of primary school, when Sor Maria de la Paz was our teacher. Celia Cano, Doris Cabañas, Chela Robredo and Lety, the same as Gaby, were incorporated during primary school, they were also in the same school. Margarita Acevedo joined our group in third grade; finally, Leonor Real began secondary school with us. Since then, we have formed a fairly compact group. Leonor, Jose and I were always the tallest in the group, that is why we sat together in the back of the classroom and we were very restless. We all have always gotten along well; they are a very important part of my life.

Like them, other close friends, whom I do not see as often as the ones from school, are there, they know that they are very dear too and that, likewise, they are a fundamental part of who I am. Friends have been an extra condiment for the stew of life, because their love

has also given taste and seasoning, has been an essential complement. Friendship is a wonderful gift, the love of friends is a warm caress of the love of God and enjoying them cheers the soul. Thank you!

...melt a bar of butter and let it warm up. From this same one had to be taken a little bit to spread the caramel...

My mom was a very affectionate and thoughtful friend. The way to show her affection was in a simple way, with what she had at her reach, as a tasty dessert. For those who she professed true friendship, she spared nothing, neither time nor work, if the result was worth it. I still keep in touch with some of those old friends of hers, like Carmen Gurtubay, I enjoy talking to her and she always says to me: “Chabelita was a lady and a dear friend”, she still has great affection for her. She remembered, in our last conversation, so many delicacies that they enjoyed together in one and another place; she also knew how to cook marvellously, like Mrs. Raymunda, her mother.

Another unconditional and very dear friend of my mom was Lolita Gonzalez de Gomez, her neighbor when she just arrived from Campeche. From then on, she established a close friendship that lasted until the end of her days. Lolita left to be with God some years before mom. She was my godmother of first communion, always affectionate and splendid. Over time, her daughter also Lolita, and I, continued the friendship. We stopped seeing for some years, while the children and obligations filled our lives, but again we have come into contact with the same affection of having experienced together, since childhood, many experiences.

...add to the milk, with the bread and sugar, six eggs beaten and mix well. Add peeled almonds and walnuts, chopped both, also raisins; about fifty grams of each of these ingredients...

Thinking about mom, in her facet of friend, I can assure that she was also for me and in many ways: being there without saying anything, she was company and solidarity; she was support and request; when I needed something, she was always willing. She gave me many moments of entertainment with the amenity of her conversation. I still perceive her presence, I seem to be seeing her in the white chair, the one that was comfortable for her, in which in the evenings she sat next to me when I sewed, or the mornings while I was getting ready, there, very close, she began to talk making remembrances of all kinds with her measured voice, stories with all the details, it seemed that she had lived it yesterday. Her enormous capacity for observation always helped her to remember every detail, tinted with emotions. Listening to her was a delight, I do not know how many times I have heard each narration, but she did it with so much flavor, so comfortable and rich, that it did not make you tired, on the contrary, it aroused the curiosity of knowing more data about places and characters.

Few years before she died, it occurred to me, late, to record her conversations, but I did not count on my recorder not being professional, but a small one. Its capacity could not perceive clearly the tone of her voice, which because of her age was low, soft. It was when I decided, so I would not forget what she told me, to begin writing some notes of it, there were not as many as I would have liked, I thought that mom would always be there to clear my doubts.

I had sown the restlessness of, at some point in life, to recreate everything that I had heard since I was a child. I had said it to mom, although for that I would commit the indiscretion of sharing family secrets so jealously kept by her.

...now perfume the mixture with two teaspoon of vanilla and three tablespoons of good brandy. Add the melted butter mixing

everything very well, from the bottom so that the ingredients do not settle...

There was not, neither term nor date, only the enormous desire to do it, engraved so deep within me that, suddenly, inexplicably, unconsciously, I headed to achieve it. As it usually happens in life, things go happening, presenting and catching you:

“It is not strange ... ask whoever you want. The ideas have magnetic properties, they attract thoughts from others, sudden revelations, unexplained coincidences. To a greater or lesser degree, we have all experienced these apparent coincidences...” (*Gioconda Belli, The Parchment of the Seduction, Mexico, Booket, 2009, p.33*).

During my transit through the BUAP (*Benemerita Universidad Autonoma de Puebla*), where I did my late university studies, I learned about the existence of the autobiography workshops thanks to one of my teachers; it was the first time that I heard about them. But it was because of the friendship that I came to this workshop: coincidentally I met Alejandra Montero at a breakfast, I had not seen her for years, occasionally in the children's school, but formally since adolescence, when we participated in the group `Up with people´ (*Viva la Gente*). We talked again after so much time. Ale told me about the work she did, she told me about Demac, it magnetized me; at that time, I had just finished studying my degree, I lacked the social service, so I took the liberty of asking her if I could complete this process with her in the foundation, to which, very kindly, she answered yes. I attended as a participant observer in some workshops, little by little I was caught by the project, when I finished the social service, I decided to participate in the workshop.

...empty the caramel mold and cover it. Put in a casserole to water bath (*bath of Maria*), also covered. Allow to cook, on slow fire, for one hour and a half. Remove and let it cool down in the same recipient at room temperature. It is preferable to remove from the mold the next day so it does not break...

Here, too, was the friendship. Besides Alejandra, with Leonor and Josefina, my old friends. I started the course and I met Yuri Mendez, Ericka Carmona and Esperanza Borrell, we became new friends. Monica Diaz de Rivera, our unsurpassed workshop guide, who with enormous understanding, corrected my writings countless times and, in addition, allowed me to cultivate her invaluable friendship. All of them made me feel very protected. With great tolerance they listened, as many times as necessary, to my amended texts and I could, with difficulty at the beginning and, with her support, unleash the story I wanted to tell. Thank you very much, my friends.

My enormous gratitude is also for other very important people in the dressing of the story: Polo, my brother, who spent a lot of time reviewing manuscripts, adding information and knowledge to make the narrative more reliable. To Zoila Berron Lastra, Josefina and Carmen Maria Rosado Lastra, dear cousins, for having shared the same story, and to Gudelia Abreu Gonzalez for her contributions and data.

The writing has allowed me to capture a wonderful walk for so many years, so many lives and recipes that I remembered and that little by little were giving shape to mine, as the ingredients of a stew. The best meeting place in a house, the warmest, is the kitchen, the stove, and there, preparing stews and soups, I gathered all the characters of my memory, I invited them so that each one of them would tell me their life, encouraging with any dish that would evoke memories. Some of those lives I shared physically and they were perfect pieces of my ideal world; others, I met them through the voice of my mom or grandpa's letters or through the talks with Polo or

Carmen, but they have always accompanied me. When bringing them back to the paper I have tasted them and they have spoken to me with a new voice, they motivated me to investigate to know more about them and to know them better. They enriched me and involved my entire family nucleus by sharing the stories that were asleep.

...in the same mold, once the pudding has been removed, make a honey with a cup of sugar and three-quarters of a cup of water, boil for three minutes; perfume with a teaspoon of vanilla. When it is cold, bath the pudding... and now enjoy it...Bon appetite!

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