MEMOIR FOR GUATEMALA

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Preface

My appreciation for Guatemala comes from a total of 20 years in the country. My husband Steve has lived here nearly twice that long, brought to the country in 1953 when a year old, and taken by his American missionary parents to the highlands, to the Nebaj Ixil community. In those days it was a quiet, isolated, and very traditional Mayan village on the northern side of the Cuchumatanes Mountain range. Surrounded by the Mayan traditions of beautifully woven clothing, corn farming, a sacred calendar, and a mixture of Catholic and pre-conquest traditions meshed together, it made for a fascinating upbringing. Not to mention the fascinating aspect of the Mayan language, including three very different Ixil languages in close proximity, plus over twenty others throughout the country with multiple sub-variants.

His fascination for language and culture, and his concerns about poverty drove him to graduate-level study and to a desire to return. When he did, he brought me along. When we married, we spent a day in Guatemala City, a week at Lake Atitlan, and then two months living and hiking in Ixil country. My roots in Mexico as an American missionary kid in a Mixtec village in Oaxaca had implanted enough Latin-American identity in my psyche to cause me to feel this was all quite wonderful. I was enchanted with the green and mountainous landscapes. Further, the bright multicolored clothing unique to each community seemed a delightful way of declaring ones' Mayan identity.

Having been introduced to Guatemala, I felt great enthusiasm for adopting it as my own home, and for being part of efforts to "help." Steve and I had been brought together not only by having similar backgrounds, but by nearly identical reactions to this background. We tremendously admired our parents' lives of love and service and intellectual accomplishments. At the same time, we could see the sense of responsibility to fix things that is so much a part of being American, made even stronger by having a spiritual message to share.

We wanted to serve with respect, and our principles meant we wanted to be appreciators and supporters and cheerleaders, not the ones making decisions about money and projects. We were, it turns out, thinking along the lines that development experts say makes for the ideal community partnership, yet in fact, so often is still not how things are done. Americans seem to have a fatal, but unconscious, need to run things. We felt enthusiastic about laying down the white man's burden, and simply making friends and having partnerships with equals. We were determined to respect the ideas and decisions of others and to be careful not to impose our own.

When we came to live in the country a few years later, we had our own one-year-old child. Attempting to learn language and culture, our vision of a life of service in Ixil country was dashed by the realization that the emergent guerrilla movement was dangerous not only for the community, but for us and for anyone with whom we associated.

We were still able to be supportive with the non-profit we founded called Ixil Fund. An educational (not religious) not-profit, we took on projects in bilingual education, microfinance, health care, and land ownership. With the chaos of the conflict we extended ourselves to relief-efforts—food, clothing, and medical care.

After several years we made the move to Guatemala's famed colonial city, Antigua. As we tentatively set down roots, we were soon caught up in the exciting world of energetic research in linguistics, history, archaeology, anthropology and the cutting-edge discoveries in epigraphy which is the decipherment of Maya writing. This research context included access to documentation of the horrifying human rights tragedy going on in the country at that time. We used our small non-profit to channel as many resources as we could to the deteriorating situation in the Ixil area, seeking to respect the decisions of Ixil leaders on how to address the crisis.

Many others did their part, and the changes, so rapid and profound, for better and for worse, mean levels of development have occurred far beyond what we could have envisioned as young people. The cost to the people, however, was very high. Many estimate that one out of every five Ixiles died, and throughout the country the estimate is 200,000 lives lost, one million people displaced.

While trying our best to give support and humanitarian aid to our adopted country, we had two more children. Born in Antigua, they gained the potential for dual citizenship, an unexpected treasure.

We moved back to the US to beautiful San Diego, worked many years at a university, raised our children, always with Guatemala haunting us. We did research from afar, in my case, elaborating on land research I had done in Guatemalan archives. Eventually we began to make trips to teach classes of students brought from the university, and the desire to return grew.

We finally did return in 2010. Now we were in a new time. Peace Accords had been signed in 1996. The results of so many changes—disarmament, reconciliation, human rights advocacy, economic growth, globalization, technological diffusion—were fascinating to watch. As we resettled in Antigua and made trips to Steve's hometown and other villages, and as we engaged in

service meaningful to us, we paid attention. The observations and memories of a lifetime, past research, and new things I was seeing prompted a desire to tell my view of the country's story.

Years of affection and respect for people of the country caused me to want to inspire that same appreciation in others visiting, even briefly. There are so many things that make it a special, spectacular place with warm and creative people.

There is a chastening poignancy to living as an American in a place where foreigners have a lot of privileges and our government intervention has been tragic at times, a similar chagrin to be children of missionaries in a post-colonial world, and even greater chagrin to be an evangelical listening to the painfully loud music and preaching of the ubiquitous evangelical take-over of the country. That said, those things are important parts of my identity and help shape how I see things. They form and underlie my hopeful and appreciative look at the story of this country.

For many years I worked at a university coordinating opportunities for community service-learning and enjoyed this creative age group, so full of curiosity. I also enjoyed leading preparation for encountering different cultures or different economic levels. I found it particularly moving to lead reflections or read written reflections about those experiences. It brought tears at times to see the love that emerged from these opportunities. When I returned to Guatemala, I continued to work with students from time to time, receiving and orienting them in this context.

As part of that process and as I observed others who were coming to do short term service, including many church groups, many adults, as well as younger people, it struck me that having some idea of the background of the country might be helpful preparation.

While the story of the country is complex and the literature is rich and well worth reading, most visitors do not have that much time to devote to it. It seemed to me that something simple and easy would be helpful, something that pointed out the many gifts the country has to give.

There is a temptation for visitors who are seeing a different culture, a different economic level, and a different way of doing things, to unconsciously feel superior and to criticize rather than be open to learning. Encouraging humility to be a good learner in another country is important to me, and I hope some of my observations will help generate appreciation and respect.

Plus, of course, I like to teach and tell people things I find interesting that they might not otherwise know!

This book begins with a trip to some beautiful places (Chapter 1), continues by describing some of the key sites of the country (2), proceeds to a visit to ruins from the Mayan past (3), and then visits vestiges of the Spanish colonial era (4). I make a visit to Guatemala City looking for the 19th century city under the sprawling city of today (5).

The next five chapters (6 to 10) cover the first half of the 20th century and are woven around both Guatemala City and a trip to a distant rural village, Ilom. In the last five chapters (11-15) the journey in Ixil country, noting many of its changes, brings us back to Guatemala City and Antigua, covering the second half of the century. This includes the civil war and post-conflict readjustments. The conclusion (16) is simply a celebration of the county's beauty.

After each chapter there are suggestions of additional reading with more academic content that can lead deeper into the topics that are merely given an overview.

My intention is not to minimize painful aspects of the history, yet at the same time to highlight the hopeful, positive, and entertaining reality that causes so many to love and enjoy the country either as citizens, long-term residents, or visitors.

Forward

In a competition of Most Beautiful Birds, the Resplendent Quetzal is a winner. It has a tufted green head, scarlet chest, and meter-long blue/green tail feathers, and has a range from southern Mexico to Panama. Elusive in Guatemala´s cloud forests, it has become integral to the country's identity. A proud emblem on the national seal, flag, currency, and ubiquitous in graphic design and art, Guatemala finds it a useful icon for its own identity. The birds do not survive in captivity, so cannot be seen alive in zoos; instead it must be searched for in the forests, its beauty and need for freedom embedding it in the imagination.

Checking for images of the quetzal on the internet gives a lavish display. As I watch You-Tube videos of them, I appreciate those who make the effort to find and share these delightful views. Checking for images of Guatemala gives yet more of the quetzal on the flag, along with Maya ruins, Lake Atitlan, volcanos, the colonial city of Antigua, brightly colored textiles, skyscrapers of the city, pleasant rural villages, market scenes, beaches, and a lot of maps.

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of the country is the impact of Maya indigenous cultures. There are over 20 different languages still actively being spoken in addition to the national language, Spanish. The country has 15 million people, 6 million of whom are Maya, plus an estimated 1 million immigrants in the US. The Maya heritage and the connection to the US combine in fascinating ways, making changes to long-standing traditions. In the northwestern highlands, in four departments out of the total of 22 (of what we would call "states"), well over half the population is Maya. These modern Maya are inheritors of the thousands of years of tradition that left ruins and sculptures highly attractive for visitors.

A Guatemala TEDx event in 2010 highlighted "Great Ideas + Great People = Great Changes." One presenter, Manuel Romero, started a Facebook site called *Perhaps you need a little Guatemala.* In his talk he explained that when he travels people are sometimes confused about where Guatemala is and ask, "Guate-what? Guantánamo? Is that a part of Mexico?" And of course the answer is no, it is south of Mexico, in Central America, a small country about the size of Louisiana.

Romero decided the country had an image problem because either people were completely ignorant of it, or if they knew anything, were focused on negatives: drug trade, violence, poverty. In hosting people at his hostel in Guatemala City he said a top concern was safety, an anxiety intensified by any of the

Embassy websites. Yet after a few weeks his visitors were in love with the country.

The country produces excellent coffee, and excellent rum. It has one of the most beautiful lakes in the world, a beautiful colonial city, Mayan cities across the north, many languages spoken, and so is a land with a rich cultural heritage. Yet many people focus on differences between rich and poor, *ladino* and Maya, Catholic versus evangelical. He decided what was needed was new branding, so he started posting pictures and captions.

Lake Atitlan: "Governments shut down, nature doesn't. Perhaps you need a little Guatemala."

A man in Mayan clothing: "Underneath your corporate outfit, your soul needs to run wild. Perhaps you need a little Guatemala."

His goal is in part to challenge volunteers, people with good hearts and good intentions, but coming with an attitude of "we are helping them". Yet, he said, if we are ever to get out of poverty, it is Guatemalans who must do the job. Visitors need to step back and realize that perhaps they need a little Guatemala and not the other way around.

Some pictures show strangely beautiful and unusual things: A sunrise over the Tajumulco volcano, 4,200 meters above sea level, on top of the clouds. A starry night in Tikal. A Mayan ceremony at the top of a mountain. The turquoise pools of Semuc Champey. Places of natural beauty and wonder.

A market scene: "Your dinner comes frozen, your veggies from a can, perhaps you need a little Guatemala."

Smiling children: "Embrace love. Perhaps you need a little Guatemala."

A pyramid: "You spent your best years climbing the corporate ladder. Perhaps you need a little Guatemala."

The smoking volcano of Fuego: "In our country, even the earth wants to reach for the sky. Perhaps you need a little Guatemala."

And many more. He concluded that though the challenges such as poverty and lack of education are great, Guatemalans are finding solutions. As a long-time resident, that resonates with me and I appreciate the energy of all those who love and work for their country.

So I invite you on a series of journeys with me that will explore today's country as well as look back into its past.

Chapter 1

A Beautiful Land

Semuc Champey and Lanquín

Sitting by the Lanquín River in Guatemala, watching the variegated shades of jade water flow by, pale green and blue, relaxing after the previous day of strenuous exertion, the beauty, tranquility, sense of life's goodness, and reflection on exceptionally pristine places of creation, made for one of those many moments of life when all seems just right. Guatemala is a beautiful land and inspires me, but I am also well aware of dark shadows in its history, and the contrasts of beauty and injustice invite reflection and efforts to reconcile the contradictions. However, on this day, I was enjoying being a tourist.

My daughter, a friend from Antigua, and I had spent a day exploring the turquoise and teal pools of Semuc Champey. Surrounded by the white limestone responsible for the brilliant color of the water, the tropical greenery, and the mountains rising around the pools, we enjoyed swimming, watching international travelers equipped with underwater cameras on poles. My friend and I moved cautiously, a little anxiously, between the six stepped pools, while my daughter joined those sliding exuberantly between them. We climbed a trail to cross the river holding a rope railing to admire the roiling river water shooting underground, and took photos of ourselves with it. Since the pools are on a limestone bridge over the river, we walked around to the other end and took more photos of the cascade where the river came out of its underground tunnel.

At the hostel near the park entrance at lunch we listened to two young Israelis speaking Hebrew at the table next to us as they assembled and disassembled blocks. Later we went to find out about caving and inner tubing at K'an B'a across the river and almost decided against it, but two Canadians we had met at our hostel enthusiastically said it was the highlight of their trip to date and we should not miss it.

We followed our guide into the caves with our flickering candles, bathing suits under our shorts. Jittery, cold and nervous, holding on to the guide rope, I gasped as I went from wading to swimming. Our Q'eq'chi Maya—Argentinian—Swiss—German—Guatemalan—American—Expat team enjoyed the adventure, with just enough unexpected twists, turns, and candles going out to keep us on high alert. My risk-taker daughter volunteered to be first down a shoot of water and to be one of those who jumped into an underground pool. She overcame her last minute doubts, her plastic shoes flying off.

We then inner-tubed a short way down the river Cahabón, starting just below the waterfall at the end of the pools we had swum in earlier. Exulting in the clear sky and trees and water and river, the pleasant temperature of the water, the gentle current, it made a nice contrast to the Tom Sawyer-style cave we had just exited.

Afterwards I studied my guidebook diligently. After all, if our Finnish dorm companion and our Australian shuttle companions could go so many places across the world from their homes as low budget travelers, shouldn't we take advantage of so many nearby adventures?

Our friend said the first time she went to Semuc Champey in 1998 the adventure travel group took them to the larger nearby city of Cobán, then a day trip to the pools, and there were no hostels or restaurants or services or even a formalized park where one was required to pay, and no convenient wooden walkways and stairs and lockers and safety ropes. In the space of fifteen years it has become enough of a destination to transform a sleepy Maya Q'eqchi' village into a hotbed of tourist-based commerce.

The next evening we went with our Q'eqchi' guide to the caves of Lanquín. As we set out we saw clumps of international budget travelers in shorts and flip-flops, carrying enormous backpacks, walking toward their hostels. Riding our pickup we arrived at the formal parking lot and entrance to the park, admiring the dense vegetation around the river and cave entrance. Entering the cave, we were surprised by the height of the caverns, a great contrast to our cave from the day before. Here the caves were reminiscent of the imagined civilizations in JRR Tolkien—heights and depths and the sense that dropping a stone might awaken something dangerous, or that ancient peoples had built within it, or the thought that a shadowy figure could be following us.

In addition to our guide's clever patter pointing out animal shapes in the formations, he found a spider for us to hold, and told us that the caves go on beyond where these steps and railing and electric lights end. Despite these amenities, the damp clay floor slick with bat-droppings kept us moving cautiously.

Seeing these two caves reminded me of Mayan mythology: the opening to the underworld, the mysterious land of Xibalba. The formation at one point served as an altar, and the walls and ceilings were black from centuries of Mayan candlelit ceremonies. No longer can ceremonies be done every few months, only once a year, since the municipality values tourist dollars more than ancient prayers.

The image of generations of Mayan ancestors entering this cave by candlelight to touch something mystical and divine humbled me. Even diminished in mystery by the electric light-bulbs strung on wires across the cavern, there was still magic, especially watching the thousands of tiny bats dash out at dusk, sounding like light rainfall. We were told this lasts two hours, they stay out all night, and they dart back into their bat cave at 4 a.m. My guidebook said Guatemala has over 100 species of bats, including actual creepy vampire bats, which in real life prefer cattle to people.

The Q'eqchi' guides and drivers noticeably spoke their Mayan language among themselves, the women wore traditional skirts and blouses, and the housing was largely the humble rural version of adobe or planks. I wondered how they felt about people with so much leisure and money for travel as the music and loud laughter of late-night partying on a Tuesday night continued.

The next morning as we got on our shuttle for the ride back to Antigua, we started to meet our travel companions. They had already been in Tikal and Belize and Mexico, and were headed to Antigua and on south. Our van included a Danish couple, a woman from Holland, two women from England, a Frenchman, and two Spanish men, all very young, all with the European talent for speaking English with lovely accents. The Spaniards were from Barcelona and the Frenchman had lived there, so there was a lot of Catalán as well. They joshed one another about language and culture and entertained us with their enjoyment of the adventure they were on.

We drove on the dirt road back toward Cobán, and once on the pavement and past the bustling traffic and business of the city, we drove south past the cloud forest preserves set aside for Guatemala's quetzal birds. Their emerald tails over a meter long, and their red chests and puffy green heads are a unique emblem of the country, and I really want to see one in the wild, since they do not, apparently survive in captivity. At one point there is a hotel where my friend actually saw them, and my desire to do the same increased as we drove by. After stopping for lunch where the road joins the east-west route to the Atlantic, we went on to Guatemala City and slowly through the traffic. We did not even mind (too much!) that it took about nine hours to get home on one of these ubiquitous tourist vans which dropped us off at Antigua's central park, to then walk home with our backpacks.

Lanquín was one of the first areas declared a protected area in Guatemala, and Semuc Champey is also one of the 309 protected areas in the country. Over 31% of the country is protected as part of a conservation system. Because it is a transition zone between northern and southern biogeographical zones, it is one of nineteen countries in the world considered "megadiverse." These countries account for 10% of the planet's land and 70% of its biodiversity. The

government agency website says there are seven different biomes in the country from rainforest and tropical jungles to dry chaparral or savanna to what is often called cloud forest. They cite 10,317 species of flora, and 2,389 species of animals: 1,033 fish, 720 birds, 245 reptiles, 244 mammals and 147 amphibians.

Guatemala as a whole benefits from all the tourism that these adventure, cultural, and archaeological sites generate, with income providing over 8% of GDP. Perhaps most of the tourists have an experience of beauty and adventure without more than a cursory glance at the country´s history in their guide-books. For me, the two go together—the beauty of landscapes, clothing, people, and the consciousness of tragedy and injustice in the present and the past. I want to see both, something one author called "beauty that hurts."

At times I have wondered if an appreciation of beauty distracts from a love of justice, but I find some appeal in the philosophical argument that appreciation of beauty leads us toward justice, that there is a connection between what is lovely in the concrete natural world and what is lovely in the abstract world of social relations. Since justice requires seeing all as equals it includes a call to a radical de-centering of self to discern what is just. Encountering beauty displaces self as well and perhaps is good practice for learning this. It displaces us in a way that gives pleasure, and perhaps serves as a guide to allow less self-centeredness in social and cultural relationships.

Chapter 2

Family Road Trip

The tourists are right: there are many beautiful and fascinating things to appreciate in this country. The travelers who come for service trips are right too, there are many practical ways to be useful in trying to address issues of poverty, health, education, housing, water, etc. While, admittedly, too often travelers compare everything to their home country rather than accepting salutary de-centering, one can try to be open, and empathy, interest, and respect are what I hope I can take on my travels. As best I can, I want to appreciate and value all I see.

I eagerly accepted the idea of another journey to another top tourist attraction, Tikal, the country´s best known Mayan archaeological site. Rather than fly four of us up for a day or two, we decided on a more elaborate road trip, a 1000-mile odyssey with husband and two daughters: Xela in the west, back to Lake Atitlan, to Nebaj in the northwest, straight east to Cobán, north to Flores with a day trip to Tikal, southeast to Rio Dulce toward the Caribbean and back to Antigua.

Xela

The trip brought out some of the basic themes of the country—the divisions between Maya and *ladino* cultures, the astonishing physical beauty of so many places, the residual effects of the long civil conflict, the deeply rural and often isolated character of most of the country, the impressive Maya past, some of the marks of the Spanish colonial past, and the quirks of modernity´s intrusion into places that not long ago were disconnected from western culture.

We left our home in Antigua and drove through forests for several hours, and arrived mid-day in Xela. Xela, or Xelajú (Maya Mam name), or Quetzaltenango (name from Nahuatl co-conquerors with the Spanish) is the country's second largest city. The park is surrounded by imposing public buildings in a belle epóque style, built in the era of coffee producers and their flush pocketbooks in the 20s and 30s. Now, less than 100 years later, there is genteel shabbiness. The chocolate shop at Café Luna a few blocks off the park has been going three generations and is full of the bric-a-brac of earlier times—flat irons, radios, clocks, a Victrola, record albums, large metal milk cans, leather suitcases. Not to mention a collection of thousands of photos, and old newspaper articles découpaged on the tables. They host cultural events—poetry reading, theater productions, literary prizes. Similar bric-a-brac in Café Bavaria on the other side of the park sets the tone of the city for me.

Competing narratives of the country´s history lead to different choices in which heroes to remember. Tecún Uman, the Maya leader killed at the time of the conquest of Xela, is visible in a striking stone monument created by one of Guatemala's talented artists. The modern migrant headed to the US with a backpack on his back is a large statue as one comes into town. The marimba, national instrument of Guatemala, has a dancing woman at its side. A liberal dictator who famously led the 1871 revolt from this western region, Justo Rufino Barrios, is commemorated in statuary in the central park. I am willing to accept them all as important parts of the story.

But they do reflect the fact that there are competing narratives about Guatemala's past and present. Does reverence for Tecún Umán mean a loyalty to the defeated and subjugated Maya from the past or does it signify working for modern transformation? Over 40 percent of Guatemalans identify as Maya and statistically are still the rural, poorer, and more disenfranchised portion of the population. Does honoring Justo Rufino Barrios commit one to modernization, even if it comes with a heavy hand? Today that modernization takes the form of multinational companies, globalized communications, and learning English. Are the migrants that go to the US and send back money (*remesas)* heroes, or are they a loss to the country, leaving behind broken families? Or is it better to forget the tensions and conflicts, and enjoy the unique products of cultural mixing that creates Guatemalan identity? The marimba came from West African slaves, and as it has slowly modified and evolved, it has become an icon for the *ladino* majority, descendants of the mixing of cultures and on-going immigration, who love marimba tunes. Two favorites, *Luna de Xelajú* and *Ferrocarril de los Altos* celebrate this part of the country.

At breakfast in the morning, sitting on the balcony overlooking the park, the blatant contradictions in Guatemala were front and center. As we looked down on the Circle of Doric Columns in the center of the park, four more columns to the right, the park was bustling, the loudspeaker in front of the municipal building announcing schools participating in Flag Day.

Suddenly, there were two competing bands: one playing patriotic music, the other following a religious procession. Women in their full, gathered K'iche' skirts and embroidered blouses made a line on both sides of the street right in front of us, followed by young women in Catholic school uniforms. The women carrying the decorated stand for the Vírgen de Los Angeles were followed by men in black suits playing in a band for the procession. The procession was organized by the *cofradía*, a group of women whose leaders, one swinging copal incense in front of the procession, had white headdresses and longer, more elaborate *huipiles*, woven blouses.

Simultaneously, the largely *ladino* crowd under the white tents across the park continued their patriotic program. After a rousing rendition of the national anthem with participants holding their hands to their hearts, people sang along to the ever popular marimba tune, *Luna de Xelaju*. Meanwhile, the procession and band continued with their music.

The competing events, one religious and largely Maya, the other civic/school and largely *ladino*, the Doric columns, the European-styled buildings, and our American tourist camera clicking from the balcony seemed to be a snapshot of today's Guatemala. Even the detail that the third K'iche' woman in the procession was texting on her smartphone somehow fit. A beautiful country, but one where the mixing of cultures is complicated.

As we left the city, we could see the Volcano Santa Maria toward the south with the wonderful K'iche' name, *Kakxanul*, which somehow sounds ominous. One of the five largest volcanic eruptions in the past 200 years came from this volcano in 1902, killing at least 6,000 people. It is a vivid reminder that Guatemala's identity and history are bound up with the a chain of 33 volcanos on the western side of the country, four of which are active, and which have brought death and destruction through the history of the country, as well as affection for their beauty and their innocent and harmless eruptions.

Lake Atitlán

We drove back south past the volcano, through the forests to three more volcanoes at Lake Atitlán. The geological formation and archaeological pieces rescued from the water in a museum at the Hotel Posada de Don Rodrigo give the awe-inspiring sense of how long the lake took to form, and how important the volcanic activity was in that formation.

It is not only our vacation spot and a popular tourist destination, but is considered by some one of the ten most beautiful lakes in the world, and some claim it as the very best. In his 1934 travel book Aldous Huxley gave it an ambiguous compliment: "It really is too much of a good thing." Personally, I find it exactly right, and we enjoyed swimming, an exhilarating boat ride to one of the villages, a pleasant supper of food bought off the street, and a comfortable night´s rest in our favorite hotel.

The glistening water is sometimes light and pale, sometimes sky blue or turquoise blue. We enjoyed sitting by the Lake, drinking a smoothie, watching the red and white and blue and white boats pass in the roughed-up water. The trees blew in the breeze and white fluffy clouds adorned the two volcanoes across from us, and the pale blue sky was the color of the Guatemalan flag.

Twelve villages surround the lake and each has a distinctive character. I have stereotyped them in my own mind—party-town (Pana), laid-back beach-front town (Santa Cruz), new age mecca (San Marcos), arts and ecology (San Juan), home of Maximón and a memorial to a slain priest (Santiago), reforestation project (San Lucas), home of exclusive international hotel with its own heliport (Santa Catarina), etc. Each afternoon the waves are stirred up in what is called the *xocomil* and it is far better to be either on the shore or on a bigger boat that cannot be tossed over by the waves. The story is that a prince is reaching down into the water searching for his lost princess in her palace on the floor of the lake.

Miguel Angel Asturias, Guatemala's Nobel Prize winner for literature, wrote one of the *Leyendas* of his first book as an explanation of how the hill at the foot of one of the volcanoes was formed. He describes the sky as the color of an orange peel, the red and pink of a pitaya fruit, the pale yellow of a cornhusk, or the yellow of a puma. Sure enough, those orange-red-yellow skies can be enjoyed sitting in the Sunset Café, sipping on something. He gives us a beautiful image of boats on the lake at night, lamps lit, people exchanging goods in a market on the water. He vividly describes the feather-encrusted Mayan troops, the chief with the long green plumes of the quetzal bird, and then the silent, mysterious Spanish cavalry coming through the mist, and the battle, vague and mystic. Some Maya fled with their treasures to the volcano, and under gunfire from more Spanish troops in boats, had to abandon them as they fled. But the volcano (loyal to its Mayan people) sent mud to cover the treasure, creating a small hill between it and the lake, now called the Hill of Gold, the *Cerro de Oro* which one sees from almost any part of the shore.

Not only does Guatemala have volcanic eruptions to deal with, there are also earthquakes and tropical storms. Three tectonic plates rub up against each other in the country and shake periodically destroying buildings and lives. At Lake Atitlán, the massive 1976 earthquake opened a fissure at the bottom and caused the water level to drop 24 feet in seventeen years. The drastic change of the contours of the shore caused several villages to build public spaces there. Now, as the water level rises, once more they are flooded, statues with water to the waist incongruously welcoming one to the town.

An ecological case study of the Giant Grebes is painfully representative of what is a great concern for Guatemala and for the world. A non-flying species unique to the Lake, a wildlife ecologist not only fought for their preservation, but documented their decline. A stable population of 200 to 300 birds had fallen to 80 by 1965. The reason: Pan Am Airlines and the tourist commission had hoped to establish a sport-fishing industry by putting 2000 largemouth bass into the Lake. They decimated at least six native fish species out of

eighteen, and decimated the crabs. Not only did the grebes suffer the loss of their normal diet, so did the local Maya. Another factor in the decline was use of the birds' nesting habitat, reeds torn up to make saleable mats by the local community.

By obtaining grants and government support, interventions increased the grebe population and a citizen campaign successfully blocked a hydroelectric plant and the contamination it would have brought. But then came the 1976 earthquake, increased weekend homes and hotels, and in the midst of the civil conflict the game warden who was also a coffee plantation owner was killed by insurgents. By 1991 the birds were gone.

Hurricane Stan in 2005 from the Atlantic side, left its mark at the Lake as well. On October 5th, landslides covered the town of Panabaj leaving 5000 homeless, but more tragically, burying 1400 residents. The place has become a cemetery, the tops of a few cement buildings still visible, the dead left under the mudslide. In 2010 Tropical Storm Agatha from the Pacific side resulted in deaths in several Lake villages as well.

So while a physically gorgeous country, Guatemala has repeatedly been impacted with tectonic plates, volcanoes, and storms from Atlantic and Pacific. And now, with global warming, droughts have reoccurred as well. Plus the growth of population, travelers, and unforeseen consequences of modernization, the beauty is always vulnerable to destruction and decay.

Nebaj

Our trip the next morning took us north through twists and turns to market-town Chichicastenango which has been a popular tourist-destination since the 1940s. Every Thursday and Sunday the center of town is covered wall-to-wall with visually exciting merchandise, and often equally eye-catching processions. The town reverts to ordinary streets the rest of the week.

A half-hour beyond is Quiché (though on this trip some road-construction meant we sat for an hour, reading our book aloud), the capital of the department, or state. It is archetypal of towns throughout the country: large Catholic church with a plaza, market, stores, busses, in happy chaos and with a set of Mayan ruins–Q'umarcaj in K'iche', the "place of reeds," or Utatlán, the Nahuatl conqueror's translation. My favorite site is the peace center, a place for conferences and retreats founded in memory of a nun who lost her life in Guatemala, Sister Barbara Ford. Its presence here is particularly fitting given the fact that over half of the massacres in the civil conflict in the 1980s took place in this department. We took a moment to enjoy the beautifully designed

buildings, the flowers, the meditation garden, and walked the labyrinth formed of stones and surrounded by roses.

We crossed the drier plain going toward Sacapulas which is the crossing point for the Rio Negro. We enjoyed watching the landscapes unfold. Like old photos, there are timeless images–a baby goat skipping up a hill, a young girl carrying a basket on her head, white-washed adobe houses with blackening rust-colored tiles, Maya in the clothing appropriate to their village doing daily chores, and pre-teens dressed like miniature adults with the same chores, herding cattle coming toward us on the highway, herding goats, carrying goods to and fro. Periodically, a burst of brightly painted buildings grew chaotically beyond the original well-organized grid of a town. Miniaturized houses, also brightly-painted, formed graveyards at the edges of the towns.

An hour beyond Quiché and, in theory, only two and a half hours from the Lake, it was time to travel up over and down the Cuchumatanes mountains. More twists and turns with vistas of valleys and mountains and foliage, the pavement is now excellent on what used to be a difficult dirt road. One turn-off and one or two villages intervene before starting the descent to the Nebaj valley, cooler and greener on the northern slope. It has always struck me as a valley with magic in it, surrounded by layers of hills leading to high mountains enclosing the valley, often laced with mist or fog shadows. Even the cultivated fields have a layer of green grass and the town is small at the center. As we came into town, two girls in long red Ixil skirts rode side-saddle behind their boyfriends on motorbikes.

For my husband Steve, this is home. He was brought to the country from the US by his missionary parents when he was a year old. As he grew, so did his loyalty to the country and his desire to live and work here, something we did for twenty years after our marriage, and now after a fifteen year break of time in the US, another five years. Hence, our perspective on Guatemala and its history always returns to the touchstone of our experience with the local people, the Ixil.

The rural isolated beauty of the town has changed with the intrusion of modernity. There is wild traffic in a town that used to have only a few trucks and buses. There are two ugly white and red cellphone towers in town and everyone has a cellphone. There are several internet cafés, a bustling market every day, an underground mall in the central park, and the cheerful chaos of more business. Electricity, hotels, banks, ATMs, the court system and a lot of schools, even university extensions, make it the big city of the area.

Steve remembers when the first TV came to town and people would gather in the municipal building to watch in fascination (but bewilderment, I'm sure),

such gems as "I Dream of Jeannie." Now many have a TV, even cable, with all the connection to international culture that implies. Many of the buildings have been financed from *remesas*, money sent back from family members working in the US. The villages surrounding Nebaj were one of the places from which many had gone with the hope of finding good work and sending money—this hope has fueled the recent influx of minors to the US. Since a day's salary is around $6 in Guatemala, minimum wage in the US is an amazing contrast.

Modernity and evangelicalism are everywhere: Ixil young women wearing brown leather jackets with their long maroon skirts, *cortes*, to church, lots of businesses choosing the name "Shaddai" (God Almighty), Christian praise music blaring on public transportation, a store featuring a blond mannequin-with-attitude in *corte*.

Ixil country was hard hit during the conflict, particularly in the 1980s, and some estimate that one out of five people were killed. A quarter of the massacres in the country took place here, half of those in the Department as a whole. Now famed for the role it played in bringing a former president to trial for human rights abuses and seeing a conviction for 80 years for genocide, the stories behind this are not far beneath the surface.

Our visits are more infrequent than we would like, so there is always a lot to talk about with our Ixil friends who hosted us. After visiting the Archaeology museum and appreciating displays of pieces from the region, we spent an enjoyable evening with them talking about our mutual interests in Ixil education, and got a good night´s sleep in their guestrooms.

Countryside toward Cobán

The next morning we headed once more out of the valley and took the turnoff toward Cunén where three roads meet: north to Nebaj, south to Sacapulas and east toward Cunén, Uspantán, and finally Cobán. Part of rural isolation is being changed by the paving of the roads we were on, but enough is still gravel or dirt to keep the traffic down, not to mention the cement rises across the road called *túmulos* built high enough to scrape the bottom of our car as they fulfilled their job of slowing down traffic at little towns.

The 2014 map I had bought was still inaccurate as to which roads are paved. Checking with the drivers of a transportation company to get the facts, it was clear that the amount of paved road greatly limits potential routes, particularly west/east. No longer part of the unknown Guatemala of a century ago, the paved road takes one smartly to a busy, prosperous town, Uspantán, now of particular note as hometown of a Nobel Laureate for Peace. My husband was

charmed years ago, shortly after the Maya woman best known for her memoir, *I Rigoberta Menchu: The Story of All Poor Guatemalans,* won the Nobel Peace Prize, to hear an elderly Maya man offer this insight: "Poor Guatemala. It has a Nobel for Literature in a land where people cannot read, and a Nobel for Peace in a land where there is no peace."

Unfortunately, that is true today, and in fact, there are now more violent deaths than there were during the conflict. At the rate of seventeen per day and most unsolved and unprosecuted, Guatemala continues to be a land where peace is elusive. The literacy rate is particularly low among Maya woman, and the poverty rate of over half the country means that child malnutrition is a serious problem, particularly in rural areas. Statistically Guatemala hovers between 4th and 6th in the world for malnutrition in children under five, caused by not enough protein for mother or child, soft drinks, and cheap, filling, junk food.

If one is not actually poor, like our family driving through the countryside, the rural pastoral life looks gracious and lovely and tranquil. Even malnourished children do not look malnourished. The animals quietly graze, the small houses are surrounded by large expanses of beautiful cultivated or wild land.

After going through Cunén and Uspantán, we continued on good pavement to the Rio Chixoy. At that point we started on rough gravel road, some of which had suffered from being washed away in the rains. That meant we traveled at about twelve miles an hour, an hour and a half of unavoidable misery to get across to more pavement.

This forcefully reinforced the reality that Guatemala in 2014 is still a rural, agricultural world, with more dirt tracks than paved roads, though with intrepid drivers getting people where they want to go. Half the population of 15 million is urbanized, and half is rural. The rural half is much slower paced, perhaps more connected to the sun than electricity, more connected to the mountains than the internet, and more connected to the streams than the faucet. Globalization mainly comes in snack food bags and sodas in little stores everywhere. We arrived at pavement again at San Cristobal, another big city for its region, and then on to Cobán. That is the truly big city of this part of Guatemala with even such amenities as a large mall with McDonalds and Subway.

While we drove through town, we decided not to stay the night, but continued on north. And we regretfully passed the turn-off to Semúc Champey and Lanquín for this trip, knowing we did not have time for the unpaved roads to get there and back.

For further reading:

Lovell, W. George. *A Beauty that Hurts: Life and Death in Guatemala.* An excellent historical overview of Guatemala.

Scarry, Elaine. *On Beauty and Being Just.* A reflection by a philosopher of aesthetics on the connection between justice and perception and appreciation of beauty.

Chapter 3

The Maya Past

Lost Cities

Our principal destination for this family road trip was Tikal, now the iconic tourist site of the ancient Maya. On the (now paved) road up from Cobán we reached Chisec, and were surprised by a three-story hotel with swimming-pool, and dinosaurs and elephants around the pool. The owner said there were enough people coming through to work on the palm oil and rubber plantations to keep them full during the week, but on the weekend, we had the place to ourselves. My suspicion: we were close enough to the Mexican border to be a good stopping point for drug traffikers. This has become the current scourge of Guatemala as the goods head north by land, now that Caribbean interdiction has become too effective. Much of today's violence in the country can be blamed on the drug trade.

In the morning we passed the turnoff to the new highway, the east/west Transversal del Norte that now goes across the country near the Mexican border in what was frontier settlement country only 40 years ago. Only a few disputed portions still lack pavement where the towns are objecting to giving up the necessary land. Ixcán is just north of Ixil country and was hard hit in the conflict as well. I had made the trip this far with some friends and turned off to stay in a village in Ixcán the previous year. The lush jungle of a preserve gave way to grass for pasture and fields and villages, the tall thin ceiba trees sometimes left standing in the midst of a pasture like lonely sentinels. All of this dramatic change in the Ixcán had happened quickly as frontier land became farmland. We had driven across the military base at Playa Grande, well known from the conflict years, and stayed in a small settlement with insufficient social services from government or non-profits efforts.

On this trip, however, we continued north and passed the turnoff to ruins and caves of Cancuén—another time—and stayed on task to reach Tikal. We then entered the flat, straight miles of landscape of the Petén, Guatemala's flat lowlands that were once a center of Maya culture. Settlers were given land there starting in the 1940s, and now there are farms, scattered towns, and the long flat highway. Roads were so limited and so poor not long ago that supplies were often flown in to settlements. But now the ride on comfortable pavement gave us time to talk reflectively, one of the benefits of long road trips.
From Steve´s work with the academic community, we have met some of the archaeologists who have undertaken major excavations of Mayan ruins during the past 30 years, and a perusal of the guidebook informed us that this road was getting us closer to those places. When we arrived at Sayaxché, we had to

take a ferry across the river and then chose to stay and watch it repeatedly cross as we ate our lunch. The guidebook indicated that Sayaxhé was a suitable launching point for exploring other excavations in progress: they suggested an hour boat trip and eight km hike to Ceibal; a boat ride and three-hour hike to Dos Pilas. Perhaps another time.

More straight highway, and finally the main towns of the Petén bunched together along Lake Petén Itzá: San Benito and Santa Elena where flights from Guatemala City can bring one quickly to see Tikal in a day or two and a narrow causeway to the little island Flores. It is a helpful stop on the way to Tikal, from which it is another hour drive to the park entrance. Flores has pastel houses with brilliant red roofs, restaurants, and hotels layered up the slight hill to the two-domed Catholic church at the top. We took a boat ride around the bay to a place to swim and enjoyed the warm water with the rain falling on us and the view back to the colorful little island.

At Flores apparently the post-Classic Maya Itzá had their kingdom and resisted Spanish conquest until 1697, two centuries into the Colonial period, their loss the last battle of the Maya resistance to conquest. The church towers reflect the years of Colonial Spanish rule, and now we tourists reflect the globalization that brings money to hotels and restaurants and tour companies. Flores is also a jumping off point to remote Mayan sites, including El Mirador: the guidebook says one must go to the end of the road at Carmelito, hike two days, see the ruins, hike back. Or one can hire mules for carrying supplies, possibly to ride. Waka-Perú from Flores is a two-day, three night trip, two hours on dirt road followed by twenty minutes in a motor boat.

In the morning we drove the hour from Flores to Tikal and arrived just as the park opened. Now a beautifully paved road receives the many visitors who come from everywhere to see this iconic Maya city. Restaurants, vendors, museums surround the entrance to the main monuments.

There is a romance about lost cities in the jungle and artifacts with unknown mystical properties, something captured by the Indiana Jones movie series. Mayan archaeologists offer some great real-life models for that fictional intrepid archaeologist. In fact, George Lucas, struck by the photo of a Tikal temple, went to film it as an image for a distant planet in "Star Wars" in 1977. Not long after, he conceived the idea for Indiana Jones and sold Spielberg on the idea. In books and video games Jones is now fictitiously credited with excavations at Tikal as early as 1926. That puts him squarely in the generation of explorers that actually first studied so many of these Lost Cities. The interplay of fact and fiction is not new. One team of young men in the 1840s—Stephens and Catherwood—brushed away tropical foliage to document Maya cities Chichen Itzá in Mexico, Quiriguá in Guatemala, and Copán in

Honduras. Their books inspired adventure novelist H. Rider Haggard to write a novel on the discovery of a lost city in Guatemala. In turn that book is said to have inspired Sylvanus Morley, archaeologist, excavator, and restorer of Chichen Itzá. Morley offered to pay those searching for chewing gum trees in the forests to report any ruins they found. In that way more mysterious cities of the forest came to the attention of archaeologists in the 1920s. Tikal was also first seen in the 1850s thanks to a collector of chicle for chewing gum.

Tikal, in the midst of the Petén, with its six high temples, seemed to merit a major project. An airstrip built in 1951 made arrival easier than the trip on mules necessary up to that point, and excavation and reconstruction undertaken by the University of Pennsylvania in 1956 continued until 1970. The distance in space and time and the wonder of discovery of a lost civilization can be seen today for oneself under "Tikal Project" on U-Tube. Footage from their years of excavation take one through the mysterious sight of the unexcavated remains of the temples standing above the forest, to the slow removal of trees, construction of simple living quarters for the workers and archaeologists, digging out of carved stone *stelae*, climbs up the rubble with a safety rope, and finally reconstruction.

Tikal, now so iconic for Guatemala and attracting several hundred thousand tourists each year, is splendid, even with less than one fifth of the site excavated. The two major project leaders, Ed Shook followed by William Coe, produced important results. My candidate for Lucas' real-life model of Indiana Jones is William Coe, a field archaeologist from the early days of the Tikal Project, project director, and later the project director at Quiriguá as well. He was a professor at U of Penn, an academic identity not shared by many of the other early leading explorers and archaeologists, but very "Indiana Jones". Both Tikal and Quiriguá were recognized by UNESCO as World Heritage sites, places of importance in our global culture.

As we explored Tikal, our Maya guide took us to the site of his old school in the former village once populated by the workers. Nearby were abandoned old vehicles from the U Penn dig. As he showed us the abandoned pickups he planted the Indiana Jones bug by claiming these trucks were used in the movie (unverifiable so far). The wonder of this space as we hiked the six miles to see the key sites, snapping pictures, hearing bits of the Maya book of stories, *Popol Vuh* from our guide, and reviving ourselves with water and snacks, satisfying our desire to claim this piece of our own Guatemalan heritage.

As we walked through the rich tropical forest we admired the *ceiba*, Guatemala's national tree, as well as breadnut trees, also called the Maya nut since it served as a food staple. The broad leaves of shrubbery and the epiphytes clinging to the trees increase the sense of dense growth. At one point

we were enthusiastic to see a monkey swinging through the trees above us. Not only preserving the archaeological treasures, it is a home for many animals: spider monkeys, howler monkeys, coatis, *tepezcuintles*, mountain lions, ocelots, pumas, jaguars and bats.

We wanted to go on the twelve miles up the road to the ruins of Uaxactun, but reluctantly accepted that our rental car was not adecuate for the road. This site was explored before Tikal and the earliest archaeologists had to do a four-day mule ride in and out to Belize until an airstrip was built. Now there is an unpaved road.

Dates in the Maya Past

To understand the framework for dating Maya sites, one must internalize this date–250 AD to 900 AD. That is the Classic period. Anything before that is Pre-Classic, and anything after that until the arrival of the conquistadores is Post-classic. In each time frame cities were built and then abandoned toward the end of each period.

Not only in the lowlands, but throughout the highlands as well, the Maya had settled by as early as 3500 B.C. By the Classic period while the lowland skyscrapers were built, groups in the highlands built sturdier, shorter, earthquake-proof temples and ball-courts.

Tikal is the icon for the Classic Maya, the middle period of the three. Archaeologists are still struggling to understand its relationship with Teotihuacan, the site near Mexico City. Clearly there were trade relationships with jade going the 1013 kilometers, or 217 days on foot, from Guatemala. In 378 AD there was some kind of Teotihuacan intrusion in the area, perhaps empire-building to keep trade routes open, something archaeologists are still discovering and exploring. After another 400 years, similar to many other Mayan sites mysteriously abandoned in the 800s, the last monument at Tikal was erected in 869 AD, and it was depopulated by 950 AD.

In Asturias' introduction to his *Leyendas* he includes Tikal in the layers of cities through time and gives a poignant description of the city being abandoned. "They closed the doors of an enchanted treasure. The flame of the temples were extinguished. Everything is how it was. Through the deserted streets wander lost shadows and ghosts with empty eyes."

A "creation date" of August 13, 3114 BC occurs on *stelae* from which many later dates, called the "long count," were calculated. Another chewing-gum-site discovery in 1926 north of Tikal, almost to the Mexican border, is called El Mirador. It boasts a pyramid, El Dante, 230 feet tall, making it one of the

highest in the ancient world, and with 9.9 million cubic feet of rock and fill, making it even more massive than Egypt's Giza. To get there is daunting—5 days through the woods there and back on a mule, or a quick trip in an expensive helicopter. The vision to open this up to tourists is there, and so perhaps it will eventually be part of a tourist-circuit to see yet more of the Maya.

The "Maya collapse(s)" perhaps came from overpopulation, drought, war, disillusionment with deified rulers, deforestation. El Mirador and associated towns, perhaps a metropolitan area of 1 million people, were abandoned in 100 AD.

Post-classic cities include K'iche' and Kaqchikel sites of Q'umarcaj (near Quiché) and Iximché (near Tecpan), each conquered by the Spanish. In the highlands cities continued to expand. Xelaju (Quetzaltenago) and Zaculeu (the Mam city near today's Huehuetenango), were conquered by the K'iche', whose capital was Q'umarcaj.

An exciting image of the busy, artistic, religious, politically complex and war-torn life of the Maya has emerged with the hard work of the dirt archaeologists, and the breakthroughs to read the glyphs. Glyph-reading gives us stronger and stronger pictures of the Maya "Who's Who" and this scientific tour-de-force is well-told in Michael Coe's book *Breaking the Maya Code*. A professor at Yale and brother of William, the Tikal excavator, he describes fascinating academic characters and the uncertain and personality-driven processes of scientific discovery.

As we learn more about these early Maya, there is so much to admire: their mathematics, including the use of zero long before Arabs or Europeans, their accurate astronomy, the complex calendar, their phonetic and logographic writing system, their elaborate trade networks. We still love their favorite drink—chocolate! Cacao pods grow on the trunks of trees, make a delicious drink, and were used as money. Beautifully painted vases often include inscriptions to say who made a chocolate drinking vessel and for whom and what occasion.

Clearly, much of Maya art held a sacred purpose, depicting deities or the stories of what later was recorded as the *Popol Vuh*. Since the members of the court used elaborate headdresses with animal shapes or feathers or both, the result can be visually overwhelming in all of its unfamiliar detail. The glyphs themselves are full of amazing complexity. Some of the art portray practices that seem confusing or repugnant: shaming and killing captives, or cutting tongue or private parts for blood-letting ceremonies. Some deities are deliberately ugly. We do not understand enough of what the sacred world was

for the Maya to fully respond to their images, but armed with my partial understanding, I look at the incense burners, burial pots, chocolate vases, plates and other paraphernalia of an ancient time and struggle to see what they saw.

To understand the vast ancient pantheon depicted on vases or *stelae*, we can learn something from the four codices that survived colonial book-burning, and the books written down in early colonial times such as the *Popol Vuh*. Besides hero twins and the lords of the underworld, we encounter monkey scribes, a young corn deity, the paddlers through the Milky Way, the moon as a young or old woman, and deities of death and war all engaged in action in a cosmic drama. We find references to constellations in animal forms and we find names of the spirits of each day, each month and each year. In a fresh modern translation of the *Popol Vuh*, Dennis Tedlock provides an introduction that gives many of the symbolic astronomical meanings behind the stories.

In the iconography, one can see that an important deity was a composite of a serpent and a quetzal, and in different epochs patronized water or wind. The feathers of the quetzal became part of elaborate head-dresses for the elite, and we see images of their splendor in paintings and carvings that have survived to give us a glimpse of a long and creative culture. Feathers were prized and part of a system of trade and tribute. In an effort to preserve the supply, hunters did not kill the birds, but rather stunned them with a blowgun, removed feathers, and set them free again. In Vienna a headdress belonging to the last king of the Aztecs includes an astonishing 500 quetzal feathers.

Kaminalhuyu

One important Maya site populated from the Pre-Classic to Post-Classic and now part of the modern city of Guatemala is Kaminaljuyu. It cannot be seen in its entirety because modern developments have built over and around it, and its construction out of adobe means much has deteriorated. But it is remarkable to think of a place with settlement from 1500 BC to the present, the space of 3500 years, even if with some gaps.

One can go to the Miraflores mall in Guatemala City and shop in the modern international chain stores, and a particular doorway takes you to the museum for Kaminaljuyu. Out on the lawn of the museum is a grass-covered pyramid with the mall next door and cars whizzing by on the street and a skyscraper across the street. The entryway has a model of the principal structures of Kaminaljuyu, down at ones' feet beneath a covering of plexiglass. On the plexiglass are the streets of Guatemala City that overlay and are interspersed with even more mounds—ancients and moderns sharing space. As one drives

out the other end of the shopping center, there is a Maya mound next to a Pizza Hut across from a gas station, pleasingly artistic, ironic, symbolic.

Holding in ones' mind the Maya timeline, one can admire the artistry of different epochs. At the Kaminaljuyu museum note is made of structures in the old world built during the same periods. The Preclassic (El Mirador as iconic site) compares to the Abu Simbel rock temples in Egypt, then the Parthenon in Greece, and finally the Roman Coliseum. For the Classic period (Tikal as icon) one can think of Petra in Jordan and then the Mosque of Córdoba of Spain. Post-Classic (Iximché as emblematic) compares to the Tower of Pisa in Italy.

Going over to the *Popol Vuh* museum at the Universidad Francisco Marroquin, one can be further astonished by the artistry of the Maya. Or at the Casa Santo Domingo museum in Antigua, the pre-Columbian artists match up well with modern artists in glass that are set side by side to show how artists from such different times treated the same theme. Reproductions of the murals from Bonampak, also at Casa Santo Domingo, seem modern in their vivid storytelling and composition. In Maya sculptures there are so many expressive human faces and figures and scenes of interaction. I am particularly attracted to the small 4-6" figures of women, ballplayers, people doing their jobs, elaborately dressed warriors or leaders. One of my favorite figures is a mother in a baggy shift carrying a child on one hip and holding a basket in her other hand. Such a distance in culture, time, place, language, and yet such a universal and easy-to-identify-with image.

Back on the road

Having diligently walked around and up the pyramids at Tikal, we looked through the several museums attached, and we decided we had absorbed all we could take in for a day and headed back to Flores. We accepted that our timeframe for this trip excluded a visit to nearby Yaxha which friends say is particularly beautiful thanks to the lagoon on which one can see the sun set. We will definitely have to go back to explore this city of over 500 structures, currently being excavated, and full of wildlife—turtles, monkeys, puma, tapirs, deer, storks, herons, egrets, hawks, parrots, and jaguar. And of course, the crocodiles in the lagoon.

The next morning we started down the east coast of Guatemala parallel to Belize and saw quantities of suspiciously symmetrical hills and wondered how many were unexcavated mounds. This made the figure of perhaps as many as 4,400 Maya sites somewhat believable. When we stopped for lunch, a map showed an astonishing number of red dots of known sites, far more than I expected, with a surprisingly large number in neighboring Belize.

For further reading:

Coe, Michael. *Breaking the Maya Code.* Tells the story of how the Mayan glyphs were desciphered in an engaging popular style.

Stuart, David. *The Order of Days: The Maya World and the Truth about 2012.*
Tedlock, Dennis. *Popol Vuh.* The definitive modern translation of this classic of Mayan literature.

Chapter 4

Conquest and Colony

Castillo de San Felipe

Our next stop had significance during the Spanish colonial era, a time that lasted from the first arrival of conquistadores in 1524 until independence three centuries later in 1821. We drove down from Tikal on the eastern highway, passing through the cooler pines, sedges, and grasses. On the eastern Caribbean side, there is a bridge at the point at which Lake Izabal narrows and the Rio Dulce starts flowing to the sea. We settled in at the backpacker's inn beneath the bridge and enjoyed the restaurant with a fine view of the water and nearby anchored yachts. Our boat ride in the morning was around the nearby island filled with birds.

In the past my daughter and I had taken the beautiful ride all the way to Livingston, key town of the Garifuna people. These are sometimes called Black Caribs, and their language is a mixture of a South American one and a West African one. The story is that this resulted from a slave shipwreck onto an island where they intermarried, and yet another shipwreck brought them to Guatemala and Honduras. Given that the slave trade from Africa brought black slaves to the country during the colonial period, perhaps there were additional immigrants.

At the juncture with Rio Dulce, a national park surrounds a reconstructed fort, a real-life model for *Pirates of the Caribbean.* On the handout that serves as a ticket we are told that in 1595 the governor of Guatemala complained to the King of Spain that they were undergoing attack by English and Dutch pirates, so a tower for twelve soldiers and twelve pieces of artillery was built. Destroyed nine years later, it was reconstructed to resist the attacks of pirates in the 1600s, and late in the century a pirate managed to burn it down. For years it was rebuilt and expanded, and the modern reconstruction tries to capture it in its time it held 100 soldiers. After seeing the fort, taking plenty of pictures, we enjoyed our swim in the aquamarine waters, looking up at a sapphire sky.

Surrounded by palms, along the river we saw the mangroves with their roots visible going into the water, the multiple species creating a connection with the water which is characteristic of both Atlantic and Pacific coasts.

The conquistadores had come from New Spain, or Mexico, along with some indigenous allies, and traveled the Pacific coast until reaching the central portion of the country and eventually creating the capital, Santiago de los Caballeros, now Antigua. Trade and communication continued to go and come

in that direction as well as via ships on the Pacific coast, but a port was established on the Atlantic by Hernán Cortés, conqueror of Mexico, in 1524 and called La Natividad. Pedro de Alvarado, Cortes' lieutenant, defeated indigenous opponents a decade later, and in honor of all the horses that came through here the name changed to Puerto de Caballos and under this name it continued to function in the colonial era and be a stop for ships from Spain. By the late 1800s it was renamed in honor of Cortéz. Located in northern Honduras, it is not far from the entry to the Rio Dulce.

The route we took the next day was thus the modernization of the route from the Atlantic coast to the colonial capital. Here we were passing through a drier more desert area with cactus, acacias, and calabash trees. We then drove through the congestion of Guatemala City which was, of course, a thinly populated valley for most of the 300 years of Spanish rule.

Antigua

When we arrived home in Antigua, we were in the ultimate symbol of the colonial era. One of my pleasures in living here is to daily write down something beautiful I see, and I take pleasure in walking through the streets with red, purple, pink, yellow, and orange flowers cascading over walls, looking at the Volcán de Agua with or without clouds, admiring the lavender jacaranda trees against the peacock blue or even midnight blue skies. I have taken so many friends, students, and family members on tours of the city, and have spent time exploring on my own, so that all of these blur together in my mind as I walk through the streets, and recall the history of the place.

An initial capital founded in 1524 was relocated twice, and ended up in this valley in 1543. Most residents, including ourselves, take pride in the fact that it was the center of government, commerce, education, and the Catholic church until an earthquake in 1773 ended its centrality, a total of 230 years. Antigua was preserved in all its Baroque charm, semi-frozen when it was abandoned and the capital moved to Guatemala City. In its restored splendor and preservation as a UNESCO international monument, its beauty with old churches and convents, cobblestone streets and lavish flowers, volcano and hill with a cross, draw over 500,000 tourists a year. Not to mention its role as having the largest Holy Week celebrations and processions in the world. Antigua was originally named Santiago de los Caballeros, in honor of Saint James.

At the top of the Cerro de la Cruz on the north of Antigua, there is a statue of Santiago on horseback carrying flag and lance. The imagery is from the time of the *reconquista* of Spain from the Moors completed in 1492 just as the conquerors went to the new world. The Apostle James had, according to

tradition, preached in Spain, and after his beheading in Judea, his remains were returned to Spain and buried there, and Santiago de Compostella became an important site of pilgrimage, something that continues to this day. In one battle the King of Spain had a vision of Saint James appearing on a white horse to lead them into battle, thus sanctioning conquest of the infidels.

The first conquistador, Pedro de Alvarado, famously confronted massive opposition at Quetzaltenango, and according to later legends, defeated Tecun Umán, leader of the K'iche' opponents. Pedro's partner, Luisa, a Nahuatl princess whose translation skills were integral to his success, gave birth to Leonor, the first mixed-blood person born in Guatemala, only a month after this important battle.

Unlike Mexico where there are no statues or portraits of the conquistador Hernán Cortéz, Alvarado's portrait is not only in the Antigua municipal office, it is also in the mural in the National Palace in Guatemala City. This reflects a profound difference between the countries. Mexico has embraced the identity of *mestizaje,* the mixing of Spanish and indigenous blood, into something new, and with conscious pride in the indigenous part of that past. In Guatemala, ethnic identity can be an unresolved tension. With at least 40% of the population identifying itself as Maya on one side, and with a landowning elite that still identifies itself as white (thanks not only to the Spanish past, but to additional immigration from Germany and Italy in the late 1800s), the mixed-blood *ladino* identity is often seen as "not either of the above" rather than the new identity of the country. The elite have even kept track of their heritage to demonstrate the purity (i.e. non-indianness) of their blood. Those of mixed blood accept that this lowers their status, while knowing that they are still above the Maya.

The art in the National Palace captures the duality: ancient Maya heritage on one side (of which the country can be proud even if ashamed of any poor and backward Maya of today), and Spanish on the other. This is not only in the stained glass of the reception hall, but in the two murals. In one mural there is the *ladino*, the child of the conquistador and Maya princess, his identity that of an industrialized laborer, an identity that attracted some to a marxist revolution.

In the other mural is the killing of the Maya leader Tecún Umán by Spanish Pedro de Alvarado, a painful image that freezes many realities. As the mythology of the conquest developed over time, the quetzal became an important part of that encounter. The story developed that the Spanish conqueror and the leader of the Maya forces were in combat, and the quetzal the Maya king carried covered the body of his slain leader in a nightlong death watch. In the morning the bird was no longer of pure green jade, but had

soaked the blood of the warrior and become scarlet. While only a story, it symbolizes the complex and violent encounter of cultures, where domination is compensated for by the quetzal flying free.

Guatemala also has an uneasy relationship with Mexico, its richer neighbor to the north. It was indigenous Nahuatl leaders who came with the Spanish conquerors, and a few additional indigenous people from Oaxaca, and fought against the Maya to conquer them. Hence, so many city names end in "tenango," which is the Nahuatl word "place of" and Nahuatl is possibly the source of the country's name, meaning "land of trees."

In reality, after six months as allies, the Kaqchiqel were disillusioned and started a six-year (or longer) guerrilla resistance movement, and leaders from other areas did as well. The names of these leaders can be found in the earliest documents and were well known for many years. Tecun Uman appears after several hundred years, and is variously identified with other names that do occur in early records. Nevertheless, in today's Guatemala, he is the symbol of resistance, his face for many years on the 50 cent quetzal bill (now out of circulation), and in texts, civic events, and art. Those more successful in their resistance have faded from popular memory, ultimately defeated as well.

The *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan*, a painted cloth found in Mexico, tells the story of the conquest of Guatemala under the leadership of Jorge de Alvarado, brother of Pedro, three years after the initial armed encounters, leading his Nahuatl allies. Their battles and route are marked with painted symbols of each town.

The museum at the Universidad Francisco Marroquín makes the *Lienzo* accessible by a set of narrated and animated videos that take one step by step through the details. At the time of first watching them, I was hooked on the content and how interesting it is that various sites have emblems that can be identified as different towns like Xela and Chichi and the valley of Antigua. It did not occur to me at the time what a remarkable achievement in animation these videos represent. The work was supervised by Carlos Argüello, successful Nicaraguan/Guatemalan Dreamworks animator, who has now trained teams of youth from Guatemala and elsewhere in this modern art form. The result of the storytelling in the *Lienzo* changes the plot from "Pedro conquered Guatemala" to "Jorge and the Nahuatl forces followed up on his initial partial conquest." In addition to exploitation of Kaqchikel resentment of their K'iche' conquerors, the conquistadores had the most spectacular assistants in decimating the population: epidemics of old-world diseases previously unknown in the new world. Periodic epidemics continuing through the colonial era probably reduced the population in the Guatemalan highlands

by 90% in 150 years. The population slowly began to rise, but did not reach pre-conquest levels until the mid-20th century.

Meanwhile, having been given the mandate to rule the region, the eighteen years of Pedro de Alvarado´s chaotic administration left an indelible mark. He continually set off to try to find riches elsewhere and left government in the hands of his brother or another. He returned to the Spanish court to defend himself against charges of excessive cruelty. While there he married a noblewoman, Francisca de la Cueva, who died enroute near Veracruz. With him also came the future Bishop, Francisco Marroquin, whose ideals of indigenous development contributed to the growing settlement. Pedro's disastrously unsuccessful attempt to go and conquer lands in Peru, the death of Luisa, and more needs to defend his reputation, sent him once more back to Spain. There he married Francisca's sister, Beatriz.

Only a bold playwright would dare come up with the epic and tragic finale of Pedro and Beatriz. In the third year of their marriage, he left with a number of ships he had built at the Pacific port of Itzapa with the plan of crossing the ocean and completing the original idea of finding a trade route to China, taking the Spice Islands near modern Indonesia. When they stopped in Mexico, he agreed to put down an indigenous uprising but was killed, on July 4, 1541. When Beatriz heard of his death, she painted her house black. She claimed the governorship, the only woman to hold such an office in the new world. But her official term lasted only two days since she, along with her ladies in waiting, died in the horrifying September 11th flood and mudslide from the Agua Volcano. The flood destroyed the city of Santiago and led to its resettlement in the current Antigua valley.

Leonor, however, survived the flood, and she married Beatriz' brother Francisco. The Hotel Palacio de Leonor is a restoration of what became her place of residence in the new town. Bishop Marroquin also survived, and contributed to the stability of the new colony.

He became a scholar of K´iche and started the school of Saint Thomas in 1559 to educate native peoples. This evolved into the Universidad de San Carlos in Guatemala City where it continues as the main state-funded academic institution of the country. Marroquin is seen as representing a stance of mediation between the competing interests of the Spanish conquerors, the indigenous people, and a critical voice in creating the colonial system. However, Bishop Las Casas, famed for trying a non-violent pacification approach in Alta and Baja Verapaz, castigated Marroquin for his acceptance of the system of Maya slavery.

A post-script to the failed sailing expedition: Cabrillo, conquistador, landowner, and ship-builder, sailed up to the California coast, entering the San Diego Bay on September 28, 1542. This voyage and official Spanish "discovery" is commemorated at Cabrillo National Monument on the Point Loma peninsula.

The governor appointed in 1551, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, had conquered Yucatán with one group, and Mexico with Hernan Cortéz, and eventually became an *encomendero* in Guatemala. Around the time he began his time in office, he wrote the *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, a lively and authentic account that draws on his 119 battles. He finished his manuscript 50 years after the conquests he described, died and was buried in Antigua in 1584, and nearly 50 more years passed before the book was published. It has been a compelling read to this day.

Leonór died a year previous to him, and around 300 years later, her life was famously novelized by the 19th century writer, José Milla, in the book, *La Hija del Adelantado*. Having lived through all these unique, larger-than-life events, she made her mark on the story of Antigua.

Exploitation vs. Compassion

The crown claimed the right to tribute (*repartimiento*), but gave some favored people commissions (*encomiendas)* to collect tribute. In a twist, Alvarado, who had started a system of slavery, commissioned Bishop Marroquin to free his slaves upon his death, and the official institution of slavery fell apart around 1550 under the more benign administration of Alonso Lopez de Cerrato . Today's villages scattered around Antigua were largely the combination of land granted to Alvarado's top warriors and settlement of freed indigenous people. In studying the growth of Antigua, initially the Spanish were those in the town center, but a gradual process of mixed marriages made the valley more and more *ladino*. Black slaves and freed blacks were part of the mix. The eventual result was that only about ten per cent of the population was Spanish, with ongoing immigration from the Old World to keep that figure up.

In a pattern to be repeated often in Guatemalan history, the *encomenderos* made excessive demands on Maya labor. The list and quantities of goods expected is overwhelming: bags of cacao, coming to the capital to work, weavings of cotton or ornamental cloth, sandals, reed mats, gourds, lime, bricks, tiles, pots, jugs, clay griddles, chickens, corn, beans, chili peppers, salt, honey, eggs, turkeys, quail, fodder for livestock, wheat, labor for harvesting wheat.

The early conquistadores tried farming cacao, the trees with pods growing on their trunks, the source of chocolate. They tried indigo, a deep blue dye from the *xiquilite* plant. They came to the new world hoping to get rich, but gold mines in Honduras and temporary success with silver and gold panning in Huehuetenango were not enough. In one of those strange repetitions of which Guatemalan history had many, today gold is being extracted once again, this time by a Canadian company, Goldcorp. The *encomendero* of the past was noted for abusive treatment of the residents, and today's communities have mounted many protests against this multinational corporation on the grounds of environmental and community impact. Congress has tried to raise the portion of the profits the country is getting, considering 5% for the communities and 42% for the country too little. The corporation counters by pointing to all of their development projects in communities, but outside investigators critique the long-term impact. This is an nresolved and on-going conflict in all of Central American, not just Guatemala.

In another recurrent theme of the country, there was a response to these injustices by people who determined to change things. Because of all the excesses as well as devastating outbreaks of infectious diseases, the population drastically declined, perhaps from 2 million to an estimated low of 130,000 a century later. But as population had gone down the requirements of tribute had not also diminished. Cerrato attempted to reduce this and implement new and fairer laws around 1550. Another reform-minded governor, Diego García de Valverde, served from 1578-87. One can hear his compassion and outrage at the excessive taxation, people "wretched and distraught" trying to meet unrealistic demands, or fleeing to escape them, too many dying. He acknowledged he was attempting to overcome slavery-like abuses that led people to despair and suicide. His reforms asked clergy to help determine who was actually still living, and he reduced tribute by deducting what had been overpaid in the past.

The Spanish implemented a policy of *congregación*, or creating settlements rather than allowing the population to remain dispersed. This was partially motivated by the intention of Christianizing the inhabitants as well as for more efficient collection of tribute. Churches were built; priests taught the new faith; and Mayas were baptized, married and buried while simultaneously resisting resettlement and Christianization. The Dominicans took responsibility for gathering *reducciones* and drew the Maya into settlements, the start of the 333 municipalities Guatemala has today. But the majority of the country remained Maya in race, language, tradition, religion, culture.

Another Milla historical novel, *Los Nazarenos,* brings to life Antigua's Santo Hermano Pedro and the convert, Don Rodrigo, who led the incipient order which still does charitable work in the country and elsewhere. Hermano Pedro,

an immigrant who failed to read well enough to become a priest, in the 1600s carried out admirable works of charity with children, elderly, and the sick. His tomb at the San Francisco church attracts many seeking healing, and the accompanying museum gives the flavor of his life and times. Most importantly, he became a recognized saint of the Catholic church during the 2002 visit of Pope John Paul II.

A statue of the saint welcomes one to town, and another is in the park in front of the Convent where he lived and died, Convento Belén, still a functioning retreat center. In front of the cemetery where he briefly served as gardener and sexton, there is the *esquisúchil* tree he planted over 350 years ago. In May it blooms with its white flowers with yellow centers.

Antigua takes pride in all the names that have been conferred on it through the centuries, most notably the one given by the King of Spain in 1543, the "Very Loyal and Very Noble City of Saint James of the Knights of Guatemala." Very recently a new title was added by the organization that monitors historical preservation, "the mystical city." Judging by art, architecture and Lenten celebrations, it is a very religious place. In addition to the Cathedral, each major monastic order in the church created a complex with church and living spaces, and the results today are multifaceted public spaces. From the cross on the hill one can look down and see each of these places in the relatively small 10 x 10 blocks around the main plaza.

The Cathedral is a semi-reconstructed ruin open to tourists in addition to a functioning parish. La Merced has packed services, the honor of displaying the most famous image of Christ, reconstructed living quarters with an immense fountain, an attached seminary, and a distinctive wedding cake-like façade. San Francisco contains the remains of the revered Saint Hermano Pedro, a museum of his life, a painting in the church of recent Franciscan martyrs, and a tumbled mass of unreconstructed ruins. Casa Santo Domingo is a five-star hotel and elegant restaurant with six excellent museums, a church space often used for weddings, and colonial and modern art throughout. The site of the Jesuits is now a library, space for temporary exhibits, arts for children, an enormous and lovely outdoor coffee shop, and courtyards reconstructed and cared for by the Cooperación Española. The convent of the Capuchins has an art museum, offices for the preservation of the City´s colonial character, and a church rebuilt to be used for weddings and concerts.

This mix of sacred and artistic uses of these old buildings gives the town its contemporary character. The Carmelitas site was once used as a jail, but it and others such as the Augustinian church, await rebuilding and repurposing, but meanwhile offer their faded and ruinous charms for photographers and appreciative eyes. The sculptures set in niches on the facades of the churches

are of biblical figures and saints important to each order. This immerses one in baroque art as one walks through the town, enjoying the vista of a large volcano to the south and a hill with a white cross to the north, and two more volcanoes toward the west, and the awed visitor ends up trying not to either bang into windows while walking on the narrow, uneven sidewalks, or to trip on cobblestones as the traffic zips by.

Thanks to the images on the façades I am reminded that we walk through life surrounded by people of faith from the past, and it is in the ruins I am most reminded that churches were intended to serve as courtyards to heaven, open to the sky above. While Franciscans had begun in 1209, the Mercedarians in 1218, and Dominicans in the 1200s, the Jesuits, with Saint Ignatius as their founder, in 1540, grew with the colony. Similarly, Saint Teresa of Avila´s Carmelites who founded their first convent in Spain in 1562, built a convent in Antigua (look up date). Her brothers had been conquistadores, and before her commitment to deeper spirituality, she had been a big fan of the romantic novels of the time.

These two Spanish spiritual and intellectual giants of the colonial era left writings still studied and revered today. Exhortations to an obedient and holy life can faintly be heard as one walks through a town of sermons in stone. As I sit in the coffee shop yard of the former Jesuit site, reading a modern translation of Saint Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, the call seems particularly clear.

The Maya had extensive libraries, but all but four books were consumed in early Christian zeal to abolish the idolatry of the new world. Bishop Landa in Yucatán famously explained the need for book-burning: "We found a great number of books in their writing system, and since they contained nothing else except superstition and demonic falsehoods, we burned them all, which caused them amazement and troubled them deeply." Emperor Charles V at the time of the conquest recruited a dozen "apostles" from each Catholic order—Franciscans, Dominicans and Augustinians—to convert his new realms. These friars were educated men interested enough in the land and people to study culture and language and thus preserved information that otherwise might have been lost. One friar who came after the initial groups of twelve, Sahagún, compiled a 12-volume encyclopedia on Mexico, but once back in Spain it met with censorship, deemed dangerous because of the idolatry it described.

In general the Maya past was suppressed, churches were built on temples, and syncretism allowed saints and former Maya dieties to merge into what is still a popular expression of religion throughout the country today.

King Philip II authorized a census in 1577 that required creation of maps, and provided a set of 50 questions to be asked in each place. After the defeat of his Armada by England eleven years later he needed money more than information, and general interest in Mayan culture declined in favor of use of Maya labor.

After a 16th century concentration on extracting wealth in labor and tribute through *encomienda* and *repartimiento* (forced labor systems), the economic crisis in the 17th century caused the Spanish to turn toward the acquisition of land throughout Mesoamerica. Since the geography of the highlands was not suitable for cacao and indigo, some land was used for sheep raising or production of sugar.

The marimba symbolizes the fusion of cultures that occurred in the colonial era—West African instrument remade with new world gourds and then redone to resemble a piano keyboard. The first documented use of the instrument was 1680 in Antigua. Declared a national symbol, part of Guatemalan-ness and considered the "resonant heart of the people," there is deep affection for the unique sound with a marimba almost required at public events. When Steve and I attended a concert in Central Park, my favorite piece was in honor of Antigua, "Moonlight among ruins".

During the Colonial period, as in the rest of Latin America, the Guatemalan church and the state spoke and acted together. The Guatemalan diocese was by 1743 the home of the Archbishop with jurisdiction over the rest of Central America which then included Chiapas but not Panama.

The colonial past thus continually impinges on the present. Rafael Landivar, a Jesuit from Guatemala, graduated from the local university by the time he was 15. After being ordained in Mexico, he returned to become the rector of the Jesuit university and wrote poetry. But the King of Spain evicted all Jesuits from Latin America in 1767, and Landivar settled in Italy where he published a book of poetry. In 1955 the Jesuits finally returned to Guatemala and the Archbishop negotiated the possibility of a Catholic university. When founded in 1961, the first one established since the University of San Carlos, the Jesuit university chose the name Rafael Landivar. Eventually Landivar's body was brought back to Antigua and an elaborate tomb is on the busy Calzada Santa Lucía where the market is located.

The colonial period was coming to an end, and Antigua was in a time of new buildings when the 1773 earthquake put an end to its growth. A decision to move to the Valley of Guatemala was finally carried out in 1776, and the former capital declined into increasing ruin, inhabited largely by ghosts and those too stubborn or poor to move. It is interesting to realize that a Spanish

priest established the first mission in San Diego, California in 1773, the Boston Tea Party was that year, and of course, American independence took place in 1776 when Guatemala City was being founded.

Living among the constant flowers, the sometimes delicate gray clouds of a coming rain, in the moonlight among ruins, we are living set back in time, remembering a long 300-stretch of Spanish rule in the country.

For further reading:

Lovell, W.G., C.J. Lutz with W. Kramer and W.R. Swezey. *"Strange Lands and Different Peoples": Spaniards and Indians in Colonial Guatemala.* A current comprehensive treatment of the colonial era.

Chapter 5

A Century of Independence

Back in Antigua, I checked the list of "places to go" on the ubiquitous travel agencies. I had covered a lot of them: Semuc Champey, Xela, Lake Atitlan, Chichi, Cobán, Flores, Tikal, Rio Dulce. But still more places to go...and that included Guatemala City.

Guatemala City

An aesthetics philosopher who links beauty and justice writes about times when we suddenly see the beauty in something we thought was not beautiful, and we experience a radical change in perception. This I can say about Guatemala City. I used to think it was a messy, crowded, annoying place to avoid. Now, after knowing it better, I think it is a messy, crowded, interesting city, with many places of great beauty and a fascinating history. The bustle of traffic and human interaction on buses and the street in Guatemala City is an enormous piece of performance art.

In Asturias' introduction to his *Leyendas* he wrote: "It is a city made of buried cities, one on the other, like the floors of a many-storied house. Floor upon floor. City upon city." One church given a place to build in the new city had to remove a Maya mound, failed to build, and after being a cemetery, it became a park with a series of different names—today it is *Gomez Carillo* after a noted journalist. So Asturias' layers are not just imaginary. Nevertheless, one has to use some imagination to dig down a layer or two to see the charm of the city's past.

The *Centro Histórico,* the initial foundation of the city, was laid out as about 20 blocks square. This is now called Zone 1 and includes the Central Park, surrounded by Cathedral, National Palace, and National Library. The city has 22 zones in a pattern spiraling out from the Historic Center, designed in the mid-1900s as growth was starting to escalate.

I have enjoyed taking many people to the National Place and Cathedral in the Central Park, walking down 6th avenue which now a pedestrian street with artists and lively businesses. I have further enjoyed attending special art exhibits and concerts as part of an annual celebration of the City center, or even the Christmas fun for kids set up in the central square, ice skating and snow and a huge tree. But in wanting to try to see the city from the 1800s beneath the surface, a walk from the northeast to southeast corners of the Historic Center appealed to me. I went on my own, figuring only a hardcore fanatic about the past would actually enjoy this.

The Old City

Starting at the Cerro del Carmen at the northeast corner of the historic center, I was at the place which had been established in 1620 as a convent previous to the moving of the city. The small white church on top of the hill is surrounded by pleasant landscaping, gardens interspersed with trees, stone walkways, and stone stairs going down all sides of the hill. A sign in the church said that the initial image of the Virgin of Carmen was a gift from Saint Teresa of Avila, but since she had died 40 years before and was canonized in 1622, the story might need some adjustment. The yellow dome of La Merced only blocks away could be seen against the five lovely azure blue domes of the cathedral only a few more blocks beyond that.

It was in the surrounding neighborhood of the Cerrito that future president Rafael Carrera would be born. It is also where Miguel Angel Asturias would live during his childhood. I walked several blocks northeast to find the street now named after him, the old house where he lived with a plaque on the wall, and a small park with *stelea*, a bench, a shade tree. The plaque at the park quoted him saying he learned many stories and forms of speech that he later used in his writing, listening to people who stayed in the old courtyard of his home.

He experienced the 1917 earthquake that destroyed so much of the city, including the Cerrito church. Seeing it rebuilt would have reinforced the imagery that this was a city of layers. In the *Leyendas* his deep affection for the city comes through in the description of it seen from a distance as small white toy houses from a nativity set nestled below the mountains. Today the houses are built of block, cement, plaster, and the many different colors of paint are peeling in places, some roofs are blackened with stains from rain. Burnt red, pale green, yellow, rose, ochre, tangerine, white, light blue, and dark green houses built to the edge of the sidewalks are chained together along each side of the street. They get repainted, but never all at the same time, so it looks much more haphazard than the white plaster and red tiled roofs Asturias described. It is the same modern construction spreading throughout Guatemala and I will confess nostalgia for the older look.

As I walked through the streets, I tried to imagine a time without cars, where the houses looked more like the old rural Guatemala, with horses, perhaps an occasional carriage, and a lot of people walking. Today those of us walking are pedestrians careful to watch the stoplights so as to not interfere with traffic. I was suddenly taken aback and taken into the past when faced on the street with goats, their herders moving them along, muzzles on their mouths.

One has to realize what a relatively small town it once was. The city of Santiago had reached a population of about 30-40 thousand before the move, about two-thirds of mixed blood, and the other third split evenly between Spaniards and indigenous people. A census two years after the move in 1776 cited a country-wide population of under 400,000 and even by 1840 there were only half a million people, most living rurally. By 1900 the total population of the country was still under a million, but a process of greater urbanization was beginning just as throughout the world. Today the country has 15 million people, half living in rural areas, with an additional million as migrants to the US. At least two and a third million live in the expanded city.

At the foundation of the city, changes that had taken place through the nearly three centuries of colonial rule made a difference. Most of those living in the city had very fragile connections to Spain, having been born in the country and many a mixture of Mayan and Spanish. Mixco is now a contiguous part of the metropolitan area, but in those days it was one of several villages at a distance in the valley from the new settlement.

There was no convent built by the Jesuits since they had already been evicted from Latin America, but the Franciscans, Dominicans, Capuchines, Recollects, and Guatemala's own Bethlehemites, all built convents. It took nearly a decade for the crown to approve the site plan and for serious building to start. A beautiful fountain with horses was built for the central park, named after King Charles III, and it remained in place for over 100 years, surrounded by arched public buildings.

The first church built, Santa Rosa, proudly displays the date of its founding on its façade, 1787. It also displays 1917, the date it had to be rebuilt after the earthquake. Born in the new world and canonized in 1671, Saint Rose of Lima, was patroness of the church which served as the cathedral until that was completed in 1815.

During the colonial era there were 18 different Spanish monarchs that ruled through their proxies, putting an indelible stamp on the country, but their time had come to an end, and the movement toward independence rushed throughout the continent, inspired in part by the American and French revolutions. While in Mexico and South America battles took place to achieve this, in Guatemala it was all on paper. The only battles that occurred were with the others in the Central American Federation, fighting for many years over whether there would be one country or the five that resulted.

As I walked toward the old University the Cathedral and central park were only a few blocks further west, and I walked along the street of the market behind them. Now around the market I was seeing *cascarones*, decorated eggs

filled with confetti for celebrating the upcoming Mardi Gras before Ash Wednesday and the forty days of Lent.

Independence

Just as the presidential house, the *Casa Crema*, is on the sidewalk on an ordinary street around the corner from the National Palace, so also the Congress with its eighteen brown stone columns flanking the windows, is on the sidewalk. Across the street is the bright white building of the university, attractive with its unusual arches and a design over the door.

The university is architecturally almost identical to the one built in Antigua, the arches engraved with six small lines tracing around them, a paved courtyard with fountain and flowerbeds, and large rooms around the four sides of the one building. After serving as the whole university for many years, and then as the School of Law as additional buildings went up in Zone 1, it is now a history museum. The museum is simple, costs only Q1, and has a room summarizing different stages and people important to the growth of the school, another features the annual student political protests, the *Huelga de Dolores*; one room has Guatemalan crafts; another has propaganda prints from the 1950s; and a final room an architectural history of the reconstructions after 1917 and 1976 earthquakes.

The building played an important role just after independence from Spain September 15, 1821. The main hall of the university served as the place that a final independence document separating from Mexico was proclaimed in July 1823, and the tableaux of that moment is pictured on the Q20 bill. The first congress met in the university and created a new constitution as well as abolished slavery. Each year a torch is carried from country to country in Central America to commemorate this region-wide independence from Spain, and school children diligently march, bands practice, floats are created, outstanding students are acknowledged with a special sash as they parade through the streets, and older students run carrying torches, faces painted, making noise with shrill whistles to commemorate this important historical change.

The former Captaincy-General of Guatemala (Chiapas in Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Honduras) became the Federación de Estados Centroamericanos. Very soon embroiled in war, the federation collapsed into separate states after eighteen years. During that timeframe there were fourteen heads of the Guatemalan state under the federation, and the 10th of these was the most influential, Doctor Mariano Gálvez, who is on the Q20 bill.

Galvez had been heavily influenced by the enlightenment ideals taught in the university. One of his decisions was to make it a secular institution, separating it from its Catholic roots. In a macabre way of showing respect, students 60 or so years after his death arranged for his body to be disinterred from Mexico, repatriated and buried in the University.

He supported science, art, a national library, national museum, freedom of the press, civil marriage, new penal code, judicial reform, reorganized municipal governments, new system of taxation, and so on. He appropriated church property, expelled the archbishop, and secularized church educational institutions. His ambitious goals required raising taxes, which did not sit well with anyone.

Rafael Carrera

Rafael Carrera had moved to the countryside from the Cerrito neighborhood, and as the higher taxes, infringement on community land under the new laws, and the removal of parish priests had angered many communities, he became the leader of a peasant revolt that swept into Guatemala City. He became chief of state for four years and then for fourteen more, with a three year gap in between. Poor farmers, the church, and the landowning hierarchy coalesced as the conservative side opposed to enlightenment, anti-church liberals. Carrera made an agreement with the Vatican to reinstitute state financial support for the church and establish Catholicism as the sole religion. The university and other schools were once more in Catholic hands.

When the move from Antigua was first made, the proposed central plaza was much smaller and five blocks to the east of what was became the immense Plaza de la Constitución in front of the Palace. Consequently the unused plaza was an appropriate site for a national theater built by 1859, named Teatro Carrera for the president. This was the next site on my walking tour. Pictures show it to have had elegant columns, statues of Roman deities in front of it. A guidebook from twenty-five years after it was opened described it as being in the middle of the square, with lines of flowering trees and orange trees among statues and fountains. Carrera's name was taken off of it after the 1871 revolution. Because of a statue of Columbus given by Italy to commemorate 400 years since his arrival in the new world, the name changed to Teatro Colón.

No bright shiny oranges or vivid flowers have survived, and today all the trees look like they are in a fight for survival with Guatemala City bus fumes. After the 1917 earthquake, the damage was so great it was torn down, and after a time as an informal market, it has become a children's park with some swings

and a library. It is now Parque Colón, still with the statue of Columbus in front of the library.

Cabrera ruled until his death, and his successor Cerna held on to power for six years by exiling the liberal congressman he saw as his greatest political threat. A military revolt deposed him and brought his rival back as head of state in 1871. Garcia Granados created the national flag still in use, two strips of light blue on each side to represent the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, a white center for the purity of the nation, with the quetzal, wreath, swords, and rifles as the coat of arms in the center. He is pictured on the Q10 bill and the scene on the reverse side shows the national assembly approving codes and laws in effect for most of the next century. An unimportant but interesting aside: his daughter fell in love with the famed Cuban poet José Marti and then pined away and died when he left her. He wrote a very sentimental love poem to her upon her death called la *Niña de Guatemala.*

Justo Rufino Barrios

I next went to the southeast corner of the old city, to the Plaza Barrios where there is a beautiful statue of the next president on horseback which has galloped back and forth across the city: first placed in 1896 at the end of La Reforma it came to this plaza in 1933, was moved down to Avenida de las Americas in 1973 and back here in 2008. On one side of the plaza is the train station, now a museum, with interesting bric-a-brac from construction and running trains, as well as a lot of old train cars.

On the other side of the Plaza is the exchange point of the green metro buses. On the south side is an excellent history museum called "¿Porqué somos cómo somos?" themed around differences in ethnicity and wealth in the country, uncovering the complex identity of both Maya and *ladino*.

General Justo Rufino Barrios, who had been the military leader of the revolt of 1871, was unhappy with Granados' slow efforts at change, and so removed him after two years, stepped in himself and was head of state for the following 12 years. Smiling like a genial grandfather on the Q5 bill, in actuality he used standard abusive authoritarian methods to impose his ideas of progress for the country. One of those signs of progress was the construction of train tracks. Trains had been invented in 1849 and Guatemala, still depending on mule trails, was behind this kick-start to industrialization. They opened for business in 1880 during Barrios' administration.

Barrios established free, non-clerical, compulsory primary schools, and there is a picture of the classroom on the back of the Q5 bill. He confiscated Catholic church property, for example, using the old convent of Recollección to serve as a

place for military training. He reinstituted freedom of the press, created a constitution, built telegraph lines, railroads, and formed a police force. He expelled the archbishop and foreign Catholic clergy, leaving only 119 priests to serve the entire country, which allowed the growth of local non-clerical leaders, and also invited evangelical missionaries to the country, believing them to be more progressive.

His 12-year administration favored the coffee entrepreneurs and a system of debt peonage to insure available labor from Maya communities. The prosperity of the coffee boom allowed both Guatemala City and Xela expand. Edison's breakthrough on electricity occurred in 1879 and x number of years later, electric lights came to the Guatemalan capital.

Having worn myself out with all this walking, I decided a taxi was in order to get to the main road west, Roosevelt, where I could hop a chicken bus to Antigua. Satisfied with my immersion in most of the 1800s, I decided I would have to return on another day, and head for the Reforma, legacy of the last president in the 18th century who deserves respect for the art and beauty he brought to the city.

After a time lapse, my energy renewed for more exploration of the city's public art, I went in on a chicken bus and made my way to Avenida Reforma, the tree-lined street that separates Zones 9 and 10.

Reina Barrios

José Maria Reina Barrios was Justo Rufino's nephew and after his uncle's death, the new president sent him to Berlin as his representative and then withdrew his credentials, all in an effort to put him on the political sidelines. But he won the next round for the presidency, the first to be elected and take power in a peaceful transition, for which the previous president, Manuel Barrillas, deserves credit. He served from 1892-1898 as a moderate liberal. Having spent several years in Europe, he returned to Guatemala determined to make it more like Paris and to foment this plan commissioned Spanish and Italian artists skilled in statuary to come to Guatemala, as well as a Venezuelan who had studied with Rodin. He laid out the plan for the Paseo de La Reforma, a wide avenue in the Parisian style. He bought from France various animal statues for the avenue—bulls, lion and alligator, fighting boars, deer and panther.

He took down the fountain that had adorned the central park since the time of the colony, and replaced it with a bandstand. Next to it was placed a statue of Cristopher Columbus to commemorate the 400th anniversary of his arrival in the new world. To celebrate the 100 years since independence, in 1921 a statue

of Reyna Barrios galloping on his horse was placed on the Reforma and surrounded by the animals he brought from Europe.

During his administration a contest to create a national anthem resulted in what is sung today. Along with calls to liberty and a readiness to take up arms, a lovely line says the flag is like "a piece of the sky with the whiteness of a cloud attached". The song speaks of resting under the shelter of the crimson and gold wings of the beautiful quetzal and requests "may the native bird that lives on your seal protect your land." Many times I have been moved as a crowd sings this together, hand on heart. One of the most memorable moments was the Independence celebration on a 15th of September when I happened to arrive at the packed central park in Antigua just as the anthem began. I deeply felt my unity with my adopted homeland.

The end of Reina Barrios' administration was not so fortunate. Discontent had emerged over the economy thanks to overextending himself through these extraordinary beautification projects. He was assassinated in 1898 after six years as president by a British/Swiss immigrant either as revenge for his putting down a rebellion in Xela or as part of a power-grab by the subsequent president and his former Minister of Justice, Estrada Cabrera.

This section of the Reforma was just beginning when the 1917 earthquake tore down so much of what had existed for a century in the center of town. It is fair to say, then, that the city we see today has largely been built in the last 100 years.

Toward the end of the 19th century the body of marimba repertoire so treasured today was created. Recently a new Q200 bill was issued, the quetzal perched to face us, the honorees three men who made significant marks on the music of this national instrument. German Alcantera was not only a composer, band leader and director of the national conservatory, the Conservatory was named after him. On the reverse side is an image of the music of one of his compositions, *La Flor del Café*. The chromatic marimba credited to Sebastian Hurtado, and a ghostly image of moon over ruins is one of Valverde's compositions. There are other stand-out composers, and much of the development of the instrument took place in Xela or Quetzaltenango, also a vibrant and growing city in this time. Despite not being on the currency one must acknowledge Paco Perez, since his *Luna de Xelajú* is a perennial favorite, the music heard often, the lyrics well enough known that crowds can sing along.

Moon like a silver gardenia
that I serenade and you become song,
you saw me singing
and now see me crying, in my heartbreak of loss.
Streets bathed with moonlight
the cradle of youth for me
I'm here to sing to my love
to the silver moon of my Xelajù

(Chorus)
Moon of my Xelajú
you knew how to light up
My sorrowful nights
o'er my sweet-faced brunette.

Moon of my Xelajú
you gave inspiration,
the song that I'm singing
is watered with tears from my heart
There won't be another
I love more than you
because you don't reject me
my silver moon, moon of my Xelajù.
.
Moon that gave light to me
in nights of love
you now console all my sorrow
because of a brunette who left me alone
because of a brunette who left me alone.

For further reading:

Handy, Jim. *Gift of the Devil.* A summary of Guatemalan history to 1984 which covers all periods very well, including the chaotic 19th century.

Chapter 6

El Señor Presidente

I walked along the beautiful Reforma Avenue that Reyna Barrios had built, appreciating the layer that he had added to the city. Starting with the monument to Garcia Granados, first president after the 1871 liberal reform, and moving south past the Reina Barrios statue, there is a curving walkway and bike path through this grassy tree-filled area between the cars noisily flowing past on both sides. I crossed paths with others walking or biking, and one skateboarder.

Past the US Embassy I made a stop at the country home that Reina Barrios built for himself along this avenue, now a boutique hotel, admired the statues in the courtyard, and then turned back to the path. For over a century the city has continued to add to its collection of outdoor art, including such luminaries as the founder of the Red Cross. In 1999, on the 100th anniversary of the birth of Miguel Angel Asturias, a statue in honor of this Nobel Prize winner for Literature was placed toward the southern end of the avenue. He faces into the wind, his coat flying, arms flung back, a book in each hand with papers falling out. It is a charming rendition by contemporary artist Max Leiva.

"El Señor Presidente"

Asturias was born in 1899, in Guatemala City, a year after Estrada Cabrera became president. One of Asturias' ancestors came from Spain to Guatemala as Captain General in the 17th century, so his background included this tie to the elite. His parents, a judge and schoolteacher, incurred the wrath of President Estrada Cabrera, and moved to the countryside for five years of Asturias' childhood.

Eventually Asturias would write a book based on the times of this president. After Reina Barrios' assassination, Estrada Cabrera became president for twenty-two years, revising the constitution to stay in office and then controlling each election. I went to hear a lecture about him supposing that surely he had some redeeming qualities. I came out convinced that perhaps his only positive point was completing the railroad that had been started by others, a railway that unified Pacific and Atlantic and that went from Mexico to Honduras. Unfortunately, even that did not work out well, because he gave so many concessions to the American entrepreneur that said entrepreneur was able to create the octopus-like United Fruit Company that had a stranglehold on the Guatemalan economy, turning it into a "banana republic."

Estrada Cabrera seemed to fit the stereotype of an evil dictator perfectly. He not only killed numerous opponents his first year in office, he killed anyone who tried to overthrow him. He sent assassins to Mexico to take care of former president Manuel Barillas who seemed to be planning a revolution. Numerous efforts to overthrow him were unsuccessful, and toward the end, he even bombed Guatemala City to try to hold on. He specialized in controlling everyone through spies, power-struggles, flattery, and manipulation. The president's biographer speculates that he may have been a madman, suffering from severe paranoia. He had two children by marriage and another twelve out of wedlock.

An illegitimate child whose father, a Franciscan brother, did not acknowledge him, he worked on any sense of inferiority by excelling at school, became the mayor of Quetzaltenango, and then a minister in Reyna Barrios' government. His position meant he was next in line for the presidency.

Once he became president, his egotism extended to an extensive renaming of things in his own honor or that of his mother, including the National University, one department named after himself and one after his mother, a municipality, a section of Guatemala City, and the Atlantic port. As soon as he was overthrown, these name changes were revoked.

Another eccentricity were the Temples of Minerva he built throughout the country, promoting a cult to this Roman goddess of wisdom by holding educational festivals in her honor. Part of the honor was for himself, of course, making the festivities last until his birthday. Elsewhere in the country, including Xela, the Minerva monuments are still part of various cityscapes. Photographs of the temple on the northern side of Guatemala City show an imposing building with Roman Columns in a barren landscape and a statue of the goddess. The temple was later destroyed, so now some amusement park rides have replaced it in a park covered with grass and trees. The relief map of Guatemala he commissioned (one more positive accomplishment) is still open and shows the shape of the country and the skill of the engineers who did the topographical work and built it to scale.

He negotiated the naming of an archbishop of his choosing, thereby temporarily resolving conflicts with the Catholic church, perhaps because someone had pointed out to him that the presidents who expelled archbishops had not ended well. Nevertheless, he expelled the apostolic delegate from Rome.

Either the judgment of God or simply bad luck, depending on ones´ point of view, there were continual efforts to overthrow him, a destructive volcanic eruption of Santa Maria in 1902, terrible yellow fever epidemics, and

earthquakes that crumbled major buildings in Guatemala City and elsewhere. The earthquake of 1917 was so severe that numerous major buildings in Guatemala City had to be redone. The National Theater was not reconstructed.

The national assembly finally deposed him, declaring him mentally incompetent. Part of the reason he knew he had to step down is that he had lost the tacit support of the US government, which had, unfortunately, followed a policy of overlooking his insanity. His home, La Palma, now where the municipal stadium is located, was sacked. He was then under house arrest for four years and died.

The *Huelga de Dolores* is an annual protest of social injustices held by students from the University of San Carlos during Lent, dressed as hidden hooded figures. Started in 1898, by Asturias' time he and other students wrote a song, *La Chalana*, which has become part of the annual protests. One of the lines says "our quetzal is frightened by a non-existent ideal". Asturias and other university students had taken an active anti-government role as members of the Unionist Party to revolt against Cabrera.

Asturias also started a novel which he finished in 1933 that explored the impact of dictatorship on society. Based on the Estrada Cabrera regime, *El Señor Presidente* was not published for yet another thirteen years until the political climate was more favorable. A "dictator novel" and one of the first to use the magical realism style that became a mark of modern Latin American writing, it critiques the trickle-down effects on society of such rulers.

Asturias' completed his law thesis in 1923, post-Estrada overthrow, and won the *Mariano Galvez* prize as best University of San Carlos thesis, and another prize as the Law school thesis. He advocated a racially, culturally, linguistically and economically homogenous nation to be created by immigration and intermarriage, preferably from northern European countries. This racial improvement would be a fundamental way of dealing with the Indian problem. He believed enslavement had demeaned the Maya who had become people with limited intelligence, will-power, sensitivity, and poor families; in contrast the *ladinos* who gave Guatemala its energy, but made up only a third of its population. It was a truly racist document.

He co-founded the Universidad Popular de Guatemala to try to make higher education more widely available and more affordable. The institution still exists with this same goal, and for many years was the only alternative to the Public University of San Carlos, until the 1960s when additional private universities were established. Today there are twelve universities in addition to this one.

Guatemalans in Paris

Shortly thereafter, Asturias went to London to study economics. He saw the Maya pieces in the British Museum, and this started a process of re-evaluating the Maya that continued when he moved to Paris in September. Some of his changing perspectives appear in the columns he wrote. His influence and popularity through his writing as a correspondent for *El Imparcial*, were evident when he made a three month visit to Guatemala. Half of the 440 articles written by Asturias from 1924-1933 that have been collected and published take political, social, economic, cultural, and educational issues of Guatemala as their theme. His commentaries on the Maya are relatively infrequent and negative, for example, referring to them as an ignorant mass in contrast to the semi-civilized *ladinos*.

After two years under the influence of scholars who respected the Maya, he started repudiating the ideas of his thesis and decrying Guatemala's disdain and ignorance of its own culture. Asturias' teacher at the Sorbonne was Georges Raynaud, French translator of the *Popol Vuh*. Asturias and a Mexican student did a Spanish translation based on Raynaud's French version in 1926, and published it the following year. He continued writing articles for the Guatemalan paper *El Imparcial* and attended a journalists' congress in Cuba, made a trip to Guatemala and translated the *Anales of the Cakchiqueles*.

Woody Allen's movie *Midnight in Paris* whimsically captures the dynamic creativity of Paris in the 1920s, evoking the air of surrealism that so influenced Asturias' emerging literary writing. He was in conversation with surrealist writers such as James Joyce in the vibrant intellectual culture at that time. Artists such as Picasso were interested in and experimenting with primitive art.

The Guatemalan artist Carlos Mérida was already in Paris, and he and Asturias became friends and started careers as the Guatemalan *avant garde* in visual and literary arts. The artists Reyna Barrios had taken to Guatemala had trained others, including in some cases, their own sons, and these became the foundation for an international art culture. One of these young artists of Italian descent, Carlos Valenti, became friends with the young artist from Xela born of mixed Spanish/K'iche' parentage, Carlos Mérida. The two of them went to Paris, learned from Picasso and other Parisian artists of this dynamic period. They also met Diego Rivera, the Mexican muralist also studying in Paris. Valenti despaired when he lost his eyesight and committed suicide, a crushing blow to his friend Mérida.

In 1930 Asturias published *Leyendas de Guatemala.* In this masterwork he combined the influences of surrealism, primitivism, his increased knowledge of Maya mythology, stories he had heard in childhood, and an emphasis on how language sounds. This book still commands the attention of literary scholars who see the effort to combine oral and written story, Maya and ladino culture, the primitive and modern, and a sense of what Guatemala is today, given its Maya and colonial history. When I first bought a copy of the book, I found the text completely bewildering. Perhaps it is a sign of some increasing acculturation that it now seems understandable and compelling, a vision of the country that no one had previously offered, a creative and completely innovative attempt to merge Maya, *ladino*, and the elite European/white identity into something distinctly Guatemalan. The year after publication, the book won the Silla Monsegur prize as the best Spanish-American publication in France.

In 1932 Asturias traveled to Egypt and Palestine and finished the manuscript of *El Señor Presidente,* which he had begun ten years before as a short story. He also published a story in French which would eventually become the sixth section of *Hombres de Maiz.*

Meanwhile, in Guatemala President Orellana had set the nation on a solid financial footing with the creation of the Quetzal as monetary unit on a par with the dollar. He is pictured on the Q1 bill, and his finance minister is pictured on the Q50 bill, with an image of the burgeoning coffee industry printed on the back. One of his major accomplishments that marked the city of Guatemala was the building of a race track to the south of the city. Today one can still see the elegant horses with glimmering coats being jumped over obstacles on a course. The old race stands, yellow and starting to fade, face the road that replaced the track. This is lined with a series of modern stone sculptures that lead to a modern, busy airport. On the other side of the equestrian school is the zoo, including ample spaces for the elephants, giraffes, tigers, jaguars, and even penguins. Behind that is a spectacular children's museum.

In the midst of the worldwide economic depression in 1932, President Orellana died of a heart attack. In the power struggle which ensued, a successful *finquero* who had held political positions under Estrada Cabrera and been effective in managing the yellow fever epidemic in his area, gathered support and was elected president. Jorge Ubico Castañeda, yet another liberal president ruled for twelve years and left his mark.

Jorge Ubíco

My next stop served as a place to recall both Ubico and Asturias. It is reasonably easy to get around Guatemala City in the green metro buses, and I headed down to the central park and another place of note in the life of Asturias—the café in the commercial center where presumably he spent a fair amount of time after returning from France. The café claims him, and claims Che as well, with their photos on a little banner.

Across the large paved plaza is the distinctive green-tinged National Palace built by Ubico. I enjoy re-visiting the palace and particularly appreciate the quirky information about Ubico's preference for the number five (letters in each of his name), which fortunately makes for pleasing design, and his strange egotism in having his thumbprint on all the brass door-openers, his obsession with clocks, the lights signaling whether he was in the building or not. I appreciate the beauty of the the wood floors made of red mahogany from the Peten, and Guapinol, a white wood unique to the country. The beautiful murals, sculptures, wooden carving and exquisite stained glass gave leading artists important opportunities to leave their marks. What appears to be green stone is actually plaster mixed with bronze. It is in this beautiful building that there is a statue of two left hands to commemorate the peace accords of 1996, and each day a white rose is placed there as a celebration of the peace.

Miguel Angel Asturias had returned to Guatemala and found the environment repressive. Ubico had closed the Universidad Popular, and Asturias was in a creatively suppressed time of his life, only writing a few poems, unsure enough to publish his critique of dictatorship, *El Señor Presidente,* which lay quietly in manuscript, biding its time. He became director of the official paper, *El Liberal Progresista,* and after two years he went to work at the paper for which he had written so many columns, *El Imparcial.* He then tried radio news, which became popular. In 1939 he married and had a son, Rodrigo, who would one day become a guerrilla commander.

Jorge Ubíco extensive building in Guatemala City added yet another layer of neoclassical architecture. Today there is still nostalgia for the time of Ubíco, in part because the country was less urbanized and more pastoral. Even more, in a country struggling with a murder rate of 40 per 100,000 inhabitants, his 2.4 per 100,000 murder rate looks incredibly attractive.

Taking power in the midst of the depression, coffee production had been hit hard, reducing the price by half and the volume by half, and so bringing in only one quarter of previous export income. He decided on a course of internal development, rather than relying on the export economy, and his method was

to build roads throughout this very poorly connected country. The result: over 1000 villages became part of the national network.

His extensive building program included the beautifully adorned ceilings in the building in which the modern art museum is located. This museum complex near the airport and zoo was at that time a Club outside of town. He had the "Torre del Reformador," a mini-Eiffel tower constructed on what was then something of the outskirts of town, in honor of the 100th birthday of Justo Rufino Barrios. He built the lovely Post office building in Zone 1 which has an arch across the street reminiscent of the more famous landmark arch in Antigua.

His accomplishments, real and lasting though they may be, were carried out with the iron fist that many Guatemalan's still admire. A communist led rural revolt in El Salvador let him to brand all his opponents as communists and to exile or execute many. His coffee plantation supporters and the United Fruit company benefited from the network of roads into formerly isolated areas. He centralized power and abolished debt peonage, but replaced it with an onerous vagrancy laws that required the Maya to work on *fincas*. The Ley de la Vagancia, #1996: if you had less than 4 manzanas of land you were required to work 150 days a years for someone else and could be imprisoned if you did not have the signature from a landowner. His Decree #1816 legalized business owners to kill those who refused to comply with the new law. By passing a law requiring a two quetzal tax per person, he was able to finance road construction. Today, that hardly sounds onorous since it is the price of a bus-fare or a pack of gum, but in that time a quetzal was a week's labor. Hence, those who could not pay had to contribute two weeks a year of work.

Ubico made considerable concessions to foreign interests. He granted the United Fruit company total exemption from internal taxation in Guatemala, duty-free importation of all necessary goods and a guarantee of the low wage of 50 cents per day. The company paid one penny tax on each stalk of bananas taken out of the country. United Fruit also had a monopoly on the country's railroads and charged the highest freight rates in the world. It owned Guatemala's only Atlantic port, so had nearly complete authority over the nation's international commerce with its fleet of more than fifty freighters. It also ran the country's telegraph service.

Ubico admired Napoleon and wished to be considered the Napoleon of Central America. He also admired Adolf Hitler, thought he realized that geographically he must side with the US, and made Guatemala the first Latin American country to declare war on Germany as soon as the US declared war. He collaborated with interning and seizing property of German Guatemalans suspected as Nazi sympathizers.

Even Ubico's admirers today acknowledge that while his results may have been admirable, some of his methods were harsh and would result in a backlash, something that even happened during his time. In Nebaj Ubico was resented for his labor laws and inserting more *ladino* power in the community. When on June 21, 1936 the Ixiles were summoned to show their proof of work on *fincas*, they disagreed, saying they had enough land of their own to be exempt and strongly opposed the *ladino* leadership. The next day, 150 people were arrested and an order from Ubico said, "Punish the Indians of Nebaj severely who promoted this disorder. Read this and Do it, Ubico." Seven leaders were shot and one imprisoned. This event, still remembered 70 years later, resulted in the creation of "The Day of Ixil Dignity."

A move to overthrow Ubico came from the rising middle class, particularly teachers. They were led by urban middle-class people who wanted a more equitable social order, though they maintained some of the traditional prejudices against Maya. A growing cry for reform, demonstrations, his suspension of freedom of speech, and his ill health caused him to step down and flee the country. After a brief interim, on October 20, 1944 a new government was formed.

Discontent with the Ubico regime led to something entirely new in Guatemala's history when Juan José Arévalo, a philosophy professor who had been in exile, was elected president. Heavily influenced by Roosevelt's speeches during World War II, President Arévalo hoped to implement a Rooseveltian new deal, a spiritual socialism, throughout Latin America. Initially, land reform was not as central an issue as relief from foreign domination of the economy.

In 1946 after Ubico's fall, Asturias' felt free to publish his critique of dictatorship, *El Señor Presidente* which had languished in manuscript during the Ubico regime. The publication of *El Señor Presidente* by an Argentinian press resulted in a broader reputation throughout Latin America.

For further reading:

Prieto, Reni. *Miguel Angel Asturias's Archaeology of Return.*

Chapter 7

Creating Beauty

After the Reforma and the Central Park I took a quick trip on the green metro buses (which cost only Q1 and effectively loop all through the center of the city). I got off at the Civic Center in Zone 4, just below the old train station. Here is the Mayor's office, the central Bank, the Supreme Court, and the National Social Security offices. In front of the later is a memorial to the president who replaced Ubico after the 1944 revolution, and initiated what is called the "Ten Years of Spring." A small bust of Juan José Arevalo seems quite appropriate in a space that would not exist if it were not for his efforts. This beautiful and artistic complex is in so many ways, his legacy.

Juan José Arévalo

In the list of Guatemalan presidents after the Central American Federation, there were 14 cited as liberal, 6 as conservative, and 2 as unionist. From October 20th after Ubíco´s overthrow, to March 15th, 1945 when Arévalo took over, there was a military junta. But Arévalo and his successor Arbenz are identified as something new: the Revolutionary Action Party.

Initially clergy approved of the new government. But the possibility of competition existed since both church and state desired social justice and material well-being, but saw different means of reaching those goals. Archbishop Rossell, for example, attempted to form unions controlled by the church where the worker's situation would improve, but would still meet the needs of the owners, and these unions were formed under the auspices of the Catholic Action movement.

New government policies included such things as the creation of a social security system, prohibition of child labor, more women's rights, research institutes, and settlement of the Petén. Also, support for Israel as a new nation. Jorge Garcia Granados, a descendent of Miguel of the Q10 bill, was the Guatemalan representative to the United Nations, and part of the 11-country commission for investigating the situation in Palestine and making recommendations, lobbying others to pass the UN resolution, and casting Guatemala´s vote along with the US to recognize Israel as a new nation. There has been a special relationship between the countries ever since.

Adorning the City

By the time of the 1944 revolution, the city had the beautifully crafted National Palace, the mini-Eiffel tower, some statuary along the Avenida Reforma,

various parks, the railway station at the Plaza Barrios, and the graceful buildings near the present-day airport. A burst of artistry was yet to come in the formation of the Civic Center.

When Arévalo took the presidency, one of the projects of the new administration was to sponsor study-abroad for young artists and when they returned to Guatemala, the art scene flourished. The government projects initiated by the springtime governments, such as the Bank of Guatemala, a Social Security health system, a reformed court system, and a mortgage bank, all needed more space.

When the city was first built, because of the instability of the Central American Federation of which it was a part with consequent wars, one of the concerns was the security of the city. Ravines and hills protected it in the north, east and west, but the road coming from the unprotected south motivated the building of the fort of San José. Today the National Theater is on that site, and this marks the southern end of Zone 1. The public buildings of the municipality, court, and bank go toward the east, and up to the old train station built at the end of the 1800s. The Civic Center includes Supreme Court, Municipality of the city, National Theater, Bank of Guatemala, and the tourist building, its size an indicator of the importance of tourism in the economy.

The Civic center in part replaced an old prison, and continued the expansion of the City toward the south. Just as the Maya lords of the forest had hired architects and artists to adorn their major building projects, these artists volunteered to put modernist, surrealist, cubist glyphs on these new skyscrapers. They borrowed Mayan and colonial imagery, mixed it with the international schools of art, and created something uniquely Guatemalan. Just as the lavender blooming jacaranda trees soften the jagged edged and evidences of poverty in the city, artists have adorned it with affection, and much is concentrated here.

These giants—Carlos Mérida, Roberto Gonzalez Goyrí, Guillermo Grajeda Meno, and Dagoberto Vázquez Castañeda—left their fingerprints all over the city in interior and exterior murals. The statuary of Rodolfo Galleoti Torres, son of one of the Italian artists of Reyna Barrios' time, is ubiquitous. His first work included sculptures for the National Palace, and one of his last works is a statue of Pope John Paul II that is at the end of Avenida de las Americas, installed in 1985.

The Generation of 1940

Perhaps I may be forgiven for having a favorite artist among all of them all, Roberto Gonzalez Goyri. He did the façade of the Bank of Guatemala in an abstract design, and used a more stylized set of recognizable Maya and Spanish sculpted figures on the walkway across that street. Behind the Mortgage Bank (Crédito Hipotecario) there are lovely scenes of commerce, also in bas relief. But it is the bright colors, movement, and joy in his paintings that particularly captivate me. The Asociación Gonzalez Goyrí established by his daughter made a video describing his career, full of beautiful images of his painting, images of his sculptures, and views of him walking beside his public art. One of his teachers was Rafael Yela Gunther, son of one of the Reyna Barrios' artists, and best known for his statue of Justo Rufino Barrios at the train station.

Gonzalez Goyrí and his fellow artists studying in the Guatemalan Bellas Artes program and serving as assistants for art in the National Palace became known as the "Generación de 1940." He says they were stunned to hear of the overthrow of Ubico and the start of the Revolutionary government. It was like "opening a window to the sun." He and others applied to the new government for scholarships abroad and he went to New York and studied in a school for sculptors. One can sense how out of place and uneasy he felt at first, but his four years there served to inspire more artistic boldness in his own work, a challenge to the more classical education he had received to that point.

A telling moment was seeing Picasso's "Guernica" exhibited, which at first he did not care for. As he grew in his understanding of the painting, he decided that great art makes demands on us and takes us time to see and resolved to do the same. His personal artistic style always drew something from his Guatemalan roots, and he identifies the country with bright colors. His return to the country was challenging, however. At first there were no jobs for artists and he took one working in a hotel. But eventually he found his place, not only managing exhibits for the US Embassy, but participating in the new work on the Civic Center, and his vivid designs added to the country's visual dynamic.

In the National Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology hangs a long bright mural going from scenes from the *Popol Vuh* to the Conquest to the expansion of learning and then the intrusion of different religious traditions. The statue of Maya hero Tecún Uman on the boulevard was his as well. In addition to these monumental works, he did an extraordinary number of illustrations for books and magazines, paintings, and even exquisite Christmas cards. Since he began his art studies at the age of 14, his nearly 70 years of artistic production left many striking pieces, ending with his death in 2007.

One of his companions from the days of working at Bellas Artes and on the stained glass of the National Palace, was Dagoberto Vazquez. Dagoberto's international scholarship was to Chile. He also worked on sculpted pieces on the municipal building in the civic center and on a mural on the Supreme court. Not only a sculptor, but a painter, his mural of indigenous people in the lobby of the National Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology is a beautiful, but very different view, than that of Gonzalez Goyri around the corner from it. Guillermo Grajeda Mena, also of the "Generación de 40" studied in Chile and did a mural on the Municipal Building as part of the civic center work, and much other work, including the mural in the Academia de Geografía e Historia. Carlos Mérida's contribution were the mosaics inside the Muncipal building, bright abstract cubist imagery of the themes of the country. In the courtyard outside in front of the Social Security building, he made yet another mosaic of the landscapes of the country above a pool of water. It has slowly been damaged by the elements, but the quetzal in flight is still clear.

The return of architects like Roberto Ayicena who has also studied abroad, and the opportunity to work together, artists and architects, resulted in a space of immense creativity. Together they developed new techniques using formed concrete, which was both modern and inexpensive, and pouring this within wooden molds. The marks of the wood are a discernible part of the abstract design of the Bank of Guatemala designed by Goyrí.

Carlos Mérida

The abstract mosaics of Carlos Mérida are not only along the side of the IGSS building in the outside courtyard by a fountain, they adorn the inside of the municipal building in a splash of color and shape that represents the encounter of cultures.

While in France in the early 1900s, Mérida had adopted cubism as his preferred style and returned to Guatemala and Mexico where he continued to work with this the style for rest of his life. There is now a modern art museum named in his honor which holds a collection not only of his work, but of all the 20th century artists of note in Guatemala, with excellent historical background on the sociocultural context of the artists. Four streams of art began in the early 20th century that continue until today: avant-garde painting and sculpture that takes international movements and often incorporates uniquely Guatemalan themes, realistic landscapes and cityscapes, portraits with a focus on indigenous dress, and naif painting that takes any theme from Maya rural life.

One of Mérida's projects was a book of paintings of the indigenous dress in the country. In a stylized way, he captured this distinctive aspect of the country

which had arisen over the centuries. Today the fact that Guatemala is a nation of artists can be seen in the numerous artisan markets, and even on the streets of so many municipalities. Each municipality has traditionally had a distinctive form of dress and though clearly styles do change over time, most of the women and often the men choose the same styles and colors. A more realistic painter, Carmen Peterson, traveled the country documenting the clothing of the 1940s when she was painting. Her paintings, as well as many weavings, older and contemporary are beautifully displayed in the Ixchel Museum at the Universidad Francisco Marroquín.

The construction of the Civic Center took place in the 50s, and 60s. A series of presidents from the military or political parties arising from the military carried out four year terms in succession. Ydígoras Fuentes (1958-1963) authorized the construction of the national theater.

Efraín Recinos

There is an easy walkway from the Municipal Building to cross the street and then climb around to the National Theater. This is on the hill that at one point served as a fort, but was badly damaged during the revolution to install Arévalo. The idea for something more grand than the old Teatro Colóm took a while to build up steam. But the result is a stunning, blue and white complex on the hill, named the Centro Cultural Miguel Angel Asturias, and with a large bust of him in white at the entrance to the theater. The artist who designed it, Efrain Recinos, was younger, but contributed to the façade of the mortgage bank, and had designed the exterior

The artists from the Generation of 1940 were joined by a younger one who had not studied abroad, Efrain Recinos, who first designed the exterior of the National Library. He was commissioned to design the front of the mortgage bank in the civic complex. His extraordinary design for the national theater complex, the Centro Cultural Miguel Angel Asturias, was built on the hill of the former fort destroyed during the overthrow of Ubíco. The design is uniquely modern and Guatemalan, formed from an abstract jaguar (or possibly ship or spaceship, he was willing for the viewer to impose their own thoughts). Even the outdoor places to sit are abstractions of indigenous women.

In Antigua at the Cerro de Santo Domingo, a collection of modern art, conference center, chapel, several small museums, restaurant and zipline, has been added by the hotel. Recinos contributed some of his outdoor sculptures such as those of tourists or travelers getting into their car, his own old VW that was his mode of transport when building the National Theater, some mosaics lining a pathway, and one of his large beautifully stylized wooden carvings of a quetzal.

A prolific architect, muralist, painter and sculptor, he died in 2011 at the age of 83, having left a legacy of uniquely Guatemalan work. While all of his images are striking, my favorites are the portraits of famed artists he did in the National Convervatory of Music in the early 90s, designed to improve the acoustics: Bizet, the Mona Lisa and Leonardo, Vivaldi, the Guatemalan girl who died of love, Vaughn Williams, Cervantes, Chopin, Isadora Duncan, Igor Stravinski and nearly 75 more, he drew from the world heritage of culture, musicians, dancers, singers. He included Guatemalan performers, writers, sculptors, many of whom were friends. And of course, Miguel Angel Asturias has a portrait here as well. The portraits are original and charming.
The result is that Guatemala City is a space rich with public art scattered amidst traffic, noise, commerce, old and new malls, taxis, the updated zoo, the renovated airport, universities, and even planned communities. New sculptures have been added along the road to the airport and within the airport. A large memorial to celebrate the peace has been added along 7th avenue, an enlargement of the sculpture now in the Peace Patio of the National Palace. Sculptures along Avenida de la Reforma and Avenida de las Americas have continued to be added during the past 50 years, showing an on-going enthusiasm for public art on the part of the municipality.

The legacy of distinctively Guatemalan works of art are an important part of the heritage of the country, a treasure that continues to inspire new generations of artists. Many of the visual artists have celebrated the quetzal: Mérida in mosaic in the patio of the Civic Center, Efrain Recinos in a 25-foot wooden carving of the quetzal in flight in the Cerro Santo Domingo collection, and a delightful feathered serpent made of bicycle tires in the Art Museum. Gonzalez Goyri did a mural for the Instituto Guatemalteco Americano that unites the images of the countries: *The Eagle and the Quetzal.* Gonzalez Goyri, Carlos Mérida, and Rudolfo Galleoti all received the country's highest honor, the *Orden del Quetzal.*

Curruchich

The leading primitive painter, Andrés Curruchich, a Maya who became prominent with his naif style, started a rich stream of Mayan painters that continue to innovate today. Born in the Kaqchikel village of San Juan Comalapa in 1891, he began to paint in the 1920s, was exhibiting in Guatemalan fairs and by 1950 was known in the City and abroad. A permanent exhibition of his work at the Ixchel Museum, interprets local village life with insight and humor. Awarded the *Orden del Quetzal*, the highest honor in the country, he also left art as a legacy in his community. Today perhaps 500 artists work in the town, many trained by him, and many have gained international reputations themselves.

Music

It was not only the visual arts that flourished in the spring. A great musical figure, Jorge Sarmientos, also began his career starting with the marimba, he went on to study saxophone and clarinet in the National Conservatory. He studied in France and Argentina to improve his knowledge as a pianist, conductor, and composer. His first composition in 1953 "Cinco estampas cackchiqueles" and his last in 1994 to commemorate the destruction of Hiroshima, framed prolific and interesting work. His over 100 compositions included something on David and Bathsheba, three ballets, choruses, a work in honor of Ché Guevara, something based on the poem on Tecún Uman by Asturias, and many others. Director of the Guatemalan symphony from 1972 to 1991, he composed a work to commemorate the earthquake of 1976.

A Nation of Artists

Almost any visitor to Guatemala is enchanted with the bright color and design of the weavings available in any market, or is enthusiastic to find a piece of jade jewelry- Longer term visitors are likely to select beautiful pottery, wood, basketry, ironwork, or leather. The nation is one of craftsmen and artists, engaged in a continuous project of how to make something new, something beautiful.

As I got back on the metro to head for the Trebol where I could get on a bus to Antigua, I continued to delight in the panorama of ordinary work-a-day movement of people in something that is artistic in itself. That kaleidoscope of interaction and smiles and selling and buying and traveling and reading and talking and listening and laughing that makes up the city.

Chapter 8

Trip to Ixil Country

One simply cannot say one is seeing Guatemala by going only to the City, Antigua, and other tourist spots. The country has so many distant small villages that there is considerable merit in looking at the country from one of these small places. The beauty of having been raised in Ixil country and having lived there as young adults, is that we not only have a natural connection to Nebaj and Chajul, but also to the small village of Ilom to the north of Ixil country.

Another friend who had fallen in love with Ixil country wrote a beautiful coffee-table style guidebook as a labor of love and with the hope of attracting more tourism to this relatively more isolated area of the country. Suzanna Place started with a particular interest in the splashy weavings of the three Ixil communities, Nebaj, Chajul and Cotzal. As she started visiting and buying from the weavers and learning to weave herself, she was inspired to write *A Guatemalan Journey Among the Ixil Maya*. She tracked us down in the course of her research and we became friends with her and her husband.

Her husband, Scott Stoll, a talented artist, had not only shared the project with her, his roots in Guatemala included the experience of Peace Corp on the dryer southern side of the Cuchumatanes mountain range. Having lived in Sacapulas in the late 70s, he enthusiastically joined Suzanna in the exploration of the northern side of the mountains. He and Suzanna shared enthusiasm for serving the marginalized that came from years in Africa with Peace Corps and other development agencies.

Our mutual delight in Ixil country led us to plan to drive to Ilom and make a visit to recently restored ruins. Because of the several hours we would be driving on dirt road, we decided a double-cab pick-up would be best. Getting the rental early in the morning, we headed out once more along the road to Lake Atitlan. Instead of turning off toward the Lake or toward Xela, we took the turn-off at Los Encuentros toward Chichicastenango. Twisting and turning through the mountains, we arrived at this town that has been a popular market with tourists since the 1940s. The beauty of so much color on Thursdays and Sundays contrasts with the ordinariness of other days, and this was an ordinary day and we chose not to stop.

A half hour or so beyond Chichi through more twists and turns is the departmental capital of Quiché. It is a bustling town so typical of towns throughout the country, with vigorous commerce in multicolored buildings. Commerce in the mobile form of market stalls blocks the downtown streets

around the cathedral. Everything is moving, with lots of buses and traffic and people walking.

We chose to find a cooler, more symbolic, more beautiful space in which to enjoy our picnic, the ruins of Gumarcaj/Utatlán just outside the town. Climbing up a rise we parked at the entrance where there is a small museum. I was fascinated to see a sign giving rules for carrying out ceremonies, including the presentation of ones' identification card as a legitimate Maya spiritual guide, with several official government agencies calling for respect for these ceremonies.

We walked among the trees hung with Spanish moss to the grassy center of the old plaza and ate our picnic across from the tallest old ruin, blackened with smoke from Maya ceremonies. The ancientness, the recollection that here Alvarado defeated a Quiché plan to entrap him, the ongoing prayers of Maya spiritual guides reminded me of how often the striking history of the country is part of today's world. We sat and ate our picnic meals, and then enjoyed taking photos and just being outdoors. After this lovely break, we continued out of Quiché toward the north.

In Steve's childhood and our young adulthood, this is where the road became dust and dirt and caused the journey to Nebaj to be a nine-hour drive. Now, all these years later, we whizzed over an excellent asphalt road, and could count on a 5 or 6 hour drive. We drove on through the more dry and dusty plain leading to the town of Sacapulas at the Rio Negro. This is where Scott had served in the Peace Corps in the late 1970s and we passed his old white plastered adobe home with a blue door. Now on a busy street with many houses made of block, in his day the house was the only one below the church and surrounded by cornfields.

We then started the steep climb, curving up the Cuchumatanes mountains with vast views to the south, multiple volcanic peaks dimly visible in the distance. We passed the turnoff that we had taken east on our previous journey, drove the well-paved road, and passed towns that clearly have remittance money coming back from the US. We arrived once more on the other side of the mountains, climbing down into the Nebaj valley.

Nebaj

Once in Nebaj, Scott and Susanna dropped us off at our friend's home where we are accustomed to stay, and they headed to stay with close friends of their. Our friends Xhun and Xhiv are enthusiastic and educated co-workers on Ixil language projects, and their home has plenty of guest space for us. We enjoy the meals in their kitchen with its traditional look and traditional food, the

engaging conversation, and then friends who come by. Their extended family, including two grandchildren, makes for a lively home, as does their youngest talkative adopted daughter, as well as their menagerie. Peacocks, ducks, a ??, roosters, etc. Never a dull moment!

The impact of the conflict on Xhun's life was extraordinary. Sent out of the country for his own safety after several family members were killed, he went first to Mexico, then studied in Switzerland, and finally in France. There he obtained not only an undergraduate degree, but a graduate degree in Bilingual Education from the Sorbonne. His home attracts many enthusiastic educated Ixiles who want to retain their traditional language and culture in a modern world.

A visit to the home of Mike and Terri McComb for supper included the chance to visit with Tomás Guzaro as well. He and Terri collaborated on his autobiography, *Escaping the Fire,* that gives a remarkable insight into Ixil culture, the period of the conflict, and the changes being brought by modernization.

Scott, Susanna and I made a side trip the next day to Chajul, a mere half an hour to on still nicely paved road. The capital of the next municipality that stretches far to the north was up until recently a much less modernized place. Suddenly not only is there a refurbished plaza, a more elegant market and improved roads, there are all manner of houses being built of block, some with distinctive remittance architecture. A founder of an NGO later told us that when she went there ten years ago there were only two landline telephones in toMcwn, a step up, of course, from the days of telegrams. But now nearly everyone has a cellphone, even if they have not modernized their stoves, and cook on the dirt floor.

Our destination was the *Nuevos Horizontes* project which gives scholarship and support to Ixil youth in high school. There is also an impressive library available to the public. We enjoyed meeting some of the students who were having a special meeting, enjoyed meeting with the founder and other staff. We had a particularly delicious traditional meal in the home of one of the parents.

We enjoyed our photo-taking in the brightly colorful new market, a sophisticated improvement to the center of town. There is nostalgia in recalling both Nebaj and Chajul as charming quiet towns with adobe walls, tile roofs, horses and mules walking through the streets, and children playing in the yards. Chajul still has enough of the old-fashioned look to be appealingly photogenic: carved pillars and doors, women siting on their porches weaving, ground corn carried on heads, firewood on mules or on backs with a headstrap,

surrounding greenery, the tall centrally located white church. The stylized birds on *huipiles* are matched by the long pink thread earrings which swing gracefully with the pom-poms on the ends of their hair tied and wrapped around their heads.

In the evening we were able to have supper with Juan Clemente and family, one of Susanna's collaborators on her book. He was delighted to share his memories of Steve's parents who had helped him with scholarships when middle school and high school study involved leaving and living in Quiché, and university study involved living in Guatemala City. Now all of these levels are available in Nebaj, but as one of the first Ixil university graduates opportunities to work with international agencies opened up for him, and his gratitude for education is profound.

Universities

The entire educational landscape has changed completely. Now there are gradeschools throughout all the villages, multiple middle-schools and high-schools in the three main towns, and university extensions available in each town.

For so many years university education was only available through San Carlos and only in Guatemala City and Quetzaltenango. After the creation of the Universidad de San Carlos in 1676, the private sector was finally able to start accredited institutions after the counter-revolution of 1952: Rafael Landivar, 1961 sponsored by the Jesuits; Del Valle, 1966, emerging out of the secular American prep school; Mariano Galvez, 1966 from the Presbyterian church; Francisco Marroquin, 1971, also secular in outlook. Since the 1990s, seven more universities have been founded and the established institutions have expanded into cities throughout the country with extension programs. None of the campuses have residential spaces, but some, like Rafael Landivar have beautifully laid out campuses, interesting architecture, and of course, all the dynamism of intellectual inquiry.

Now many of these institutions have extension programs in departmental capitals, particularly Landivar and Mariano Galvez.

The latest innovation is the creation of the Ixil University, an institution with accreditation from Nicaragua that focuses on practical application of research within the Ixil communities.

Juil

The next morning, leaving Steve in Nebaj to meet with various co-workers, Suzanna, Scott and I hopped in the pick-up and headed out. We picked up Juan Clemente and his wife who wanted to go with us as far as Juil, a site where Juan had helped rebuilt a traditional Mayan prayer site in a European Union-funded project.

We drove out north of town, now on an unpaved road through lovely green foliage alternating between valleys and climbing up into pines, and seeing vast stretches of green mountains. We passed a spot where we were told that a major confrontation took place between guerrillas and army. Now it is just a beautiful valley full of trees with a stream running through it.

The next stop was Juil, an important ceremonial site, and we easily found the prayermaker´s center, covered well with a reconstructed house. Here anthropologist Nick Colby had observed the annual new year's ceremony and described it in his book *The Daykeeper*. Names for the role of Mayan religious leaders have varied from daykeeper to shaman to Mayan priest to now, the preferred, spiritual guide. All of this is part of Mayan traditional spirituality, and respect for time, creation, and the creator.

I doubt any of us will ever forget climbing through multiple barbed wire fences and across lovely fields of trees, pasture or corn, looking for the Juil ruins. Nearly giving up, Juan persisted as we rested and assured us he had finally found these elusive ruins. After climbing a muddy path up the hill, we came to a cornfield, dry barren stalks at this season, and were able to see unrestored, deteriorated and pillaged mounds.

Driving back into the town of Juil, we went to a small lodge that is hoping for tourism and is managed by some of Juan Clemente's friends. They graciously invited us for a delicious soup meal, and after more conversation, Juan Clemente and Irma said good-bye and Susanna, Scott and I headed further north.

As we left Juil I could recall when we walked the trail that went straight up to the top of the mountain and down rather than along the side as vehicles could now go. I remembered the wind speaking to the tall old trees at the top, the coolness of what could be called a cloud forest with its ferns and orchids.

Countryside

Now we continued for several more hours through beautiful forests with mountain landscapes and firs, pines and cedars. I looked for the bright indigo

or cobalt blue birds we used to see on the trails, the *xaras,* or jays, but did not see them. Chajul's land used to stretch all the way to the Mexican border. Starting in the 1970s as settlers were given land in the lower flat lands of the Ixcan nestled up against the border, the jungle slowly became farm and pasture land, and eventually the population grew large enough to split apart from Chajul and become a separate municipality. Up until 2007 or so, there was a mule trail, a path suitable for walking on, not a road suitable for vehicles. The option was a long day's walk to and from Chajul. Now we drove in our four-wheel drive vehicle on the dirt road, occasionally passing through a small village or seeing one across the valley, roofs visible through foliage on the hillsides. The mountains and valleys continually tempted us to stop and take pictures.

I reflected on how different and how much more comfortable a four-wheel drive pick-up was compared to my trip to Ilom the previous year. When I went by public transportation, it took six hours to Nebaj on a chicken bus with a live turkey in a bag rolling around at my feet or on the lap of the woman in front of me, its bright eyes staring. After an overnight in Nebaj, it was four more hours to Ilom. We were 40 people crammed into a 20 passenger van dashing over the gravel road. Christian praise music blared much of the way, and I listened to all the chatting in Ixil, understanding some of it. At one point some of the passengers had to get out and walk so the van could labor up the hill. At another point we all had to get out because there had been a landslide and we precariously slushed through the mud so the van could creep carefully across. After accomplishing our agenda we had stayed part of the night, wakened by the blaring morning bus honking its horn, and leaving at 3 a.m. for our return to Nebaj.

Of course even that was nothing compared to the nine hour trips to Nebaj in the 1970s, two more hours to Chajul and two days of walking to Ilom we did multiple times, a few times with our little daughter on Steve's back. The road was completed in 2008, and now, while a bumpy ride, public transportation is available. But in our double-cab pick-up, it was not even particularly bumpy and we enjoyed the landscapes and the conversation, stopping often for another opportunity to take pictures of the expansive landscape.

For more reading:

Guzaro, Tomás and Terri McComb. *Escaping the Fire: How an Ixil Maya Pastor Led His People to Safety in the Guatemalan Holocaust.* A remarkable story well-told of the life of this Ixil leader.

Place, Susanna. *Guatemala Journey Among the Ixil Maya.* A combination of guidebook, history, and personal story with spectacular coffee-table pictures.

Chapter 9

Coffee Finca

Coffee Plantations

We arrived at the turn-off to the largest of the coffee plantations in the vicinity. As we drove up the hill and got closer to the entrance, we saw weathered fences—two long boards across the upright posts, zigzagging gracefully up the hill. The beauty of the green hills and the sky and the fence on a fine day inspired yet more picture taking. As we arrived at the entrance, the fence was literally the iconic white picket fence.

At the chain closing the opening, the guard agreed to call the administration to give permission for us to enter, something he graciously did. He had managed the place since 1985 and cautiously took stock of our intentions. We drove in past the building that presumably holds processing machinery, past the cement outdoor spaces for drying coffee, past an old abandoned grader slightly overgrown with weeds, through a stream, and up the hill. We passed the airstrip, saw the Catholic church on top of the hill, drove by the humble plank walls and lamina roofs of homes and stores.

As we drove elsewhere on the *finca* we admired the long leaves on the stalks of the cardamom plants, and found the state of the coffee a little dreary, perhaps from a recent attack of coffee rust. Since the *finca* has won numerous international prizes for its coffee, the state of some of these plants seemed particularly sad. The humble plank homes of the workers contrasted with the concrete building for administration and coffee processing, and even some guest houses on the hill.

A previous visitor to this finca was the American anthropologist Jackson Stewart Lincoln. He spent November 20-29, 1939 here and in surroundings villages part of a year of fieldwork. He traveled with the Ixil area priest, Padre Jordán Fernández, a conservative Spanish Catholic. During Padre Jordan's career he clashed so badly with the saint societies that the Ixil sent a delegation to complain he was an evangelical. An Episcopalian anthropologist was, for the priest, a dubiously acceptable travel companion. For Lincoln, however, the association built some trust with those he met.

His host at the finca was Lisandro Gordillo and he visited another nearby finca run by Swiss entrepreneur Egger Forster. Lincoln and Gordillo spent several hours discussing the agricultural possibilities, and Lincoln enjoyed the comfort of western food and beds. Two days with good food and wine contrasted with the beans and tortillas they had been eating. The *finca* employed about 1000

Maya who had originated from Santa Eulalia, but Lincoln complained that he was unable to do ethnological work due to the workers' attitude toward the *finca* owner. He did see a 30 x 60 meter Maya ruin of a temple amidst the coffee trees, and he heard rumors of a cave containing gold, jade and mummies.

Lincoln reported that four reputable authors on Guatemala had referred to a lost Maya city that could be visited from a mountain near Chajul. Of those who had tried to reach the city, none had ever succeeded. After Lincoln's trip to the *finca,* on January 30, 1940 he flew over the region with, among others, an archaeologist for the Carnegie Institution, but the clouds blocked his view of any ruins. Shortly before his death he climbed one of the highest mountains in the region, but clouds once again obscured his view.

Coffee Country

Before the introduction of coffee, the principal product as of independence had been cochineal, a source of red dye. Disastrous rains in 1852 ruined the crop. Combined with the introduction of analine dyes in 1857, landowners began to cultivate coffee, following Costa Rica's example of success. The increasing power of these coffee growers led to more and more discontent with the conservative regime, and their desire for changes in land laws was one contributing factor to the liberal revolution.

Barrios put the power of the state behind the emerging coffee entrepreneurs. Foreigners received preferential treatment because they had access to capital, expertise and markets. Banks were created; a modern professional army was created, more infrastructure was built; and more land was titled to create coffee farms. A new law in 1877 permitted lands that had merely been rented from municipalities to be purchased, and a new titling law created a rush on claiming vacant land.

Large land holding developed in Guatemala, even though they were not necessarily more productive than small holdings. The resulting powerful "plantation oligarchy" has dominated Guatemala´s political life ever since. Actual membership in this group changed as fortunes rose and fell with rises and falls in the international market.

In Antigua's Barista Café a timeline of coffee production in the country gives us some interesting facts. Highlights include the fact that it was the Jesuits who brought the first plants to the country, a jump from 383 bags exported to Europe in 1859 to 1,117 bags the next year to being Guatemala's primary export by 1880. In 1888 Guatemalan coffee won first place in a Paris Expo and in 1915 first prize in San Francisco. The volcanic eruption of 1902 was apparently a boon to coffee. Not only was instant coffee invented in

Guatemala, important innovations in planting and processing contributed to the industry.

Coffee, sugar, tea, chocolate and tobacco—products some call drug foods—went from minimal consumption in industrialized nations in the 17th century to staples by the 20th century. Now coffee is the second most valuable source of foreign exchange for developing countries after oil. Central America became an important coffee producing region in the nineteenth century and by the turn of the century was producing one-tenth of the world's coffee, particularly the high quality milds from the *arabica* species. With only one-seventh of Brazil's coffee area, the Central American countries maintained their niche in the market through the quality of their coffee.

In the 1920s the Central American coffee trade, initially dominated by Germans, shifted to North American control. In the United States a century of marketing efforts had transformed coffee from a luxury item to a staple. Despite a lack of nutritional value, advertisers promoted coffee's value as a stimulant and identified it with rest and recuperation. In the 1920s the coffee lobby financed research on a relationship with labor productivity and concluded that a mid-morning and mid-afternoon coffee break would counter lassitude in the workplace. It was this product that drew Guatemala, and eventually the small village of Ilom, into international capitalism.

Titling Land

The story of the creation of the *finca* went back to the national processes in titling land. In the 1880s labor contractors came to Ixil country on behalf of south-coast *fincas* and saw an opportunity to obtain land and begin their own. The municipalities got title in this period, but not before this particular *finca* was claimed. In confronting this unexpected intrusion into their land, the municipal representatives tried to see if they could make the legal claim. When they lost, they blamed their own ignorance that allowed them to be outmaneuvered and left defenseless and dispossessed. The municipality expressed a preference for subsistence agriculture, the marginal economic state in which they had long lived, a life with a piece of land for raising corn and caring for pigs and chickens.

Jacobo Arbenz

The theory that large *fincas* were the best solution for the country's economic progress was countered by a 1950 census showing that 2 percent of the population controlled 72 percent of the cultivable land and since more than two-thirds of the people depended on agriculture for their livelihood, this had

created extreme poverty. Further, only 54 *fincas* owned 1.7 million acres of which more than 1.5 was uncultivated.

When Arbenz became president, elected when Arévalo's six-year term ended, one of his major projects was the paving of the road to the Atlantic. In the university museum there are the woodcuts lauding this success as well as other efforts on behalf of ordinary workers. Truthfully, the art style seemed propagandistic and reminiscent of the Soviet art styles. It was US anxiety that there was excessive communist influence his the government that set it up for its downfall.

An Agrarian Reform law was passed June 17, 1952 under Arbenz. It provided for expropriation of idle lands to be redistributed to peasants. The Agrarian Reform Bill, Decreto 900, was enacted on June 27, 1952. It empowered the government to expropriate uncultivated portions of large plantations. Small farms (less than 223 acres) were exempt; medium sized farms (223-670 acres) were exempt if they were two-thirds cultivated. Large farms that were fully cultivated were also exempt. Those lands taken would be paid for in 25 year bonds with a 3% interest rate at their worth as declared for taxation. Rural unions began to spread, and a peasant league was created. As expropriations continued, opposition from the affected landowners increased.

Even before the Agrarian Reform Law of 1952 of the Arbenz government, agitation for change had gotten some results for the people of the nearby village of Ilom. On November 13, 1946 Luis Arenas gave the people the steep hillside slope that the town itself was situated on, though no title was actually extended. On June 11, 1951 Congress expropriated land for the people of Ilom and two nearby villages, even before expropriation had become national law, and congress requisitioned sufficient funds to make the purchase.

Similar to the national pattern, the *finca* had over 86 *caballerías*, but the cultivated portion was only just over 5 *caballerías*. Over 7 *caballerías* was devoted to pasture for cattle and the remaining land was forested. Therefore expropriation proceedings were opened, and it was decreed on March 30, 1954 that the people of the local villages, including Ilom, should receive the land so taken. The forests on land with an inclination of 30 degrees would be retained by the state as forest reserve. The owner responded with a protest on the ecological irresponsibility of the small farmers who would destroy forest land and provoke erosion. Another small *finca* owner protested that the people of Chel, a village near Ilom, had plenty of land that they weren't cultivating and he couldn't understand why they were trying to get any more.

Arbenz' principal target with this law, the United Fruit Company, rejected the sum the government offered for expropriated land which was the stated value for tax purposes, and said the land was actually worth substantially more.

CIA Overthrow

The owner of the *finca* we were on went to the US Embassy and offered to lead a revolt for $200,000 to overthrow the government. His offer was not accepted, but United Fruit Company orchestrated publicity and lobbied against the Communist regime, supported by the archbishop. A covert CIA operation put Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas in power and the Land Reform bill was overturned and land was taken from the peasants within 18 months.

After the liberation arranged by the CIA, the church returned to a cooperative relationship with the state, and the archbishop made no secret of his political preferences, calling new President Castillo Armas a saint.

Asturias vented his rage at the invasion from exile with a series of short stories called *Weekend In Guatemala.* The stories sarcastically accused the CIA (which covered its tracks so well that the operation remained a great source of pride in the agency) as well as the Guatemalan collaborators, of rape of the country. Subordinates of the new president burned subversive books, which included *Les Misérables*, Dostoyevsky, Arévalo, and Asturias.

A month after the June 27, 1954 coup, US Ambassador Peurifoy´s wife published the following triumphalist and tactless take-off of a nursery rhyme in *Time* magazine that made no effort to maintain any illusion of a lack of American involvement behind this covert operation to redirect politics in the country in a line more appealing to US interests.

Sing a song of quetzals, pockets full of peace!
The *junta's* in the Palace, they've taken out a lease.
The commies are in hiding, just across the street;
To the embassy of Mexico they beat a quick retreat.
And pistol-packing Peurifoy looks mighty optimistic
For the land of Guatemala is no longer Communistic!

Unfortunately, it very soon became evident that the pockets had holes in them, and peace was falling out at a precipitous pace.

The Banana Company Trilogy

Asturias had already turned his attention to a critique of the United Fruit company, resulting in the first book of a trilogy: *Strong Wind* (1950). That

same year he married his Argentinian wife, Blanca Mora y Araujo and the following year he published seventeen sonnets for Blanca. Arbenz made him consul in Paris in 1952 and Ambassador to El Salvador the following year. Asturias immediately resigned his position as Ambassador to El Salvador when Arbenz was overthrown. He went to visit Pablo Neruda in Chile and then went to Argentina and published the second volume of his banana company critique, *The Green Pope*.

His model for this was Minor Cooper Keith, an American who had been contracted to build a railway from Costa Rica to the Pacific. When looking for a financial boost to the floundering enterprise, he planted bananas in 1878. The profitable result became the United Fruit Company (UFCo) which by 1930 had $242 million in assets, controlled 100 ships, and sold 90 percent of bananas available in the US. President Estrada Cabrera had granted a contract to complete the railroad to Puerto Barrios and ended up giving Keith the port, previously completed track, 4,600 *caballerías* of land, tax exemption for 99 years, control of water and lumber. Named the International Railway of Central America (IRCA), they ended up with a railroad monopoly. The ships also monopolized coffee exports. So the triumvirate of UFCo, IRCA, and the "Great White Fleet" did very well for its shareholders but very poorly for Guatemala.

Effects of the Coup

A young man from Chimaltenango, Mario Payeras, later to become not only a guerrilla commander, but a literary figure and historian, read Asturias' book of protest. He credited the book with awaking his understanding of the crime committed against Guatemala, and wrote that his copy circulated among the first clandestine fighters and he saw it under the cots and on the tables of the urban combatants.

My first introduction to an artistic protest, the Diego Rivera painting *Glorious Revolution*, was the reproduction at the Kaji Tulam Museum. The cariactures included CIA chief Allan Dulles with pockets of money; John Foster Dulles the Secretary of State holding an atomic warhead with Eisenhower's face on it; Castillo Armas, the Guatemalan Colonel who was installed by the CIA as new head of state with money in his packet; and, the conservative Guatemalan Archbishop lending his support. Obvious and sarcastic, the painting was done in 1954 after the coup engineered by the CIA to make sure communism got no foothold in this hemisphere.

Part of the painting shows workers loading bananas onto a ship, since the coup was also clearly intended to defend the economic interests of the United Fruit Company. While O'Henry coined the term "banana republic" for a fictional

country, it was based on his experiences in Honduras and paralleled this company's oversized role in Guatemala. John Foster's law firm had represented the company and Allan was on the board. Their machinations to overthrow a democratically elected government are well explained well in *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* by Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer.

With their shared critique of the imperialist US, Diego's wife and now revered artist Frida Kahlo insisted she be taken in her wheelchair to a protest organized against the Guatemalan overthrow. She died a few days later. Miguel Angel Asturias wrote to Diego asking him for an artistic act of solidarity, and so the painting was begun. Diego asked his Guatemalan artistic collaborator, Rina Lazo, to collect appropriate photographs and newspaper articles, and working together they completed the mural in three months.

The Dulles brothers called this overthrow a "Glorious Victory" and so Diego put that name to his canvas. He asked Rina to pose in a red shirt as a revolutionary for the painting, and then had her paint on her own the political prisoners up in the right corner and sign that portion. She later went on to fame as a muralist in her own right, and three years later painted *Vengeance* which depicted these same events with a focus on those who parachuted in as part of the overthrow, including a peasant in an upside-down position of crucifixion.

Strangely and ironically, both paintings disappeared for the duration of the Cold War. Diego gave his to an eastern European exhibition and when it arrived in Russia his kind of communism and his kind of art were out of favor with Stalin. Fifty years later in 2007 the Pushkin museum in Russia found it in storage and sent it for exhibition in Mexico. Similarly Rina Lazo's painting which had been sold to a private collector, disappeared as well.

Then in 2010, President Colom of Guatemala, to celebrate the October 20th revolutionary victory in 1944 that had begun the ten years of spring, arranged an exhibition in the national palace. A child of the left, Colom's uncle had been mayor of Guatemala City and was assasinated by the right, and his sister became a well-known revolutionary. The well-attended exhibition of *¡Oh Revolución! Múltiples visiones, 1944-2010* included not only Diego's painting (valued at $1.2 million dollars) but Rina Lazo's *Venganza* which had been found in storage in the Mexican museum in Toluca where the purchaser had donated it. She, still alive, came to be part of the event. Not only the political message, but the one and a half million quetzales spent to bring the painting created some outrage over wasting money in a poor country, not to mention the leftist, anti-American, triumphalist nature of the message.

But by this time, perhaps some triumphalism may have been excusable. The United States, in the form of President Bill Clinton, had apologized for the US overthrow and its role in the subsequent years of the internal armed conflict. The Peace Accords had been signed in 1996 and so former guerrilla commanders were now public political figures, and the country was working to assimilate this revolutionary history.

No one disputes that this violent overthrow was an important part of the mix that started the 36-year civil conflict by 1960. At first the opposition was political, but when the leaders of the country, clearly under the thrall of the US, permitted the Cuban team preparing for the Bay of Pigs invasion to trail on Guatemalan soil, even military leaders began to revolt. Leftists, students, anti-imperialists, and military officers coalesced to begin a revolt.

For further reading:

Handy, Jim. *Gift of the Devil.* Another summary history of Guatemala that has excellent information on the era of spring.

Schlesinger, Stephen and Stephen Kinzer. *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala.* Well-told details of the CIA operation.

Chapter 10

Ilom

We left the *finca* grounds and traveled perhaps another half-an-hour to arrive at the modern village of Ilom. The town is awkwardly situated on a hillside, and the road snakes down through buildings precariously holding on next to drop-offs. As we drove into town in the pickup on a Sunday afternoon, the church services treated us to a background of lively amplified music. It is hard to comprehend the reasons that such a small community as Ilom, for example, now has thirteen evangelical churches.

No longer the pastoral place I recall pre-conflict, now there were buses and trucks, a busy market, two hotels (admittedly humble, but functional), a simple restaurant, a lively market, a school built in part with funds from the cell-phone company, a health center, even a large formal soccer field. The winding streets curving down the hill since the town is built on a steep slope, and the children wanting to hang on to the back of the pickup had made our entrée to the town a little chaotic. Horses and mules and people selling their wares and trucks and us made for a jumble that harmonized with the jumble of the town's layout.

Unsure which hotel our friend Antonio had reserved for us, we were at a loss, knowing he was still tied up in his afternoon church service. Fortunately, one of his friends who was aware we were coming, notice our confusion and pointed us in the right direction for the hotel where we left our things, and then helped us find a place to park.

At that point, we went to Antonio's father's home and spent time talking to him and to sister Rosa who gave us an earful on the frustrations of an educated Ixil woman struggling to find work in her field. She had made sacrifices to go to Chajul to study, and finding a job was a struggle. Antonio arrived and we moved over to his home to say hello to the family, and to make plans to walk through the community.

Seeing that a cement and stone road is building constructed, we asked and were told that it was a concession from complaints made to the hydroelectric company that they were not doing anything for the community. Ilom had even had to get its own generator for electricity, even as a neighbor of the dam. When the road opened in 2008 a whole new connection to all the opportunities beyond the community began. I expect Ilom will be a constantly changing place each time I go back for another visit. New things include the import of block and cement and so some homes, businesses and churches have been built in the modern style, replacing the dark planks of most buildings.

It was sad to hear that the lush oranges of my memory are no longer. The orange trees have gotten some kind of disease that has ruined the wood, and the results in dried up fruit falling from the tree.

Even though I knew it had been burned down, I really wanted to see where we had lived off and on years back with Antonio's uncle. There I had learned to weave and to make tortillas and to wash clothes on the rocks with soap-tree pods. The white landmark church, presumably surviving over centuries, looked down each week on the simple market laid out on the ground in front of it, and we enjoyed the novelty of going to buy a soda and piece of bread. Steve learned to work in the cornfields and to use a two-man saw to cut lumber for our host's carpentry business. These brief stretches of time gave us experiences of rural life we have never forgotten.

We encountered another one of Antonio's uncles at the family site and briefly chatted with him, and I was satisfied to now have a layout in my mind of where we had such formative experiences.

One of those formative experiences was recording the story of the coming of the *finca* in the memories of Antonio's grandfather. He had told this story, drawing on his boyhood memories.

Creation of the Finca

> I was born in Chajul and came to Ilom with my parents when there was a famine in Chajul. My father came to see the land because there was good land in Ilom. We planted corn and had a good harvest. Before coming to Ilom my father only rented land. There was good land. There were wild pigs and forests. Here there was grass, there sugar cane, there something else: anything would grow in the earth. There were cows, horses, and pigs.
>
> Then Lisandro came. They began to say that he had bought the land in Guatemala When he came he said that it was true.
>
> "Ilom is mine because I have title. But I'll return you the land if you will pay me what I paid. Explain this to everyone. How many men are there?"
>
> "All right, I'll tell them," said the mayor.
>
> Some said, "We should buy the land from Lisandro because he does have title."

Others said, "Why should we buy the land because it is already ours? It belonged to our ancestors. We've grown and gotten old here. This title is something that he invented He has just stolen the land. It is not his. Let's not buy it."

Others said, "Maybe it would be good to buy. That way we'll have a title in hand."

"There's a place to oomplain in Guatemala," said some.

Lisandro left. He came back in about a month. "What news? What's the answer?"

"We don't want the deal," said the mayor.

"That's all right if you don't want it. It's your business. If you don't want the deal I'm going to complain to the authorities about trespassing. If you give me the money I'll give you the title."

Lisandro said, I'm going to bring a surveyor to measure the land." When the people saw the surveyors, they got together. He mayor called them to go and take the surveyor and Lisandro prisoner. They put Lisandro and the surveyor in prison. The men were angry.

When Lisandro got out he sent a message to Nebaj that the Lacandones had invaded Ilom. "Come quickly because Lisandro was killed." Soldiers came from Sacapulas, Nebaj, Cunén, Huehuetanango, Santa Cruz del Quiché and from Guatemala thinking Lisandro had died. But Lisandro didn't die, we did. Three of our people were shot. Lisandro killed them. Many soldiers arrived. Lisandro pointed out the mayor.

"It's his fault for calling everyone to capture us," he said to the captains and the lieutenants. The major was imprisoned.

The next day what they did was to take down his pants. The soldiers used their whip. Suddenly the soldiers took down his pants. Two soldiers grabbed him, one under each shoulder, that's how they were held. And another man whipped him.

There were three that were shipped. The one named Bernal was mayor, another was named Marcos and the third was named Marchiol. The three that were shot were named Miguel, Baltazar and Juan.

> Whose fault was it? It was the people's fault because they refused to buy the land. The old people had good intentions, but they weren't clever because thanks to them we don't have land today. It's their fault that we have ladino bosses now. Our life could have been good if the men had bought the land.
>
> There isn't any more land. We're just on the finca's pasture. We're almost dying of hunger. We don't have food and we don't have cornfields. "It may be difficult for us here," we say, "but we don't have to go too far to be able to work on the finca." The older people always went to the finca. They had a lot of debts.

An article on Gaspar Ilom had appeared in *El Imparcial* In 1927 and planted a seed in the context of his life experiences and intellectual development to that point which would eventually become his novel *Men of Maize*. Called *The Unknown Guatemala: Uspantan and Ilom,"* my translation of the rather flowery article follows:

> Ever since the charming administration of Reina Barrios we have heard about prodigious national wealth, hidden and half-lost among mountain chains of the northeast, which upon descending to the planes of Yucatan, disappears, but leaves Guatemala the variety of its majestic mountains, the fertility of its currents and rivers, the joy of a luxuriant vegetation and the miracle of a fauna that was once prodigious, according to archaeological discoveries, and which today appears beautiful and varied. In a word, the marvelous region which extends between Quiche and Huehuetenango toward the Petén is exceptionally fertile in the profusion of nature's three kingdoms.
>
> As of about thirty years ago, this has been called the "Zona Reina," not only to embed in the title the first name of our sophisticated ruler, and not to set aside this flattering idea, the zone irrigated by the Uspantan River deserves, for its productivity, to be named monarchically for its distinction as privileged among the privileged. All saw that if as could happen, the coasts and slopes of the west became impoverished, national agriculture could find an advantageous refuge in these rich lands with a comfortable climate and healthy air where the volcanos don't threaten destruction nor vandals destroy, nor has there ever been a drought. Whoever wishes more precise information can find it in the complete monograph written by the careful scholar, Lic. Don Adrian Recinos, regarding Huehuetenango, his homeland.
>
> But the enthusiasm for the discovery, almost a revelation, was followed by awakening to a disagreeable and cold reality: that splendid zone was

inaccessible. The abundance of its produce was worthless if it was enclosed land, guarding its virginity with impenetrable mountains. The closest departmental capital was that of Huehuetenango, and from this city to the capital and the ports there were many unconquerable leagues. In fact, at the time, the highway did not reach even ancient Zaculeu.

Without wide roads, technically well designed and built according to art that becomes science, all this richness is useless, pointless and sterile, and does not remove poverty.

Little by little, Guatemalans dared to penetrate they mystery of the buried treasure, stimulated by the hope that one day the government or private individuals or both together would on the mountain ranges, make the tracks for vehicles which would be needed to fulfill the soil's promise and transform thick organic debris, patiently accumulated in the solitary high rainforest, into dazzling gold.

Those who daringly entered the region, were not owners of great capital, (which, between us, are timid and gripping old businesses) but rather middle class farmers, largely without resources, but rich in boldness and faith in their success. On the first parcels, granted free of charge by the government, it was through their personal work, the efforts of their own arms, that with their axes tore down the primal ancient forests, burned the trees, broke up the soil, and trusted new seeds that had never germinated. We emphasize this aspect that speaks highly of Guatemalan character: tenacious, energetic, and persistent.

We are referring to the lands of Ilom where a group of young men arrived in 1900, armed with tools to take possession of the parcels which the ministry of development had given them. They spent long days opening new ground in a tough fight with the rough soil and mountainous weeds they found there, lacking everything but a strong and resolute will to succeed or die. They attacked the agricultural conquest of the soil just as the Europeans came in a political and military conquest. To continue the comparison, in the same way that Cortes burned his ships to destroy any idea of a shameful return, those intrepid young men sold their horses to the indigenous people and stayed without anything but arms for hunting to provide their daily food.

These young men were the Mexicans Lisandro Gordillo, Isaias Aranda, Alejandro del Valle, Tomás Aguirre and Salvador Gordillo. The land had the local name of Shamac, which in the Maya language means base or seat of the mountain.

> A second obstacle soon arose: the hostile opposition of the locals. When they realized that the roots of the ladino were taking hold in their territory, profaning their sacred backwardness, the local chief Gaspar Ilijom raised a protest, supported by all the inhabitants scattered there. This leader, who also had the role of shaman and so the fearsomeness of his double power, moved to remove them from the earth. He administered strychnine to the municipal secretary Ricardo Estrada, according to legal records from the pertinent authorities.
>
> The shaman and chief held high the banner of rebellion against the explicit orders of the government that these first colonizers could settle there. Official papers were crumpled and torn and death threats hung over the young farmers who, to sleep, had to take turns at night, keeping watch. The chief, had used his authority to order all the Indians that anyone who sold the intruders even one corn tortilla or one single egg, with have a penalty of twenty-five pesos silver as a fine and fifty days in jail.
>
> In spite of this, the young ladino group held on to what they had obtained by right, and without using their arms, began to work as an answer. In subsequent articles we will see how it is true that the secret of success is in persistence.

Media coverage identified the Maya as savages and the *finca* owner as a heroic rescuer. Reference was made to savage shouts and "alarm drums, such as might call together a fanatical horde on the banks of the Ganges or a tribe in the center of Africa. Innumerable groups of Indians began to issue from the huts, bearing rocks, sticks, and machetes for the attack." Although the Indians made it clear that the cause of the riot was "the fear that...the *ladinos* were going to steal all of the lands of the hamlet," the newspaper interpreted the violence as resulting from the "the racial hatred and the fanatic aggressiveness of the Indians against landowners or *ladinos* who venture into these areas in search of honest agricultural work..." The article concluded that the aggressive spirit of the Indian could be stirred up to commit atrocities.

Lisandro Gordillo Galán, had purchased Shamac (the land titled previous to Chajul's title) and continued to buy. On January 4, 1927 the article in the *El Imparcial* eulogized Gordillo and friends, but in 1928 the Municipality of Chajul and the people of Las Pilas within Nebaj municipality sued him. The lower court in El Quiché ordered Gordillo to return the land to the people of Ilom and Sotzil within three days, basing the decision on a judgment that these lands were under Chajul ownership.

The decision in favor of the Ixiles was upheld by the appellate court nearly a year later. But in 1929 the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Gordillo Galán, saying the municipality had offered insufficient proof that these lands were within their titled land.

The lawyer for Chajul gave his interpretation of the case in no uncertain terms. He said that the Registrar and Gordillo Galán knew they were taking land from Nebaj and Chajul, and that the notary who authorized the title was bribed with land given to his wife by Gordillo. He accused President Estrada Cabrera of having considered himself superior to the law and having taken property of others and urged reparation.

Lisandro Gordillo was able to begin development of his *finca*. The area was too large to be cultivated with coffee immediately, so the people were allowed to continue planting their *milpas* of corn, beans and squash on *finca* land. Gordillo himself proved to be amiable enough, treating his workers well and making many improvements in the area. However, he overextended himself financially in such projects as building a mule trail to Chajul to get the coffee.

Rural life

We walked back through town to have supper at Antonio's home. I recalled the charming old Catholic church in the center of town, but looking at the tiny wooden replacement for what fire and rain had washed away in the conflict, I supposed the construction next to it might be a new church. But I was told it will be the market to replace the temporary stands set up on tables and protected from sun or rain by tarps. The thirteen evangelical churches and somewhat diminished Catholic church and diminished Maya traditional spiritual practices reflect changes occurring throughout the country. When we lived with Antonio's uncle and aunt, they were the only evangelical family in town. Now all but a very few individuals among the 800 families in town are evangelicals or Catholic charismatics.

As we arrived back to Antonio's home, we passed a small plank house which I had been told became the temporary home of a series of human rights accompaniers. Once in his home, I helped pat out tortillas for our supper, enjoying the novelty of being in a home with a raised stove, the walls darkened by years of smoke, a small table pulled up for us to have bean soup in which to dip our tortillas.

Perhaps daily life was not all that different from when anthropologist Lincoln had visited the community. Upon his arrival, people from Ilom met them near the village and traveled in procession with him to the *juzgado*, the main government building where he was received by all the leading men. These

principales had generally served as part of the local government. The Ilom *Regidor*, or principal local authority, simultaneously served as a prayermaker.

Lincoln had obtained lists of the Mayan calendar day, month, and year names collected in 1722, 1854, 1872, and 1928. In response to an act of kindness in dressing the wounds of a woman in Ilom who had been robbed and attacked by a man from the *finca*, the prayermaker there gave Lincoln his first list of month names which he was then able to use to elicit lists elsewhere. He took photographs of everyone involved: the criminal, a soldier and official who arrived to take the man into Guatemala City, and the woman.

His pictures of glyphs from works by Maya archaeologists intensely interested them as well. After his visit to Ilom he wrote: "I was deeply touched by the kindness, simplicity, friendliness and endurance of these people, once they were convinced that you were their friend."

During the time of Lincoln's stay in the area, out of Ilom's population of 1,500, only three inhabitants were *ladino:* the Municipal Secretary and his family. In addition to the *finca* owners the only other *ladinos* living nearby were the military commander in Zotzil, and a ladinoized Maya storekeeper in Chel. No school existed in Ilom. In the entire Municipality of Chajul the 1940 census reported a mere 8,000 inhabitants, with 300 *ladinos* mostly living in the town center. In the Ixil region there were 1,300 *ladinos* among 25,000 inhabitants.

Lincoln and the priest stayed in the nearby village of Chel on November 27, 1939, the night of the important Yearbearer ceremony. Since the priest disapproved so heartily of native ceremonies, the people conspired to keep him talking at length inside the *juzgado* that he might remain oblivious to their prayers, incense and sacrifice outside. Lincoln glimpsed the ceremony, understood and sympathized with the ruse for the priest, desperately desired to be an observer himself, but was restrained against his wishes by the delegation. "I was furious not to be outside," wrote Lincoln, and when he was finally let out only smoldering embers remained.

For further reading:

Elliott, Elaine. *Gaspar Ilom and Mayan Resistance to the Western Ideology of Nature*. MA Thesis, University of San Diego, 1998.
Available on-line (with permission): www.srElliott.net/A/EDE/MA/

Chapter 11

Men of Maize

It seemed appropriate to take along a copy of Asturias' *Men of Maize* to read in the evenings while on this trip in Ixil country, particularly in Ilom. It seemed unlikely to me that any current residents of the real Ilom would read the book since Asturias' language and storytelling is of such an exotic literary level it is a challenge to enthusiastic readers such as myself, and even took a while for critics to accept. It is far more of a challenge for the struggling readers which makes up most of the population.

It seemed ironic and incongruous in our fairly grubby little hotel room in Ilom to read a work that is internationally known, translated into multiple languages, accepted as an important part of world literature, knowing that the roots of the story came from real occurrences in this very real place. We had preferred this room to one offered us that had no window and a suspicious insecticide smell, and we made some effort to make sure no creepy-crawlies would attack in the night in our room, but the beds were hard, we provided our own sleeping gear, and my only light for reading was a little headlamp strapped around my head.

Asturias had read the account of the conflict in Ilom and the article on the entrepreneurs published in *El Imparcial*. It had obviously planted a seed of an idea that he started developing in short-stories. When he started to develop this as a novel, he was doing something new. It would be the first example of *neo-indigenista* writing, something more anthropological and invested in the culture than had previously been written by anyone in Latin America, and yet the start of a trend.

After a long day of travel and spending time with people, I only managed one chapter, the one on the death of Gaspar Ilom, and fell fast asleep. For Susanna and Scott it was a much more restless night. The quarrels of the dogs, the cries of the roosters, the grinding gears of a truck stuck in a hole, the honing of the 3 a.m. bus waking people made for a noisy uncomfortable night.

Because of Asturias' book, *Men of Maize,* the small village of Ilom, had become symbolic for me of the much larger story of the country, and a way of seeing Guatemala's history in microcosm, on a small scale. Definitely a remote village like so many others, Ilom was outside of and unaffected by independence from Spain in 1821 and the upheaval and contest between Liberal and Conservative governments in the 1800s. The quiet rural life of planting and harvesting corn, weaving clothing, celebrating the Maya calendar went on.

While theoretically the story begins in Ilom, Asturias, of course, had never been here. Instead, he drew on his memories of smaller towns from his childhood in Baja Verapaz, and his memories of stories he had been told. But, of course, most of his literary influences were from the outside, the City, France, old Maya manuscripts, avant-garde and symbolist ideas about writing, and a drive to present a new vision of his country.

Feeling no obligation to write an historical novel, Asturias took artistic liberty from the newspaper accounts he had read and reversed the accusation that Ilom poisoned the *ladino*, and had the *ladino* poison the Maya leader. Instead of coffee cultivation, the conflict is over cultivating maize for subsistence or as something commercialized.

In Asturias' story, the guerrilla leader of the Maya, Gaspar Ilom, leads the others to kill the *ladino* maize growers who plan to grow and sell maize for profit. A contingent of troops arrive to settle the dispute in favor of the *ladinos*, and Gaspar is poisoned and all of his men are massacred by a *ladino* Colonel, who laments a lack of resistance on the part of the Maya. A series of revenge killings begin. The Maya kill the son of a *ladinoized* landowner and then decapitate a *ladino* family. Seven years after the initial massacre, the Colonel and his men return to deal with cattle thieves. As they travel through the woods, he and his men are ambushed and he is killed in another Maya-led massacre.

With the help of an empathetic literary critic, Reni Prieto, the form and elaborate symbolism of the novel become clearer, the roots drawn from the Mayan mythology Asturias had studied. It is almost, to my way of thinking, as though he had decided to add some chapters to the *Popol Vuh*, and thereby continue the story of the Maya into the modern world. The *Popol Vuh* ends with the creation of men of maize. This book starts with the confrontation between the men of maize and modern agriculture, full of chemical poisons. The massacre of the village of Ilom and the death of the community's defender is then avenged by firey deaths for each one who had a part in Gaspar's demise, a saga of retribution.

Besides interesting language and descriptions, the structure is fascinating. It is a chain of six different main characters: Gaspar Ilom and his village, a *ladino* family, a shaman and his *nawal*, a military man, a broken and restored family, and finally to a traveling post man. It does not take a lot of imagination to make analogies to the real historical development of Ilom as a representative of all of rural Guatemala.

Working at it, I had learned to read and enjoy the book on its own terms, delighting in its novelty and beauty. By using colors, numbers, animals, fire,

water, corn, sun, moon, to weave a spell to unify past and present, Maya and *ladino,* Asturias made a creation story for today's Guatemala.

Asturias' story in *Men of Maize* does not end with Gaspar Ilom, but follows with two more parallel characters, Goyo Yic and Nicho Aquino. Nor does the story remain in Ilom and its nearby villages. It expands and extends to all areas of the country, from the mountains of Huehue on the Pacific, to the Castle of San Felipe on the Atlantic, to Guatemala City. He depicts the Maya on the move from their villages, a modern reality which even goes beyond the country to Mexico, the US, Canada, Europe.

He may have seen the coming revolutionary and counter-revolutionary storm, but he seems particularly prescient in his last two sections of *Men of Maize.* Migration and its complications for family life comprise one section, and the impact of modernity comprises the last one. No matter that this was originally composed in 1949, it speaks to 2015. In this final portion, modernity had entered the mystical Mayan world: postal service, sewing machines, a priest making cross-cultural observations, foreign merchants and landowners, tourists, and travel to the Capital of Guatemala. At the end, the fact that modernity had not overcome the traditional opened communication to a hidden world where the connections throughout the story became clear, the symbols stronger.

After the stories of the conflict with Gaspar and the subsequent retribution, Goyo is a blind man. He is literally blind, and he is symbolically blind to the richness of his culture. He loses his wife, but subsequently regains his sight and beings a quest in search of his wife. In the process he becomes a wiser man. The third major figure, Nicho, is a postman who with the power of words and the power of travel raises the vision of others, aiding the reconnection of Goyo with his wife, and the recreation of community by these two.

Thanks to literary critic Prieto and his brilliant analysis, I can see that just as the two sets of hero twins in the *Popol Vuh* represent sun and maize in different phases, so two of the *Men of Maize* characters have the same roles. Gaspar Ilom and Goyo Yic also have wives who represent the moon. Just as the *Popol Vuh* is a chain of related, but disconnected stories, Asturias' book uses a similar structure, and characters in one story become legends in following ones. The armed struggle is in stories 1-4, retribution for exploitation of the land is in 5-9, and a hero's quest is in 10-14, with an epilogue of the resurgence of a community once more restored and built around corn.

Characters are good or evil, the good associated with water and corn, the evil with fire. There are triads of animals associated with the triad of fire, water, and corn, and symbolic colors and numbers from Mayan mythology fit as well.

Fire (deer, dog, firefly), water (fish, snake, rabbit), and corn (ants, opossum, coyote) connect also as animal companion spirits, or *nahuales.* The first hero, Gaspar, dies, as does the father of the hero twins in the *Popol Vuh*, and the second hero triumphs, as do the twins from the original myth. Nicho, the postman, has a symbolic last name, Aquino, similar to Ah Kin, or the scribes of the Maya. Writing and education are his solution for the modern Maya, but without losing his mysticism or his coyote *nahual.*

Hence, the book is a symbolic, metaphorically rich, modern Maya mythology. Form and style are unfamiliar, and the text is more challenging than any of Asturias' other works. Since Asturias was a *ladino* entering the Maya world as a scholar and visitor, there are very legitimate critiques that he was not writing from within the culture.

Part of the agenda in Nicho's story is the hope that education, words, and the beauty of language will be the means of a modern Maya renewal. Thus, perhaps, with today's schools, computers, cellphones, Facebook, the Academy, the modern jobs that require information management, this has turned out to be prophetic as has the epilogue which depicts the continued loyalty to raising maize and to building community that is part of current reality. There is a determination among educated Maya to retain language and culture, and not to be swallowed up by modernization.

After this book, Asturias continued writing and publishing at a brisk pace: a theater piece and a poem one year, his biting and sarcastic piece of artistic solidarity about the CIA overthrow, *Weekend in Guatemala,* the next. He next published a piece of theater about Bartolomé de las Casas, and traveled extensively: India, China, Moscow, France, Spain, Brasil.

The Cuban revolution succeeded on January 1, 1959 and Asturias met Fidel Castro in Buenos Aires later that year, went to Cuba in September as the guest of Fidel, and traveled once more to attend the first anniversary of the Revolution. Back in Buenos Aires he published *The Eyes of the Interred*, his final volume of the banana company trilogy in which revolutionaries successfully bring down a government, an ideal that real revolutionaries very soon aspired to.

The international reputation of Miguel Angel Asturia increased, his poems and *El Señor Presidente* that brought him most attention. Castillo Armas had been assassinated in 1957, and those who followed him were military presidents unfavorable to Asturias. But when Mendez Montenegro became president, he offered Asturias the position as French Ambassador and Asturias took it. The one civilian president in a long line of military men, perhaps Asturias felt some hope, but his leftist friends were appalled.

Asturias had become president of the Pen Club in Paris, and at this point, his life took a turn toward significant fame. He was given the Lenin Prize for Peace and went in August to Moscow to receive it. The next year he inaugurated expositions of Maya art in France, published another book, *El Espejo de Lida Sal*, and then in October 1967 was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, the first Latin American novelist to receive this honor. He went to Norway in December to formally receive this prize. *Men of Maize* is not included in the profile on the Nobel prize site, showing that even those sophisticated judges may have been put off by this elusive, neo-indigenista work, part mythmaking, part social/cultural/political agenda.

In addition to more poems and columns, he published *El Alhajadito,* a novel he had begun writing in the 1920s. Political changes in Argentina made him less welcome, and he was temporarily detained, and went to France and Italy. In a portent of things to come, the William Faulkner Foundation awarded him a prize for the best Latinamerican novel, *El Señor Presidente.* The following year he spent a summer in France which would soon become his home, and his novel *Mulata de Tal* was published.

All this history was in my thoughts as I was going to sleep in the hotel in Ilom, aware of these fascinating constrasts in life that make up what Guatemala has been and is today.

For further reading:

Asturias, Miguel Angel. *Men of Maize.*

Chapter 12

Revolutionary Movement

Ruins of Ilom

In the morning a soft haze of smoke moved between the houses, the signs of fires warming and cooking breakfast and for one moment, it brought back for me the pastoral memories of our early years in the village. We collected items for breakfast from one of the ubiquitous snack food stands, and did the slightly painful work of extricating the pick-up from where it was parked. We left Ilom with Antonio on the shorter back way to the hydro-electric plant property where the restored ruins were located.

This had required obtaining permission from the hydro-electric company that now owns the land. Once we arrived, it was an attractive site, researched and refurbished over a three-year archaeological project. We went through the tasteful entrance of bamboo and stone and received information from both signs and one of the men who worked on the project and now served as guide.

Q'umarcaj, our picnic spot near Quiché, was a post-classic site, inhabited from around 1400 to its destruction by the Spanish in 1524. Nebaj and Juil north of Chajul were inhabited from 500 AD on, with destruction of ruling elites by around 900 AD, but perhaps on-going settlement of ordinary people. But now at Ilom, we were entering a period of greater time-depth. Highland settlement went back as far as 3500 B.C., but here the archaeological signs pointed to settlement by at least 500 BC with people from El Mirador arriving around 150 AD, presumably their migration related to the collapse of that pre-classic site. By around 500 AD, the Ixil area was occupied by people wealthy enough to put jade and pyrite in their tombs who had settled at least three sites: Ilom, Tzicuay and Nebaj. In any case, here we are touching one of the oldest settlements of the Ixil area from which migration to Nebaj, Chajul and Cotzal took place to the south.

This, then, can be said to be a foundation of the Ixil community in the deep roots of time. The vestiges of temples, homes for rulers, and a ball court, were not reconstructed, the original stones were left with tidy grass on top of them and all around. On the archaeological map there are an additional seven settlements nearby.

For many centuries this settlement and the others sustained the people. Perhaps early in the 1400s the K'iche' king Kiqab' conquered the Ixil towns of Nebaj, Cotzal, Chajul, and Ilom.

The orange tree growing on top of the taller temple is a poignant reminder of why the city collapsed. The tradition is that conqueror Bernal Diaz del Castillo brought the first orange trees to the new world, and the conquerors also inadvertently brought the diseases that new world inhabitants had never known. Military campaigns to conquer the Ixiles had taken place five years into Spanish control, but an uprising forced the Spanish out six years later. Not giving up, four *encomiendas* were given to Spanish conquerors in the Ixil area.

But the people had no immunity and so the Ilom population was decimated in 1531, seven years into the conquest, by one of the new diseases, and any survivors moved elsewhere. Thus a focal point of settlement, and there are many more ruins in the surrounding communities, drastically diminished after 14 centuries. It could not have been completely gone, however, since Ilom was still on the tribute list 25 years later.

The population of the entire area continued to decline drastically, perhaps as much as 90%, bringing the Ixiles to a mere 4,000 people in 1780,
In one of the reports to the king in 1740 the Ixil area was described as having good land, lots of corn and fruit trees. Hardworking people made thread, had mules and cattle in the the pleasant, pastoral life one imagines as one drives through these landscapes, even today.

Hydroelectric Plant

At the ruins we were on the property of a foreign-owned hydro-electric company, Xacb'al, named after the river that flows north and is being damned to create electricity. We observed the building covering the generators, the tall towers and power lines, all this modern metal strangely out of place in the valley. Farther down the road we saw the dam and pool accumulating the water. A host of dump trucks were mysteriously doing their jobs building yet something else, and periodically we were stopped or allowed to go on by orange-vested traffic monitors. It was all a bit jarring in the midst of this beautiful landscape.

The anomalous buildings of the hydro-electric plant seemed an incongruous growth in the pristine rural valley with a river running through it. Machinery, traffic jams with trucks busily hauling supplies for building yet more to the dam, seemed out of place. And, clearly, the policies of the company have seemed out of place to the residents who have periodically erupted in protests of one sort or another, including, in some cases sabotage. We could see some protestors camped along the side of the road, expressing their concern about a new tunnel being built.

I recalled the hopeful few of Mario Payeras that development of hydroelectric power would be a boon to the impoverished Ixiles of the area and could see that this apparently is not how things really work. The profits for the international corporations seem to be fine, and local communities beg and insist on some benefit, but are complete skeptics that this has brought any real economic development for them.

Antonio recounted his tour of the plant and critique of the tour guide who claimed the water was pure after going through their machines. Antonio challenged him to drink it, and of course, he declined. Antonio's father insists that they are ruining the land for cultivation by lowering the water level, draining it away. I uncomfortably thought of the drowning of Gaspar Ilom in *Men of Maize.*

Clandestine Revolutionaries

Passing beyond all this modern clunky machinery, as we traveled through the mountains and trees of uninhabited areas of Chajul, I was struck again by how many people walked through here in the 1970s and 80s, either guerrillas in their hidden, clandestine work, or the army pursuing them, or Ixiles fleeing from the terror of the armed encounters. A vast stretch of Chajul's land was taken to form the Visi Caba Biosphere, a site that provides habitat for the quetzal as well as other species. I longed to see a quetzal, but realized it was unlikely in a vehicle, driving along the edge of the reserve, and that I would have to try a different strategy. Antonio had seen one in the taller mountains near Ilom, and my husband had seen one hiking there years ago.

In Mario Payeras' paen to Guatemala, *Latitude del Flor y el Granizo*, he described the pre-hydroelectric company landscape that went north of here, including the habitat of the quetzal:

> One intact environment of the natural world is the tropical rain forest of the Cuchumatanes in the highlands between the Xacbal canyon to the edge of the Zona Reina. Besides containing tucans, owls and howler monkeys, in these mountains there are two species, rare on zoological maps: the quetzal and a tiny species of pheasant. To the northeast of Juil, in the municipality of Chajul, a path from within the cloud forest descends the steep mountains to the Copon river, a place of hunters with blowguns. There on the southern slopes dwells a black bird that resembles the miniature pheasant, although smaller than the peculiar species of the upper reaches of the cloud forests. In April, before sun-up, one can hear its morning song, similar to the musical hum of a distant airplane. On the same slope, although several hundred meters lower, lives the quetzal. When the sun is high, one can sense the rapid flight of

> the male–emitting his characteristic crude song–flanked by the females. Like the other bird, the quetzal rarely can be found on the other side which is more humid and wild. On the northern slope where silence predominates, the dense vegetation nurtures perpetual clouds, and the high streams, upon being released, form deep waterfalls to whose spray the ferns have adapted. Several levels of birds below, one can hear the murmur of the rivers that run to the warm world of the Zona Reina.

In an interview Payeras explained why they chose these forests as their field of operations.

> …when the principal means of fighting has been defined as guerrilla warfare, land and population become factors that are indissolubly united. In this case, both factors translated to implanting guerrilla warfare in the western Guatemalan highlands, the most isolated, least connected and having the weakest links to what we today define as agroexport capitalism… At the same time it is the most densely populated by indigenous people, the sector of the Guatemalan population that not only is in the majority but is also socio-economically the most severely exploited and oppressed.

Movement in the 1960s

The guerrilla movement had begun on November 13, 1960 when army officers attempted a coup against then president Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes in large part a reaction to his permitting those training for an invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs to do so on Guatemalan soil. Though the coup attempt failed, they chose a strategy of guerrilla warfare, eventually forming the FAR, Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes, and locating themselves in the east of the country in the banana plantation region and in Guatemala City. Building support for a guerrilla movement was not only slow, the process involved many losses. They initiated public hostilities after four years with a group of twenty-one, but after a year were reduced to five people, then with more recruiting reached thirty people. In 1966 when Julio César Méndez Montenegro became president, he stepped up the confrontation, and the movement disintegrated with the onslaught of torture and assassination of sympathizers and army organization of peasant militias. The key leader, Turcios Lima, one of the original officers to rebel, died in a mysterious car crash. By 1967 guerrillas were once more reduced to a group of six.

Two celebrities joined: the poet Otto Rene Castillo who served as political organizer, and Miss Guatemala 1958, Rogelia Cruz. Castillo was a gifted poet. One of his poems served as a prophecy:

My country, Let us walk together, you and I;
I will descend into the abyss where you send me,
I will drink your bitter cup,
I will be blind so you may have eyes,
I will be voiceless so you may sing,
I have to die so you may live.

He was killed in 1967. Rogelia was, of course, very beautiful and became an icon when she was killed, her naked body left in public as a warning to others. In 1968 FAR killed the US ambassador. In 1970 they successfully carried out several sensational kidnappings, but another founding leader, Yon Sosa, was also killed. They continued in the Petén, Santa Rosa, Escuintla, and Guatemala City.

Gaspar Ilom

At this time a second organization formed, ORPA, or Organización del Pueblo en Armas, headed by Miguel Angel Asturias' son Rodrigo, now 32. Rodrigo had been born in 1939 and when he was two years old, his brother Miguel Angel was born. When he was three the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda established a friendship with his father and visited their household. The following years included his father's loss of work due to political changes, a move to Mexico, and his parents' divorce when he was eight. Rodrigo's subsequent years included long separations from his father who served in various diplomatic posts abroad. *Hombres de Maiz* was published when Rodrigo was ten, and his father remarried in Argentina the following year.

The 1954 overthrow occurred when Rodrigo was 15, and planted seeds of his future revolutionary commitments. He then studied at the University in Argentina, living near his father. By 1959 Rodrigo had decided to become a revolutionary guerrilla, though he and his father disagreed about the need for violent revolution. When he returned to Guatemala to be part of the movement, he was arrested in 1962 and on the verge of being shot. But after a reprieve and 15 months in jail, he was expelled to Mexico in 1964.

Rodrigo crossed into Guatemala from Mexico on April 5, 1971 and lived an underground, clandestine life, for 16 years. He chose Gaspar Ilom as his *nom de guerre* and explained why:

> It is very simple. Ever since I read *Hombres de Maiz,* I have been impressed with the personality of Gaspar Ilom. It occurred to me that it would be a just recognition to this person, as well as to my father who wrote the work. Now it is difficult to lay aside a name that I have had for more than 30 years. Even my wife calls me Gaspar. Many of my

> *compañeros* in the mountains don't even know my real name. When I arrive there, they all say that "Compañero Gaspar" has come.
> I thought it was a way of identifying myself with the struggle that we were carrying on. And it was a way of rendering homage to my father for what he had given me. ... The moment I crossed the river and began to go deep into the mountains, I started to feel the possibility and the prospect of another life, of a very rich life. ... I was a completely clandestine man, who went totally unnoticed.

He and two other university graduates founded ORPA and worked eight years secretly, holding large meetings at night, trying to convince others that war was necessary. Rather than reporting them to the authorities, the peasants listened responsively and referred to ancestors who had predicted liberators from the mountains. They recruited and trained peasant organizers, and gave courses on political and historical themes. One of the first nine recruits, Commander Evarardo (real name: Efrain Bamaca Velazquez) joined Ilom at the age of 18 and was the only Maya to reach the top ranks in the rebel army. He would become well known after his death due to the dramatic hunger strike of his American wife, Jennifer Harbury. During the eight years spent organizing secretly, Rodrigo's father died in France in 1974.

Ejercito Guerrillero de los Pobres

A third organization, the EGP, Ejercito Guerrillero de los Pobres (EGP), was also formed at this time. During the 1954 CIA invasion, Che Guevara had been in Guatemala, working as a doctor. As described in *The Motorcycle Diaries* his outrage over the injustices he was seeing throughout Latin America had pushed him toward Marxism and this was the last straw. When the overthrow occurred, he took refuge in the Argentinian Embassy as did young Ricardo Ramirez. He had become a union organizer and a member of the Partido Guatemalteco de Trabajadores (PGT), which was outlawed and became clandestine after the coup.

Payeras, also in the EGP, also developed his revolutionary ideology in response to the 1954 CIA invasion. After Payeras' death in 1995, Yolanda published materials in addition to what he had published in his lifetime, and those contain interesting biographical details. He was born and raised in Chimaltenango, near the town center, and his house has been replaced by the phone company. When he was 14, he was living in Guatemala City near the government radio station and describes the guns, explosions, violence, and chaos he experienced at the time of the 1954 overthrow.

After high school he studied philosophy at the University of San Carlos and became interested in Marxism. He continued studies in Mexico and then in Europe, and starting at the age of 24, from 1964-1968, he studied philosophy at the University Karl Marx in Leipzig, East Germany. This was followed by two years of travel in Cuba, Soviet Union, North Korea, Italy and Belgium. He then settled in Mexico. While in Mexico, his brother was disappeared by the government.

When studying in Bucharest, Romania, Payeras met Asturias. Payeras, in awe of his literary idol, spent a somewhat tongue-tied evening with Asturias. When Payeras moved to Leipzig to continue his studies he once more encountered Asturias there. By the time Asturias published his *Sonetos de Italia* in 1965, he knew that Payeras was also an aspiring poet and he inscribed a copy "For Mario Payeras, poet and customs agent for the stars, who lets through firefly contraband."

In January 1972, the fifteen committed Guatemalan guerrillas of the EGP crossed the border from Mexico into the Ixcan just north of Ilom to begin recruiting for a revolution. Because they worked clandestinely for many years building support, we co-existed with them in the Ixil area, completely oblivious that our aims for community development would soon drastically be changed and curtailed by their social change movement.

Their cohort included several Kekchi Maya indigenous people from Baja Verapaz who had been part of the 60s movement, and the objective was to recruit Ixil Maya, since of the fifteen, none were Ixiles. Four were Maya from other areas, five had lived on the Pacific Coast, two were from the eastern region, and four were from cities.

Within months one revolutionary gave up the hardships of revolutionary life, and returned to clerking in a store. Another was executed by the guerrilla group for expressing his skepticism of the group's ability to win support. Another left because of illness and a fourth left to organize in the city. In two years they gained only one guerrilla recruit. After beginning to work in a more populated area, two Ixiles joined them. By the spring of 1975 there were fifty armed men. On their way to La Perla the hardships were such that they lost all of their new recruits.

Yolanda Colom, whose uncle was mayor of Guatemala City and eventually assassinated, became a supporter of both Payeras and the movement. She joined the group in the mountains and she and Payeras married. She describes in her memoir how she created training documents and literacy materials for the indigenous recruits. By 1976 she says they had about 70 recruits to whom they read the writings of Ché. His image was part of the EGP flag, carrying on

his tradition and hoping to replicate the Cuban success in the Sierra Maestra now in the Guatemalan Cuchumatanes.

In the summer of 1974 and again in the spring of 1975, we hiked to Ilom and stayed overnight at the finca. Only a month later on June 7, 1975 guerrillas shot the owner of the coffee-plantation that had been the source of the conflict described in Asturias' novel, and a man who had offered himself to the CIA as an opposition leader before the 1954 coup. The past continually impinges on the present, and when we were at the finca the grave of the owner was pointed out to us–a cross in an enclosure on the top of a high hill near the entrance. The army, when it took over the finca as a base, used the space as a helipad. The army reaction to his death included shooting 38 cooperative leaders in the Ixcan the following day and they spent several months combing the mountains in an unsuccessful attempt to find the guerrillas.

In the midst of this organizing which would become such a political earthquake, Guatemala suffered a severe physical earthquake on February 4th, 1976. Payeras' hometown of Chimaltenango was extremely hard hit, and throughout the country over 25,000 people died from this literal shaking of the earth.

Even as the army pursued the guerrillas in attacks and counterattacks, they began efforts to win over the disaffected population. As, perhaps, a bureaucratic coincidence, on May 17, 1977 the people of Ilom received title to the land the town is situated on as well as municipal land for planting crops. Another landowner from the region was kidnapped at the end of 1977 by the EGP. The army mobilized an intensive search and did a house to house search in Nebaj at the end of January. The family paid a ransom and published EGP communiqués in the papers, one of which cited the landowner's acts as a counterinsurgent leader, and he was released.

Armed Conflict

When General Lucas García became president in 1978, extrajudicial killings rose from 100 to 10,000 by 1981 according to the Historical Clarification Commission.

The EGP occupied Nebaj on January 21, 1979 to commemorate the search of the town the previous year. A meeting held in the market to explain revolutionary goals included a denunciation of yet another landowner as an exploiter of the people. A *guerrillera* then went to his house and shot him as he resisted being taken to the central square. Today the house where he was shot has become a gracious hotel, the Ixil owners well aware they have transformed a space marked by tragedy.

That evening 100 special troops arrived from Quiché and the army organized a meeting to denounce the communist agitators. Special police were established in Nebaj, and the number of disappearances and incidents of torture rose. In June 1979 army bases were established in Nebaj, Cotzal, Chajul, and on Finca La Perla. The guerrillas carried out armed propaganda actions with new Ixil recruits and the army attempted bombings in the mountains for several months, but found it to be ineffectual.

The experiences of the EGP vanguard were brilliantly written up by Mario Payeras in the book *Days of the Jungle*, and his 80-page account received the Casa de las Americas prize from Cuba. As the EGP expanded all over the country, he became the commander of the urban front in 1980. He successfully led efforts to car bomb the Industrial bank financial center.

Meanwhile the FAR under Pablo Monsanto (real name: Jorge Soto) concentrated in the east and worked with union organizing. The EGP led by Rolando Moran (real name: Ricardo Ramirez), concentrated in the north and also did urban recruiting; their organization claimed to have armed groups all over the country, but were particularly strong in Chimaltenango as well as the Ixil area and Ixcan. Gaspar Ilom (real name: Rodrigo Asturias) had chosen the mountains of Huehuetenango and San Marcos and down to the Lake and Sololá. The PGT, the worker's party continued its efforts as well.

Other allies included some of the popular unarmed but sympathetic organizations, including the Comité de Unidad Campesina (CUC). Following an execution in Chajul, representatives from CUC went to the city to protest. Neither Congress, the OAS, radio stations, newspapers, student groups and political parties was willing to help. Consequently, on January 31, 1980 they occupied the Spanish embassy. It was bombed and 37 people died.

Among those killed were four students from the University of San Carlos. The University had already seen the death of three prominent student leaders, and a key administrator. In 1980 the 140 members of the university council met weekly to analyze their role in the Guatemalan crisis, and since the rector's life was in danger, he went into exile. The government wanted to take over and have the military control the university, and as a result of a guerrilla attack in the city, shot at students coming into the university, wounding many, killing eight. In 1980 a total of 127 students and professors were killed, others were tortured, and many professors chose to go into exile.

ORPA announced itself publicly on September 18, 1979 by occupying a plantation, and they executed three *ladino* plantation owners in San Pedro Necta in February 1981. As the army retaliated, the deaths of many who

joined the movement were taken philosophically by Gaspar Ilom as a necessary, though sad, part of war and their sacrifices became a motivation to persist.

Catholic Church response

The situation was becoming complicated for the Catholic church as well, particularly for the diocese of Quiché. On March 2, 1980 a shootout by the army in the Nebaj plaza was witnessed by Fr. José María Gran who reported this massacre of civilians to the diocese. He and his assistant were ambushed and killed June 4, 1980, probably in retaliation. The bishops responded strongly and said that those who plan and execute murders of priests would be excommunicated. On July 10th Fr. Faustino Villanueva was also killed in Quiché and on July 18th Bishop Gerardi's life was threatened. The next day he determined to close the Quiché Diocese.

Bishop Gerardi hoped that his action would draw attention to the seriousness of the problem and asked for dialogue with the authorities. When he presented his problem in Rome, Pope John Paul II responded with a letter to the Guatemalan bishops objecting to the "scale of suffering and death that presses down, giving no sign of letting up, upon so many families and church communities, deprived not only of many catechists, but also of priests who have died in obscure circumstances, at times in vile and treacherous ways". He mentioned Quiché and exhorted "those responsible in your country to spare no effort at remedying the tidal wave of discord and hatred".

When Bishop Gerardi attempted to return to the country in November of 1980 he was interrogated at the airport, refused entry to Guatemala or El Salvador, and so went into exile in Costa Rica. Meanwhile, the first attempt to reestablish Catholic leadership in Quiché failed when Fr. Juan Alonzo Fernández was killed February 15, 1981, ten days after he arrived.
The Guatemalan Army claimed there were 10,000 guerrillas in 1981 and another 200,000 were collaborators. More conservative estimates guessed about 4,000 armed revolutionaries. The latter may be the more accurate number, since when demobilized, less than 3,000 guerrillas turned in arms. In 1981 the government broadcast information that the three guerrilla groups (ORPA, EGP, and FAR) and the Guatemala Labor Party (PGT) had formed the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG).

By 1984, the identity of Gaspar Ilom as Rodrigo Asturias had become known. In 1985 when a journalist visited the ORPA encampment on the southern slope of the Atitlan volcano, he found a group that survived on rice, beans, maize, and soya coffee. A camp library of about 60 books included Shakespeare, Tolstoy and Dickens.

As the guerrilla leaders continued their recruitment, helped by injustices and torture by the army, the number of Ixil guerrillas increased. When a philosophy professor visited them in the mountains and reported on their activities and attitudes, "exploitation" and "repression" occurred frequently in accounts of why they had joined. Some began by doing errands, recruited by friends, family or acquaintances, and as their contact and commitment increased, they might join those in the mountains. The ideological instruction which often included their first opportunity to become literate might then reach a point where they could serve as organizers in villages.

Counterinsurgency

A counterinsurgency strategy began under President Lucas García and continued under Presidents Ríos Montt and Mejia Victores. Their scorched earth policy would be devastating to all the country, and Ixil country would be particularly hard hit. From March 1982 to August 1983 under Ríos Montt an estimated 70,000 were killed or disappeared. A total of 626 villages were attacked, inhabitants tortured and murdered, and over 300 villages were destroyed. In one declassified CIA cable the guerillas are said to be a phantom enemy, and that it was civilians being slaughtered for their suspected sympathies: "The well-documented belief by the army that the entire Ixil Indian population is pro-EGP has created a situation in which the army can be expected to give no quarter to combatants and non-combatants alike." (see note below for source) Terrorized, an estimated million people fled from their homes.

In 1979 the EGP had begun to recruit in the village of Ilom, and soldiers from the nearby base at the *finca* began kidnapping selected people in retaliation. In 1981 select people were killed; at least ten homes were burned. As things escalated, the guerrillas realized what was coming and went to the village to warn the people to flee into the mountains. The people found it very hard to believe they were in such danger and chose to stay in their community.

On March 23, 1982, the very day Ríos Montt came to power through a coup, the army came once more and called the villagers to the center of the town. Antonio Caba was 11 when he and his father were locked in the church by the army with over 1000 other men, and the women were locked in a municipal building. They watched as the 95 men were selected for death, and watched through the church windows as they were killed, fearing for their own lives. The army then burned the town to the ground, and all homes were destroyed and everyone lost everything they owned in the fire, including all of their stocks of food.

They went to the nearby coffee plantation, and over 150 children died from exposure and a measles epidemic in the first months. Antonio's grandmother died of *tristeza* (stress & depression) and his little sister died of malnutrition when she was 40 days old. The army compelled them to serve on armed civilian civil patrols. When they were allowed to go back to rebuild their town, they started with nothing.

The surrounding villages were attacked on subsequent days, and similar massacres, burning, destruction of villages occurred throughout the country. According to human rights reports there were a total of 114 massacres in Ixil country, 344 in the Department of Quiché, many in the Ixcan, and a total of 626 villages destroyed in the country as a whole.

Non-violent responses and the effort to stay alive including some who went through the US to Canada with the help of the sanctuary movement; many from the Ixcan fled across the Mexican border and became refugee communities there, some in the isolated areas hid in the mountains or formed the CPRs—Communidades de Poblaciones en Resistencia. Closer to heavily militarized towns, people chose to accept army amnesty and being resettled in development pole villages, required to patrol for the army. Ilom residents, when allowed to return, were a development pole.

The scorched earth policy under three different heads of state (Lucas García, Ríos Montt, and Mejía Víctores) which affected civilians so terribly, also defeated the insurgents. The head of the EGP organization, Rolando Morán, decided that the best strategy for achieving social change would be through a negotiated peace process and went into exile.

Mario Payeras

Mario Payeras in 1982 was not only ill and undergoing surgeries, he saw the army successfully find and defeat the urban organization he was leading as well as isolate the few loyalists in the mountains. He went into exile in Mexico and wrote an autobiography, and broke with the EGP in disagreement over military strategy, and started his own organization, Octubre Revolucionario. From 1985 until his death in 1995, while trying to build this organization he wrote numerous books, including a three volume work on military strategy, short stories, more children's books, a critical reflection on the failure of the revolutionary movement, and reflections on ecology and what he called "ecocide" brought by industrialization. He worked on a novel and on trying to learn Mayan languages, and started a political/cultural magazine.

Payeras' book of environmental history, published in 1988, in 70 pages describes Guatemala in lyrical Edenic terms, then the destruction of the

environment brought by agribusiness and industrialization, and finally offers a plan for restoration of the environment and respect for the Maya. The blurb on the back of the book, *Latitude del Flor y el Granizo*, gives a sense of his aspirations in this project:

> In this book, Mario Payeras (1940-1995) demonstrates to us with poetic enthusiasm the beauty and fascination of Guatemala's landscapes. The author's love for his country, for the exploited and discriminated indigenous people, and for the flora and fauna in its land, cannot be hidden. His poetic prose, amazing at times, describes the components with descriptive language, full of imagery and metaphor.
> With the imagination of a poet, he causes us to love Guatemala. With the rigor of a scientist, he explains natural and social phenomenon. With the expertise of a guide, he shows us the paths of the plant and social worlds of Guatemala. With the passion of a social fighter, he gives us confidence in human potential to change the world and affirm life. *The Latitude of Flowers and Hailstones* is an essential text to understand Guatemala in its social and ecological dimension. At the same time it is an invitation to life, a beautiful way of writing science and history and a delicate means of understanding literature.

Payeras' entry to Guatemala was denied by the government in 1994 and he died in January of the following year. He was buried in the Tuxtla Gutierrez cementary in Chiapas near several other guerrilla leaders, including the famed Yon Soza.

For further viewing:

When the Mountains Tremble An important film on the revolutionary movement.

For further reading:

Stoll, David. *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala.*

Note:

"Counterinsurgency Operations in El Quiché," February 1982, Central Intelligence Agency, secret cable, in National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 11 U.S. POLICY IN GUATEMALA, 1966-1996 Kate Doyle and Carlos Osorio. Available at: www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB11/docs/ Accessed: August 18, 2009.

Chapter 13

Justice and Reconciliation

As we drove back toward Chajul after seeing the ruins, we passed small villages that had also been destroyed and burned during the conflict—Covdonga, Estrella Polar, Chel, Jua. The people of Chel, for example, had fled into the mountains to hide and survived with great hardship on what they could hunt and gather. Finally, their suffering too great, they turned themselves in to the army that had burned down their town that was stationed on the *finca*. Rebuilt Chel is once more a graceful village lining a river, numerous bridges crossing between the houses, lamina roofs a pleasing rust color, many brightly-dressed women washing clothing on the rocks under large trees.

It struck me as ironic that *Men of Maize* had been prophetic of the revolutionaries. The guerrilla movement in the book depends in part on the efforts of the shamans who cause deaths through their magic and through inciting others. The real guerrilla movement was more Marxist/ladino/class-based than Mayan, but did in fact, execute and kidnap landowners, and did kill a significant number of soldiers. Perhaps there is a disconnect here: the destructive fire of bombs and weaponry were massively on the side of modern agriculture, not the Maya, and the Maya-instigated retribution to date has been court cases resulting in some acknowledgments of injustice, but no violent deaths. Lucas and others who sent the fire, have died of old age. Perhaps Asturias did not envision that the Arevalo/Arbenz dream of independent peasant farmers turning the tables on agribusiness would be smashed by agribusiness/military/CIA and end up with yet deeper tragedies for the Maya.

Rebuilding

Similar tragedies to that of these villages took place across Guatemala, with Mayan areas the hardest hit. The suffering is almost impossible to grasp, particularly today when they have rebuilt their homes, their towns, their lives. Thirty years on, they are aware that they are stronger than the forces who sought to destroy them. I am often stunned by the determination and resilience it took for people to survive these hardships, and the courage of the communities in rebuilding from nothing. Fires destroyed wood and rain destroyed adobes, so it was as though they were new settlers when allowed to return.

For their rebuilding, one of the few things they were given was aluminum roofing, *lamina.* Today the roofs are all shades, from the bright silver of new

constructions, to the softened rust red after years in the rain, to browns and even black after more time. The softened version is enough like old tiles to have charm and beauty, something unexpected for me.

These accompaniers played a small but important role in the human rights story of the country. They haphazardly began by being present to Nineth Montenegro, a woman whose husband had disappeared in Guatemala City, and whose efforts to find him attracted other widows who formed the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM). After violence against members of the group, Quakers started this non-violent form of protection and the story is well-told in *Unarmed Bodyguards* as they took on this role with other leaders. Accompaniment has now become a standard tool in human rights work, extending even to Ilom as it connected to the world through the human rights struggles post-conflict.

Seeking Justice

The Association for Justice and Reconciliation, formed from the five departments hardest hit in the conflict: Ixil country and settlers in Ixcan in Quiché, Q'anjob'ales and Mam in Huehuetenango to the west, the Achí to the east in Baja Verapaz and Q'eq'chi in Alta Verapaz, the settlers in Petén to the northeast, and Chimaltenango on the road from Guatemala City. The members formed the association in 2000.

Many became involved through the exhumation process of removing their families from mass graves to then rebury them. Survivors gave their testimonies of what happened and if they knew of someone who was responsible for the massacres. They also gave their name, last name, address, dates, how many family members they lost, if they lost mother, child, siblings, or grandparents. They also started a process of exhumations and inhumations. In the exhumations they could learn form in which people were executed, shot, burned, or cut with a machete. The first lawsuit filed against all of the high command—three presidents, their defense ministers, and their intelligence officers—stagnated for many years.

One by-product of the intensity of the conflict is that Guatemala has had an amazing array of human rights heroes, people working non-violently for the transformation of unjust suffering. I made a list of approximately 100 leaders, many of which have received international recognition for extraordinary work for justice, and this list is in Appendix A. It is impressive, and the country can be proud of all of these people who worked tirelessly, and some to the point of death, for change and justice.

Though some guerrilla leaders thought a peace process a good strategy after the chaos of 1982, the opportunity languished, finally starting in 1986. It continued with ups and downs for 10 years, resulting in a truly impressive set of eleven agreements. The guerrilla organizations jointly negotiated as the URNG, and civil society and the United Nations played important roles as facilitators.

Despite the fact that a negotiated peace was underway, there were several high profile episodes of violence. In 1989 members of the student association at the University of San Carlos began to receive death threats. At least twenty student leaders were kidnapped and disappeared. From 1978 to 1995 a total of 433 people were killed from universities. Myrna Mack, an anthropologist studying the plight of refugees in the Ixcan and thereby hearing of the scorched earth policy, was stabbed 27 times on September 11, 1990, her body left in the street outside her office. In December 1990 the people of Santiago Atitlan successfully forced the army to remove its base that had been in the town ten years.

Peace Accords

The final accord was celebrated on December 29, 1996, a day that continues to be recognized. Jointly with President Arzú, Ricardo Ramirez, head of the EGP, received the 1996 UNESCO Peace Prize for their efforts. Gaspar Ilóm (Rodrigo Asturias) was not one of the signers of the peace because a disaffected member of his organization had kidnapped a wealthy cement heiress right before negotiations ended. However, in a sign of peace, Arzú went outside to the Central Park to announce the peace, and together, he, Gaspar Ilóm, and a disabled child, lit the perpetual flame. This monument, which remained outside many years, is now in the patio of peace in the National Palace.

The guerrillas reformed as a political party, and Ilóm ran for president in 2003, but received only 2.6% of the popular vote. He died of a heart attack in 2005. Because the Peace Accords had agreed that the United Nations report *Memory of Silence,* would not name names, the Catholic church undertook its own set of interviews. The Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala compiled these interviews into the four-volume report *Nunca Más (Never Again)* under the leadership of Bishop Juan Gerardi. Killed a few days after presenting the report at the national cathedral, he became an acknowledged martyr of the human rights movement. Reading Francisco Goldman's *The Art of Political Murder: Who Killed the Bishop?* the success in trying his killers, frought with farce as it was, symbolized transformation.

Bishop Gerardi's garage where he was murdered is only a few blocks behind the national palace and there is a memorial plaque to him in the park outside the house. Inside, the garage contains perfectly ordinary functional cars carrying out the business of the diocese. Bu there is now also a room of photos and books lining walls. On the opposite side are three murals—one of the bishop and the peoples' increasing distress over death and suffering, another of indigenous groups organizing resistance and calls for justice. Each one of these has heroes to celebrate.

The third mural is the "Mass of the Martyrs" and here there are so many recognizable faces. Myrna Mack, for example, an anthropologist whose research regarding the displaced angered the government enough to cause a dramatic stabbing death on the streets near her Guatemala City office. Her sister Helen was transformed by this death into a determined human rights fighter who won reparations and an apology in the case against the government.

Documenting the Past

When I visited the Police Archives, our excellent host said that things like this could only happen in Macondo, fictional town in Gabriel García Marquez´novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* and in Guatemala. Authorities during the Peace process assured the negotiators there were no police archives, they had all been destroyed. But in October 1997, ten months after the accords were signed, the police spirited out tons of documents to an isolated site surrounded by broken-down and abandoned vehicles, and with a mysterious inner space only accessible by one door that seemed meant for detentions. When in 2005 the neighbors expressed fear that there were explosives in the place, the team investigating happened to notice stacks of bundled papers. Invested with rats, bats and insects, the quickly realized what this was: police archives from 1881-1997.

A massive undertaking to clean, catalogue, scan, put on line, and preserve these 80 million documents is underway, and the Justice Department has successfully prosecuted several human rights cases using data from here, including the disappearance of Nineth Montenegro's husband. It is astonishing to walk through the thousands of boxes, and startling that there are over 1 million cards that monitored persons of interest, largely those perceived as a political threat. There are hopes to construct a public museum and a small portion of the space shows the chaos they initially encountered. Already there are two beautiful outdoor pieces of art—an angel of peace, and a split piece of Guatemalan marble that symbolizes the goal to unify a fractured country.

Another important space that commemorates human rights heroes is the historical memory museum Kaji Tulum in Guatemala City. It has a dark room, lit only by candles of some ghostly outlines of a family on the back black wall, the simple possessions in the room tossed around on the dirt floor. Without words this tells the story of the worst of the armed conflict, the unjust killing of rural civilians. When schoolchildren go through, the guide, usually a university student, explains the meaning. The next room has a whirlwind of Maya clothing going up the center and around the room are the outlines of soldiers and people, and a set of books: the UN Human Rights report, the Catholic church human rights report, a bound copy of the material from the trial of one of the presidents during this period of human rights violations, the military manual and instructions that became the basis for considering this genocide.

Two small dark rooms contain videos from the conflict period, one room covered with a small percentage of the names of victims, the other with pictures and captions of some of the human rights heroes who died. One exception: Nobel Laureate Rigoberta Menchú is still very much alive and active, working for justice.

In the next room we have a series of images to represent the journey from truth, to memory, to justice. And then a room with photos of youth working for justice, mirrors to catch the images of visitors and place them among those with this work, and a way of making stylized birds of peace fly. In the courtyard a bright blue tree is adorned with red birds on which are inscribed the names of grassroots organizations, all key players in the human rights movement. Included here is the Asociación de Justicia y Reconciliación. The final reflection room has four colors of corn and indications of their symbolism, a tapestry overhead with names of those family members who were lost, and place to sit and write what "I can do to build peace." There is an open space of plexiglass where these comments are accumulating.

Perhaps it is my deep familiarity with the details of which these rooms are artistic representations, but I find this moving, and perhaps many other visitors do as well. The place seems to me one of transfiguration of suffering into hope and peace, as it is both realistic and optimistic, truthful and healing. One of the people quoted in the museum is Antonio from Ilom, and one of the organizations cited is the Asociación de Justicia y Reconciliación of which he served many years as president. The Ilom massacre marked Antonio's life so strongly that he became a determined and fearless human rights worker, taking numerous opportunities for training that has made him an effective and articulate spokesman and representative for many communities. He says he will stay in the fight for justice until his dying day.

Getting into Court

We had seen the small plank house in front of Antonio's home for the human rights accompaniers. These young people from multiple countries in the world were doing their part to keep safe a young man from Ilom, Antonio Caba Caba, who had become the president of a small Association with ambitious goals: to bring to justice the presidents, defense ministers, and intelligence officers of three administrations who had harshly sent military forces to kidnap, burn towns, massacre, and make refugees and displaced people of Maya communities. Antonio spoke of many who came to live in Ilom—several from the US, others from Canada, Germany, Denmark, France, Switzerland—all human rights accompaniers to keep him and others from the community safe.

It strikes me forcibly that such an important human rights leader is from such an isolated village. And, in fact, he went to Guatemala City many times as *AJR* president and legal representative, and starting in 2000 had to walk half-way to and from Chajul until around 2007 the road finally went all the way to Ilom. Antonio emphasized that they are not looking for vengeance but for the truth so that the citizens can know and judge what they suffered, so that it can never be repeated. As we traveled with him, it seemed so unlikely that this gracious, unassuming man who lived so far away had become a significant player on the international human rights scene.

Antonio became a member of the Association as did all the 125 member because he is a survivor who wanted to see change not only for victims, but for all Guatemalans and the generations to come. After starting to organize in 1995 with the help of national and international agencies. CONAVIGUA had been started as a widow's group by Rosalina Tuyuc, who went on to become a political figure in the country. Others included Amnesty International, the Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala, and the Center for Legal Defence of Human Rights. .

In 2006, AJR brought a new lawsuit to replace the stalled one. This was more specifically against Efrain Ríos Montt and his intelligence officer for the time he was in office and focused on the Ixil area. The 2000 suit against eight people failed in part since all managed to escape prosecution by living in exile, dying, or hiding, Mejia Victores, defense minister and then president, was arrested but did not stand trial due to illness and senility. Ríos Montt could not be prosecuted while serving as a member of congress, but when his term of office ended, he was taken to court and put under house arrest. Strangely, then, Ríos Montt—as he so often had in press reports—served as a stand-in for two other presidents and an entire military structure that defended their actions as a legitimate response to a guerrilla movement.

For AJR and their human rights lawyers, CALDH, the purpose was clear. As the trial started, the president of AJR was interviewed and expressed these hopes: "As survivors and defenders I believe that we have a right to demand justice and to clarify the truth. …There cannot be people who deserve more "equality," both in rights and in justice. … It will mean that there is justice for all, without regard to the economic level of a person. This has never happened before in Guatemala. … Perhaps not overnight, but we hope that, by means of this process, the younger generations will have a better future. We want the rights of the indigenous people of the communities, who were most discriminated against during the war, to be respected. We demand that all be taken in account as equals by the state, without distinction due to history or origin. We also hope that with this sentence impunity will diminish in the country, not only for crimes committed during the armed conflict but also for crimes today. What we want as an association is a definite change toward equality."

The defense offered over 100 legal challenges to having a trial at all, saying a trial is not wise or right for all these reasons: 1) bringing up the past is polarizing the nation, 2) this cannot be genocide since all of the Ixiles were not killed, 3) guerrilla massacres cancel out army massacres, 4) the soldiers who died equate with civilians who were killed, 5) this is a political lynching and the continuation of the conflict in which leftists were militarily defeated.
On the anniversary of the Ilom massacre, March 23, 2013, the story was told in Guatemalan court. Pedro Caba said: "We want the law to be applied. Is there law for us as human beings, for the Maya people? May the authorities realize that we are not lying." Another remarkable part of the trial has been that testimony was taken in Ixil Maya. Survivors of massacres, sexual violations, burned villages, and living in the mountains with great hardships, recounted with tears their extremely painful experiences.

One day I went in to see for myself the context of this historic trial. When I arrived at the court, a little disoriented and confused, Ixil women were also arriving, and I followed them up the three flights to the large room. I was stunned as I walked out a door to see Ríos Montt standing three feet away in the hall with his guards, smiling politely. Inside I watched the reporters taking pictures, interviewing, the crowd gathering, the prosecution and defense teams lining up at their respective tables. That included the president of AJR, as representative of the plaintiffs. Ríos Montt came in, poised and dignified, and went and graciously shook hands with those at the prosecution table. From the level of politeness one wouldn't know they were opponents. The reporters swarmed around him taking pictures and asking for comments as he sat down once again at his table, without his lawyer.

We rose for the three judges to come in, sat down, were asked to turn off our cell phones, but were allowed to use our cameras. The judges had each participant respond that they were present, speaking into their microphones. The judge spoke with dignity as she read the higher court decisions that validated the continuation of the trial, but said the trial must stop for the day so that the defendant would have the benefit of counsel, and decreed that the trial would resume at 8:30 a.m. on Wednesday.

At one point the trial had been suspended, waiting for a higher court decision that potentially could nullify all of the testimony given or potentially require survivors to repeat their testimony. The panel of three judges were on the verge of hearing closing arguments, when an arcane legal tangle was created. When the suspension was announced, some of the non-Maya supporters in the courtroom cried, but the Ixiles did not. When asked why not, they responded: 'We've survived worse. We've finally been able to speak out, and we'll be able to overcome this setback.' " The courtroom erupted with the chant, "Somos Todos Ixiles" meaning "We are all Ixiles." Later that afternoon they marched from the Supreme Court where the trial has been held, to the Constitutional Court which introduced the measures bringing the trial to a stop.

On Friday afternoon, May 10, 2013, the verdict on the genocide trial was given: the defendant Ríos Montt was sentenced to 50 years in prison for genocide and 30 years for crimes against humanity. Specifically, he was found guilty of masterminding and overseeing the massacre of 1,771 Ixil Mayans in the department of El Quiché, as well as the forced displacement of 29,000, and 1,485 acts of sexual violence and acts of torture. Approximately 5.5% of Ixiles were killed, so the number was only of the specific instances brought before the court. His military intelligence officer was not convicted. Ríos Montt spoke to reporters and immediately challenged the justice of his conviction. He was then led from the courtroom by police and taken to prison, and was later moved to a military hospital, suffering from hypertension. Meanwhile, his lawyers continued to submit legal challenges, trying to reverse the case.

On Monday, May 14 the court met to consider the reparations asked for by the plaintiffs. They did not ask for any payments from the Ríos Montt estate, but rather for any expenses to be covered by the Guatemalan state. Presumably these reparations are also nullified. The requests approved by the court had the potential to have a positive impact on traumatized and impoverished Ixiles, but it is more of the same obstruction they have persisted in fighting for so many years. Here is what was approved:

1) Public apologies at the National Palace of Justice, and the three Ixil municipal centers by each branch of government with a formal written

apology. Current President Otto Pérez Molina has said that he would welcome the opportunity to do this, and that he has wanted to offer this apology since the signing of the peace agreements.

2) Memorials and educational reforms, including
a) a cultural center,
b) a museum commemorating the identity of the indigenous peoples,
c) a monument to honor victims, particularly women and children,
d) a mural dedicated to the Ixil people affirming commitment to a multicultural system of justice, and
e) to make March 23 a National Day Against Genocide.

3) Establishment of training programs for the military and intelligence entities which focus on human rights and humanitarian law.

4) Establishment of elementary, secondary, high school and universities in communities affected by genocide.

5) Inclusion of genocide victims in the Ixil region under the 2003 Law on Reparations which provides limited reparations to victims.

On Monday, May 21 the highest court, the Constitutional Court, ruled in a 3 to 2 decision that a portion of the trial had to be redone, and so the verdict and sentencing were nullified. This did not rule that Ríos Montt was innocent, simply that the clock had to be turned back to the moment when all the prosecution witnesses had completed their testimony.

The Supreme Court building in the Civic Center with his large human rights plaza in front of it logically seems to be the highest court. It certainly has great architectural grandeur with the wide marble lobby and two sweeping marble staircases curving out and up to the second floor. But under the revised constitution of 1989, a higher Constitutional Court was created, a building built a half a block from the old Parque Colón. The building on an ordinary street thus wields extraordinary power. In the front of the building is a marble sculpture of Pegasus, the winged horse, by Max Leiva, the same artist who made the statue of Asturias on the Reforma.

One of the principal groups that lobbied the court against the verdict was CACIF, the organization of large business owners. Immediately after the verdict they said they would be in permanent session until the sentence was overturned. A reporter asked if they objected to this phrase in the

ruling: ¨extermination of the Ixiles was implemented as a way of defending the national elites¨ and of course they did.

In contrast, Ixil woman Ana Caba said to the Reuters reporter in response to the Constitutional Court decision, ¨I'm distressed. I don't know what's happening. That's how this country is. The powerful people do what they want and we poor and indigenous are devalued. We don't get justice. Justice means nothing for us."

When the annulment occurred other leaders were philosophical, saying "these are things that happen. We have already said that even though they annulled the trial, the history that was made was not only at a national level, but also at an international level and has gone to the whole world. So it is an advantage or a hope for us that even though they can play with the sentence, they can say that what the judge did is of no value, but the sentence was given and they cannot take it away..."

The landmark Myrna Mack case was tried and in 2002 the Colonel who ordered her murder was convicted. The case was overturned on appeal in the following year. The case went to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and in 2004 the government acknowledged responsibility and made reparations, including a very public apology in the National Palace by the president, in an event attended by many human rights leaders.

Additional human rights trials have taken place in Guatemala: in 1999 a paramilitary man received a 50-year sentence for killing dozens; in 2001 three army officers received 30-year prison terms, and their accomplice 20 years; .in 2009 another paramilitary was sentenced to 150 years for his part in disappearances during a two year period; in 2011 four former special forces Kaibilies were sentenced to 6,060 years each for the Dos Erres Massacre. Later that year a fifth soldier was extradited from the US and sentenced to the same time. In 2012 former chief detective of the National Police received 70 years for the disappearance of a university student. The same man received an additional sentence of 90 years in 2015 for orchestrating the attack on the Spanish Embassy in 1980 that resulted in the death of 37 people.

Guatemala can legitimately point to a much-strengthened judicial system that has been able to accomplish these things. Yet despite all these on-going successes, the statistics of violence are higher than the annual civil conflict average of 4,166 annually. Rather the annual average is 4,929, a rate of 41.1 per 100,000 people in 2010, making it the fourth highest rate in the world. The prosecution of these is still very low.

For further viewing:

Precarious Peace A film on the peace process and current issues.
Granito. A film on the human rights struggle.

For further reading:

Wilkinson, Daniel. *Silence on the Mountain: Stories of Terror, Betrayal, and Forgetting in Guatemala.*

Chapter 14

Maya Resurgence

We dropped Antonio off in Chajul, and we stopped to visit one of the families of the *Nuevos Horizontes* scholarship program. The son who had graduated from high school was attempting to start at the university, but as the oldest from a poor and large family, the finances were precarious and it remained to be seen if this would work out. His mother graciously received us and was glad to see that the organization was working to try to figure out how to make his further education possible.

We got back in the pick-up and headed **b**ack to the comforts of the relatively big city of Nebaj. There it was easier for me to accept that the cellphone towers, all that block and cement and all those *tuk-tuks* and trucks are the choices Ixiles are making to modernize. Who am I to impose my nostalgia on today's people, today's needs and opportunities. But part of the choices clearly include holding on to a strong Ixil identity, and that includes language.

Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala

Steve's main purpose for this trip was to give a one-day workshop on Ixil linguistics to a group of twenty young people seeking to learn more and to educate others in reading Ixil. As the end of the workshop we were touched that he was given an Ixil weaving commemorating the day, something we proudly took back to place on our wall.

Even during the conflict, the resurgence of Maya voice occurred with the creation of the *Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala.* A movement of Mayas trained in linguistics and part of producing primers, dictionaries, and grammars, they successfully advocated for the creation of a standard alphabet across all 22 Maya languages, then for the creation of the Academy, the public use of Maya in government publications, and finally a law requiring bilingual instruction. Their main building in Guatemala City is on La Reforma, the former house of the Minister of Defense. The symbolism is not lost on anyone that from a place where armed conflict with Maya was organized, now one can find the proud dissemination of radio, TV, and books. The library and warehouse were open to the public when we attended the 20th anniversary celebration, and there has been impressive production in all the languages.

They have also built locally, with creative Maya-themed designs in each language area. For example, among the K'iche' where the *Popol Vuh* was written, there are stone carvings on the wall of portions of the story. In the Ixil area there is a building that takes up some of the weaving designs. In all the

cases, there is more visibility, more insistence on the viability of language and culture. Since Steve was involved in the ground floor of these efforts, including the publication of numerous books, we are rather astonished what institutionalization can do. One of their many accomplishments was research and publication of a book on history, culture, spirituality and analysis of current issues. Others included an immense grammar, and an analysis of place names.

Development

Six years after the peace accords a community development system was put in place with government funding which could be applied for through the municipality. Community committees, called COCDES, could solicit the projects they needed—roads, water, health centers, schools, etc.
Thanks to that as well as the peace accords and international aid, the 2008 monograph on the Ixil area prepared by the Academia was able to point to these successes and changes: the deactivation of the Civil Patrol and removal of all the army bases in the area, community committees for development, the creation of a Justice Center, construction of asphalted highways to the three main towns and dirt roads to all the villages, creation of a regional peace committee, new primary and middle schools in the villages, and regional health and social services, clinics in villages, organizations for youth and women, and more voter participation.

Additional accomplishments since then include an Ixil judge and staff in the Justice Center, high schools and university extension programs in the region, the construction of the Academia Ixil building. There has also been an astonishing surge in the non-profit sector with immense creativity in their programs and has resulted, in at least three cases, in organizations started in the Ixil area expanding internationally.

Maya Literature

Gaspar Pedro Gonzalez has not only written many books himself, he has taught Mayan literature at Universidad Mariano Galvez and written a book on literature. He makes the point of how rich the production of literature by the ancient Maya was, and how suppressed the Maya were under Colonial and national domination, resulting in "400 years of silence." But that silence has now been broken, and literature is flourishing.

In Zone 1 of Guatemala City there is a wonderful Mayan bookstore, *Nahual Wuj*. Full of books about the Maya, more books written in Mayan languages, board games with Maya themes, machine-made belts and *huipiles* that cut costs, knickknacks with the day-god names, an abacus, a clever rotating

calendar, and an agenda full of Mayan glyphs, it is a treasure-trove for anyone with a love for things Maya. It is also a symbol of how things have changed and how much more the Maya have asserted their presence and languages in the country.

One of the items was a Q1 booklet with statistics on the country. While the 2014 population estimate for the country is over 16 million with 40% Mayan and indigenous people, the booklet focuses on a different but important issue. There were 332 total municipalities (now 333), but in 159 of them, 87% of the population was Maya (2002 census with 3,875,689 Maya in those municipalities and only 556,050 *ladinos*). The point made is that there should be extensive government services in the local languages.

They point out that Guatemala is made up of four ethnicities, with the Maya having the greatest time depth of 5,000 years, the indigenous Xinka, 1000 years, the mixed ladino population 500 years, and the indigenous Garífuna only 200 years. The latter are a mix of African slaves and South American indigenous people who were shipwrecked on the Central American Caribbean coast.

Each page of the booklet points out the practical results today of "500 years of marginality and oppression": 13 years less in life expectancy, higher poverty and extreme poverty, higher rates of illiteracy, fewer university students, higher infant mortality, chronic child malnutrition, and fewer average years of schooling. All true and all serious problems to be addressed. But today's Maya initiatives to address their own marginality and oppression are impressive. Down the street from *Nahual Wuj* is yet another Maya print shop, *Cholsamaj*. Not only do they have yet more Mayan language publications, they have beautifully done reproductions of the Mayan Codices in fold-out form.

Numerous Maya writers have gained international recognition. The most famed is *I, Rigoberta Menchu* by the 1992 Nobel Prize winner, a Quiché Maya woman. Ever popular in literature classes in the US, it tells of the oppression and conflict endured by the Maya from the personal point of view of someone who lost most of her family members to the violence during the armed conflict. Another author, Victor Montejo, a Kanjob'al Maya, has written numerous compelling books, my favorite of which is the *The Adventures of Mr. Puttison among the Maya.* The story of a seemingly naïve American visitor to a remote village and his misadventures. His interactions at first seem kind and charming, even if a little inept, and the community treats him with affection, but I cannot spoil the ending—it must be read!

A K'iche'-Maya poet, Humberto Ak'b'al also has gained an international reputation with his poems widely translated into many languages. One haunting poem:

Memories
Now and then
I walk backwards.
It is my way of remembering.

If I only walked forward,
I could tell you
about forgetting.

Even today I thoroughly enjoy seeing Gaspar Pedro Gonzalez' book *La Otra Cara* in bookstores. I cannot help but have a sense of connection when seeing the translation of the book, *A Mayan Life*, on reading lists or in bookstores, since I translated it! Another Q'anjob'al author, Gaspar has gone on to write many more books including outstanding poetry, his most recent, *Xumakil.* His gracefully presents tangible Maya experience.

Maya Artists

There is a similar rise in visibility among Maya artists. On my first trip back to Guatemala after many years, in 2007, I made a point of going to Comalapa. This Mayan town is noted for its naif artists, starting with the renowned artist Andrés Curruchich, and going beyond to thousands of others. My motive: on-line I had seen images from the historical mural on the front of the cemetery and was struck by the vividness and honesty of the town's story told through art. The ancient myths, traditional life of subsistence farming, suffering from the 1976 earthquake, violence and death in the armed conflict, the struggle for peace, and hopes for a prosperous future were all portrayed with talent and emotion, humor and compassion. In person I was more than satisfied, perhaps "amazed" is more accurate, to see how silence over human rights abuses had been so publically broken.

Artists at Lake Atitlan, particularly in San Juan La Laguna, have taken up a unique and memorable style, particularly with bird's eye views. An artist from Sumpango has made his mark with imagery of the large kites that fly on November 1st, for Day of the Dead.

But perhaps the two standouts are artists who have been given public art commissions. Benvenuto Chajay did three murals in a new market area in Zone 1. Rigoberto Chex Otzoy, has taken the traditional themes of his

Comalapa Mayan life, and transfigured them with a modern artistic sensibility. He did a 2014 mural for the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology that complements the earlier work of Roberto Gonzalez Goyri and Dagoberto Vazquez.

Past neo-indigenismo

Asturias' books, *Leyendas de Guatemala* (1930) and *Men of Maize* (1948) were the start of a trend in Latin American writing called neo-indigenismo, that captured indigenous reality with a more human, anthropological and ethnological voice than had previously been done.

When independence from Spain occurred, some novelists chose to tell stories of native people as a way of distancing themselves from the colonizer, yet the approach of these 19th century novels was sentimental, romantic, pictorial, and nostalgic. The native American culture as exotic was characteristic of this *indianismo* writing. There are examples from South America, but in this period in Guatemala the romantic novels of Jose Milla focused more on the colonial Spanish era and its protagonists.

In the first half of the 20th century a new tendency arose in Latin American literature, called *indigenismo*, that protested social injustices, was more realistic and documentary and without as much psychological richness.

In this context, Asturias' work was a significant advance. Yet as indigenous writers of their own testimonies, poems, novels and works of scholarship push back the clouds of romanticism, impersonal social critique, and the literary modernism of Asturias, it is logical that a critique of his work should arise.

Guatemalan Journalists gave him the Quetzal de Jade in 1968, and the Mayan communities gave him a staff and the title of "son of Tecún Umán." He received the Cruz de San Carlos in Columbia and presided over international movie and theater festivals. More travels, more publications, and in 1970 he was the first Latin American novelist to be the president of the jury at the Cannes Film Festival. A film of *El Señor Presidente* was made, but not to his liking. In 1974 he became ill and died the 9th of June, his wife and son Miguel Angel with him, his other son, Rodrigo, living hidden in Guatemala as a guerrilla. He chose to be buried in Paris which had become his home in these years, and his Tecún Umán staff was buried with him, all he had learned from the Maya a significant part of his life and success.

But the modern Maya intellectuals are not quite so enthusiastic. The most obvious target is his thesis, a document that he acknowledged in the course of

his life was racist and disrespectful. Victor Montejo, for a while a professor in the University of California system, wrote an important book published by University of Texas, Austin Press, called *Maya intellectual renaissance: identity, representation and leadership.* He gives the well-deserved critique of Asturias' racist sentiments, quoting from his with understandable outrage and disapproval.

He also writes of the 400 or so Maya organizations working to express their points of view in contrast to others who claimed to speak for them during the armed conflict. He identifies three types of Maya leaders: militants/ revolutionaries, moderates/regenerationists, and conservatives/traditionalists. The rise of a Maya middle class and the rise of Maya public intellectuals (of whom Montejo is certainly one important figure).

In this new world in which the Maya speak for themselves, the *neo-indigenista* novels of Asturias hold an ambiguous position. Poet Humberto Ak'b'al who has received numerous international awards for his poetry was honored with the highest Guatemalan literary prize in 2004. Yet he refused to receive it since it is named after Miguel Angel Asturias and Ak'b'al cited the racist thesis. It seems like it would be equally legitimate to question Asturias' presentation of Maya life in the novels, and the work to analyze his *neo-indigenismo* by modern Maya needs to be done.

When a Maya voice writes on "The Power of the Word" the tone is profoundly different from the inarticulate Maya in Asturias. This is from *Xumakil* by Gaspar Pedro González as translated into English in a trilingual edition, Q'anjob'al, Spanish, and English.

Grandfathers, grandmothers, guardians of the word,
Guardians of values:
Bring the ragwort, the rue in handfuls,
Bring the copal and the styrax,
Bring the nawals and the magic,
Spread the driving smoke,
Purifying, cleansing smoke
To dispel evil influences,
To shake off our forced exclusion,
To keep our words pure
To keep our thoughts true.
Grandmother, let your word be heard,
Like ancient drums,
Conches and rams' horns
From the high summits,
So that new children,, the new generations

Don't lose their way,
Lose their selves in delusions
That come from other places.
Grandfather, lift up the word like a standard,
That it may never die.
May it flow like the life-giving river,
May it fly like the wind through ravines,
May it sing like song-birds.
For if the word is silenced
Thought too is muted.
Only the word is left,
A weapon to free us,
Shield us from exclusion,
Break the chains
Of many *katuns*.
The men of corn
Will not be debased by the lessons
Of dark corruption,
Nor hide under impunity's umbrella,
Nor harvest were they have not sown,
Nor profit from the sweat of another man.
Those are the ways of the others.
But we have learned
From our elders that if we don't work
We don't eat,
That shame follows wrong,
That you stand by your word,
The moral values are the only way
For man to have dignity.
All the rest is rubbish.

The Maya have had a new start. All the apocalyptic, non-Mayan "end of the world" drama of December 21, 2012 fell apart once one realized that it was the end of a 5,200-year period, a B'aktun, and the start of yet another. The 13 days and their spirits intersect with the 20 months to create a calendar of 260 days. This interacts with a 365-day solar calendar, with resulting time periods of 52 years and finally 5,200 years. We have entered a new Maya time, and it can be seen.

The highest honor the country gives is a medallion, the *Orden del Quetzal*, for admirable achievement. It is fascinating to look at the list of those who have been so honored in many different fields: visual arts, writing, singing, archaeology, epigraphy, agriculture, botany, athletics, diplomacy, ecological preservation, humanitarian work, and most recently high achievement in

computer science. Archaeologists and even National Geographic have received recognition for work on ancient Maya culture, but clearly there is room for more recognition of the modern Maya.

Xe'vak

In Nebaj the next day, Suzanna and I went to the Archaeology Museum and asked one of the young men to take us to see the ruins of Xe'vak. Here was yet another instance of young Maya taking pride in their heritage and responsibility to show it off, and we enjoyed and appreciated our tour guide. Similar to Kaminaljuyu in Guatemala City, the old mounds are mixed in with modern construction, which in some cases has built over them entirely. Not so similar, there are also cornfields and the altars at the top of each old temple are still in use. We saw one man praying on the edge of the old ballcourt, another inside a church presumably built on a mound, and we found smoking embers at the top of one mound. There were 19 or 20 structures, and in one of the excavations a beautiful piece found and placed in the national museum is also reproduced on a portion of the Q20 bill. The views were beautiful as were flowers and other vegetation, but some of the debris of modernity—plastic bottles, junk food bags—were scattered along the paths.

It was time the next day to retrace our steps and drive back to Antigua and once more be part of a thoroughly modern world.

For further reading:

Montejo, Victor. *Maya intellectual renaissance: identity, representation and leadership.* An analysis of contemporary Maya leadership.

González, Gaspar Pedro. *A Mayan Life.* The first novel about Mayan life from a Mayan author.

Chapter 15

Lent and Easter

On Facebook and on the web one can see gorgeous pictures of Guatemala, some on a video that will give skycam views of Semuc Champey, Lake Atitlán, Tikal, the Castillo de San Felipe, Antigua's ruins, the National Palace, and the large flag in the center of the city waving boldly, blue and white. On one of the pieces I saw lovely Paseo Cayalá in Guatemala City. After having it in the back of my mind for a long time, I finally went to see it.

Huelga de Dolores

The day I chose, however, also gave me an opportunity to see the famous annual student protest from the University of San Carlos, the *Huelga de Dolores*. Held in Lent, the last Friday before Holy Week holidays begin, it uses the imagery of the religious processions that are going on throughout the country at this time.

As I arrived in downtown, I walked along the pedestrian thoroughfare, 6th avenue, a place often filled with shoppers enjoying a stroll. This day, however, it was packed with the happy chaos of holiday crowds, families and food vendors, most stores closed, the street filled with the parade of protestors. Each department and school from the university, walked along with their floats and banners, dressed in different colored robes and hoods: red, green, purple, orange, white, yellow. Most students wore their hoods as bandanas, their faces showing, but some had them down, only their eyes mysteriously looking out. One sign said this was the 117th year of this protest, and surely covering ones' identity with the hood has been useful at times in the past.

T-shirts included statements like "If there is no justice for the people, there is no peace for the government" or reference to impossible dreams on low budgets. Images of Ché reinforced the left-leaning, revolutionary sympathies of the protest. Creative floats satirically lambasted government corruption, social problems like hunger, poverty, malnutrition, violence, unemployment, illiteracy, poor education, poor health care, insecurity, pollution. The president, vice-president, and the candidates for the upcoming elections all came in for their share of critique. One float had a dinosaur representing the political party tearing down a Mayan pyramid. Another group were dancers dressed as jaguars with bones of government corruption around their necks. Fake priests sprinkled holy water on the crowd (including me and my notebook!) to protect us from the evil effects of the skeletal patroness of the event, the Chabela. Another group had a boat amid the pollution of Lake

Amatitlán. Others wore skeleton masks or had pictures of skeletons in action, the theme of death very present as a reality of the country.

A block before the central park each group would stop and offer street theater, or speeches, or dance at the site where student leader Oliverio Castañeda de Leon was killed. An activist and leader in the University student government, he had helped organize protests regarding the raising of bus prices, and ended up on a death-threat list. He participated in the October 20 1978 protest march that commemorated the Guatemalan spring, speaking in the central park and saying at the end, "They can kill our leaders, but as long as there are people, there will be revolution."

As he and other students walked away, gunshots began, and a machine gun bullet hit Castañeda and another man got out of a vehicle and shot him again, and he died shortly later. The government of Lucas Garcia had accused the university students of subversive activities, and this case, never prosecuted, is considered a human rights violation by the government at that time.
At the spot of the death there is a plaque with a famous quote from his speech: "They can kill our leaders, but as long as there are people, there will be revolution."

The protesters had placed a banner above with the following quote from Martin Luther King Jr. in Spanish: "We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people." Under the banner they had set up a shrine to the skeleton-faced patron of the event, Chabela, dressed as in a *velación*, the candlelight homage the evening before a procession. I went and looked at the plaque on the floor to Castañeda which has his famous quote and was handed a Guatemalan ID card commemorating the strike.

As I continued on around into the central park, again the protesters had a chance to raise their voice and get their message out via the university radio. T-shirts for this year's event were on sale with all the political candidates going into a meat grinder and coming up with more of the same in the form of the current president. The faces in the dream were of Ché, former President Arbenz, slain mayor Argueta Colom, the beauty queen turned guerrilla Rogelia Cruz, and the slain student leader Oliverio Castañeda. The quote from Helmet Kohl: "A people that do not know their history cannot understand the present nor construct a future."

Argueta Colom's nephew, President Alvaro Colom, posthumously awarded the Castañeda the *Orden del Quetzal* and asked the family for forgiveness on behalf of the government, saying "A medal can't bring even a second of his life back, but will serve to give testimony of his life."

This protest is part of a long tradition from huge crowds marching far out from the country side to the capital, to groups paralyzing traffic on the few highways, to hunger strikes in front of the National Palace, to candlelit vigils, marches with photos of missing family members, chanting in front of the Courts, to speeches in Central Park. Some more effective than others, civil disobedience has a long and honored tradition in the country.

La Limonada

After absorbing as much of the protest as I could, I found a taxi and headed up toward Zone 15. Close to the Centro Histórico, starting behind the old train tracks, I passed a canyon where I could see part of La Limonada, a famous shantytown started shortly before the 1976 earthquake. What was visible were tall, unplastered, unpainted, block houses. Part of the world-wide trend of urbanization as well as the urge to flee the countryside during the years of the armed conflict, it is one of the areas in the capital called "red zones". These are not only concentrations of poverty, but also of violence, particularly from gangs that grew as a result of deportations of gang members in the US. As the government can manage it, roads and schools and electricity and water have been added. As individuals can afford it, their rural-style plank houses surrounded by yards with chickens and a pila have been replaced by houses made of block. A touching movie called *Reparando,* features a gang member turned pastor and a teacher committed to the neighborhood and celebrates some successes toward positive change.

They are part of a dedicated generation working in creative non-profits and church programs. The social service sector is energetically attempting to address each of the issues highlighted by the student protest. After the peace accords when documented non-profits stood just over 500, and some estimated 1000, the sector has grown to over 10,000 with surely additional groups functioning with no Guatemalan legal standing. Among the leaders are outstanding young Guatemalans. For example, Dr. Mark Arellano who works in Zone 3 where formerly people lived in the garbage dump, has written a book called "50 projects of social action to involve young people and change the world." He highlights ways young people can get involved and serves as a passionate voice for making change. As a result, he has been invited to present not only on public media, but to presidents of various Latin American countries as well. He is just one of many inspiring young Guatemalan leaders.

Paseo Cayalá

Driving through the hills along double-divided road rich with trees, I passed into another side of Guatemala of malls and gated communities. Here in

upscale Zone 16 I arrived at Paseo Cayalá. A wide open walkway between graceful arched walks filled with elegant stores, restaurants, galleries, pet shops, hair salons, and more shops. I could see a church tower and when I arrived at the "central square" saw a statue of Pope John Paul II, a large chapel, and a place set aside for a larger church. Here on the hill one had a panoramic view of Guatemala City. To the side of the church where one might expect a municipal building, the architecture was right, but it was actually a Cineplex with a large Starbucks on the side.

All ones' consumer desires could presumably be met in this place, and the shops were surrounded by apartment complexes on the periphery. It was pleasant to eat a *crème brulee* at *Le Petit Paris*, miniature Eiffel towers holding up the glass table-tops. A large Guate flag fluttered in the afternoon breeze, sun shining through clouds and branches, the metro-like entrance across the way leading to a below-ground parking structure. A grassy area held the handsome face of a marble giant in profile, his thigh, knee, and foot poking out as though he lay in the ground.

At night the street lights came on, strands of light strung across the open air walkway, and families, friends, people on dates, and children playing together created the spirit of a village, a very privileged modern techno-savy village. For further exploration, I realized I will need to return to see the EcoPark that is nearby, part of the project, a forested area within the city that allows for recreation, has a museum on birds, and offers environmental education. Inaugurated in 2011, it built on over twenty years of residential development in the area, seven different projects designed by modern architects and urban planners.

Antigua Semana Santa

Back from my outing to protests and luxury, I watched the traditional and very beautiful creation of carpets made of colored sawdust, flowers, pine-needles, and other creative things for the Palm Sunday processions of Antigua. There is no reason to undersell a place that brings in over a half a million tourists a year. Its claim to fame beyond the baroque architecture is the lavish medieval-style processions. They occur year round but are particularly intense during Lent. The villages around bring their Christ images to process, as do four of the parishes. The result—nearly non-stop commemoration of the crucifixion for 40 days. The grand finale is the Cristo Nazareno from La Merced on Good Friday, a procession lasting from 4 a.m. to late evening. On Saturday four images of Christ in a coffin with a grieving Mary behind, process the streets with black-robed women commemorating death, grief, suffering, loss. The tun-TUN sound of a drum, the laments by the bands, and a powerful

odor of incense pervade the streets 40 days. After each procession come the vendors and then the garbage trucks cleaning up a mess.

It is actually the mess they are cleaning up that is truly my favorite part of the whole thing. Five hours before each procession, families create elaborate designs from colored sawdust, flowers and vegetables. A display of community art that says life, and joy, and resurrection, and survival of suffering.
No longer can I be annoyed that there is no Sunday celebration of life, and the joy of the resurrection. There is now a small procession out of Obras Sociales de Hermano Pedro. No longer can I lament only funereal music, since more up-beat music accompanies the balloons and dancing and the white-robed image of Christ.

My choice for Easter celebration was to go to my evangelical church. The growth of the evangelical voice in the country was a great surprise to me when I returned five years ago: multiple mega-mega churches, media such as television and newspapers, a flood of missionaries and Christian service teams, a church on every corner in some small communities. In Antigua the evangelicals had gone from a small Central American church and small neo-pentecostal one, to CAM plus more Spanish churches, two bilingual Spanish/English ones with extensive service attached, a YWAM base, and reams of foreign missionaries based in Antigua, plus a highly visible Catholic charismatic presence and cross-church women's ministry.

While the evangelical church got a tenuous start in the late 1800s, it was a significant charismatic revival that started in Totonicapán in the 1930s that began what has resulted in a small church on every corner in every village in the country, usually with loudspeakers and rock music. The next spurt of growth came from the influx of neo-pentecostalism, both in the Catholic and protestant sectors post 1976 earthquake. The result: perhaps as many of half in the country claim to have had some kind of supernatural experience. As a sign of the maturation of the neo-pentecostal movement, the El Shaddai church established the Universidad de San Pablo in 2006.

I had numerous church choices once back in Antigua and decided to go to Vida Real in the Hotel Casa Santo Domingo. It is a block and a half from my house to the main entrance, and I delight in the winsomely decorated passage through to the courtyard, past the restaurant. If coming for an evening walk the candles lit all through the space fill me with gratitude. On a Sunday I turn right and walk under hanging orchids, past reception with yet more striking art, take the ramp down and into the tunnel that takes me comfortably a long block, past a street overhead and up the stairs above the parking structure where the meeting rooms for the church are held. The passageway has stores and art and a business center, so is always a pleasant walk.

Once at my church I enjoy the very modern techie style. Usually only one of a few Americans, often the only one, or sometimes with a visiting foreign service team, I appreciate the savy preaching done on video.

My walks by candlelight take place in the courtyard to the left of the entrance that is the entré to all the museums, beautifully presented works of Mayan, colonial and modern art. In that direction is the tent-covered sanctuary where I enjoy my annual experience of the *Messiah*, a Christmas experience of worship. My favorite of the six museums is one where Maya works of art are set side by side with modern works of art in glass, each with the same theme. The juxtaposition emphasizes our humanness, and makes a connection with people from two thousand years ago, more or less. The artists' hands, language, culture and centuries apart, have an ability to give us new eyes.

Clearly, Guatemala is in an era of resurrection, greater hope, greater resources to confront poverty and violence, a moment when the tragedies of the past are being turned into gifts in the present, a time when there is a possibility that the beauty of the country can shine brighter. There is no point in not enjoying it.

Letting Guatemala have its fresh start appeals to me, one that celebrates all its rich heritage. Recently I went to hear the National Chorus at my nearby Capuchina ruins. They wore bright Maya fabrics, the women in huipils over black tops and slacks, the men in vests. Much of their repertoire was from Guatemalan composers and one soloist sang what had become an anthem for protestors in recent history. Another young woman played the guitar, singing her own composition in honor of her home on the Pacific coast. Lovely melodies and harmonies and beautiful voices. When they sang a lively tune set to Miguel Angel Asturias´ poem about a hummingbird, I thought, "How perfect. Singers in Mayan clothing in a colonial church, celebrating the restored town´s role as an international monument, ladino and foreign audience listening to the poem of a premier contributor to world literature." After enthusiastic clapping the chorus regrouped for an encore: the ever-favorite marimba tune*, Luna de Xelaju.* This is today's Guatemala, delighting in its uniqueness and its place in the world.

Revolutionary post-script

Even the revolutionaries have gotten a fresh start. I do not recall when I first learned that Mario Payeras had written children's books published after his death by Yolanda Colom. But since one of these books had illustrations by Roberto Gonzalez Goyri, one of my favorite modern Guatemalan artists, I was motivated to track it down. It was the one written in 1980 when there was hope that the revolution might succeed.

I went to Oakland Mall in upscale Zone 10 in Guatemala City just before Christmas and enjoyed the enormous tree, chair for Santa, ice castle and Christmas music (in English). I enjoyed he novelty of being in a setting of over-the-top commercialism, prosperity, international and local businesses mixed together. I enjoyed the plants and fountain where I ate my very Guatemalan lunch of black beans on bread. The confusingly placed escalators insured one was trapped to see as many shops as possible which reminded me that getting us to spend money is a world-wide science.

I went into the Artemis bookstore and the clerk looked up Payeras' books on the computer and helped me find several: one that gave his perspective on Guatemala history, another set of essays that included his respect for and relationship with Nobel-Prize winning author Miguel Angel Asturias, a book of poetry we never managed to find on the shelves, and the children´s book I was looking for. The later has such cheerful artwork and is a charming and playful story. Only by knowing that is was written by a guerrilla commander could one see an obvious political interpretation.

In today´s Guatemala I was safe buying, in an affluent urban space, subversive literature about the life of the Maya and the poor. The vision of the revolutionaries is gently, delicately and beautifully told in this children's book and, of course, I love the illustrations. The story is of a monster in the shape of a movable closet who frightens the children in his neighborhood. One day when he is sleeping, the children unlock seven cupboards, each inside the other. They finally reach his heart where they discover a singing canary. When he wakes up, he is so grateful to have his heart freed, and he and the children become friends and play together ever after. It is an imaginary happy ending for Guatemala's suffering and conflicts. I have been looking for that in the real world.

That a movement which had such impact not only on my own life, but on that of the country as a whole was now somewhat contained in a children's story I could buy at the mall struck me as deeply ironic.

Chapter 16

In Quest of the Quetzal

Protected Spaces

Outdoor adventures to enjoy Guatemala's beauty there are, enough to keep me traveling many years. Despite its increasing population and its struggle with poverty, Guatemala values its land, the forests, the waters, its wildlife. The northernmost, the extensive Maya Biosphere Reserve is part of UNESCO's reserve. In 2015 marking 25 years since it was created, the threats to the environment include forest fires, agriculture, even such things as illegal airstrips for drug trafficking. But the principle threat, 90% of the threat, is that of illegal cattle ranching. Nevertheless, the preservation effort has success and notes that not only are there 200 archeological sites within it, but this rich array of flora and fauna: 2,800 species of plants, 513 birds, 62 amphibians, 122 mammals, and 95 reptiles. Crocodiles, monkeys, jaguars, tapirs, macaws, quetzals, 300 other species of birds—the country is rich with wildlife. Cloud forests, rain forests, mangrove swamps, wetlands. It is a geographically rich environment.

Two reserves seek to give habitat for the endangered manatees, a sea mammal that sailors mistook, from a distance, for mermaids, thanks to their human eyes and long tails, and perhaps the sounds they make. Columbus saw them close enough to write that mermaids were not nearly as beautiful as people thought, but hence their scientific name *Sirenia*. Sea turtles are protected along the Pacific coast and at the right time of year one can see the baby turtles making their first trek into the sea.

Even the volcanoes are protected spaces, and of the four active ones, the most popular for tourist visits, is Pacaya. With my daughter, my son, his wife, her parents, after an early morning shuttle ride, we rented horses to ride through the fresh green foliage, climbing higher from the end of the road, and finally coming out to the grey fields of lava, the clouds surrounding us, the cold, the wind, the prickly and difficult walk. We gathered with our guide to toast the marshmallows bought at the last little store, enjoyed the novelty of enough heat still escaping through the rocks, and took pictures to commemorate our cold adventure. Then back down on the horses and home by the middle of the day, the tour guides ready to take an afternoon group.

I have manatees and macaws and turtles still to look forward to in hopefully not too distant time. Perhaps someday it will be easy to get to El Mirador and other ruins as yet unknown in the Maya Biosphere.

Quetzal Reserve Trip

For now, however, the most accessible trip, four hours from Antigua on the road to Cobán, is one of several quetzal reserves in the country. I have wanted to go ever since my friend went and saw a quetzal at a hotel right next to the reserve several years ago. Another friend responded enthusiastically to the idea and added the benefit that she would soon have a car in which she could drive, and we collected a third companion and set a date several months out.

My big hope: to see the quetzal in real life, any glimpse acceptable, but ideally in flight making their short, undulating swoops, the four foot long tail-feathers arcing behind them. I started looking up pictures on line, and learning a little more about their habits. Since quetzals live in cloud forests 3000 to 4000 feet above sea level there are specific places in the country where their habitat is accessible to bird-watchers. They are solitary, and one is most likely to see them (if one is very lucky) at dawn or dusk. In 2000 the estimate was that there were about 1000 left in the whole habitat, and as habitat diminishes, they are a threatened species.

Both males and females are bright in color, yet only the males have the extremely long tail feathers. They hollow nests in rotted trees and incubate two or three eggs for eighteen days. The young quetzals are nearly naked and have closed eyes for their first ten days of life. They eat lizards and bugs at first, but eat fruit as adults and are particularly fond of wild avocados. Their eyes are set in such a way they have 360 degree vision. They learn to fly around three weeks, and around three years of age they begin to grow the long tail feathers that give them the name "resplendent quetzals." As their tail-feathers grow, their undulating flight is made even more graceful. They have a variety of calls: whistles, chatter, identification or agitation or courtship calls. I could only hope I would actually see or hear them.

In Guatemala there are at least four reserves working to give them the living space they need. The reserve we would be near is called the *Biotopo Mario Dary Rivera* in honor of the rector of the Universidad de San Carlos who established the university's Center for Conservation Studies (CECON) as well as the system of reserves. He served as director of the new Quetzal Biotopo from 1977 to 1981 when his life was cut short by unknown assassins. I made our hotel reservations and we agreed on our 10 a.m. departure time.

However, when the morning came, things did not start out at all auspiciously. I had caught a terrible cold and was worried about infecting my friends. Further the weather notice warned of a tropical storm off the Pacific coast that

was guaranteed to bring heavy rains. Should we cancel? My friends said they would dose me with Vitamin C and we should still try it. I was further saddened to read the morning paper with its condolences for Ríos Montt's lawyer who had been assassinated days before. An op ed acknowledged that no one yet could know who was behind this, but I could easily come up with a number of murky conspiracy theories that are not all unrealistic in the political context.

We approached Guatemala City at a time when traffic should have diminished and it was so horribly backed up we wondered what could be happening. After two hours we were barely into town and stopped for lunch, and on the TV learned what was happening. Protestors were holding up traffic at all points of entry and exit of the city. This had such a different feel from the seven weeks of Saturday protests that had been taking place in response to outrage over massive government corruption. The news showed the several feet of flooding in some of the Pacific port cities from the storm, plus massive new volcanic eruptions from Fuego.

After lunch we not only crept through Guatemala City traffic, the storm had us in the midst of a foggy, wet, world, windshield wipers moving dramatically to show us our way. I could not help but think of the political movement which had swept the nation shortly after Easter. Outrage at the news of government officials involved in corruption, and over 50 arrests being made, massive demonstrations demanded the resignation of the Vice President, who did resign to face full investigation. The crowds from Central Park in the City expanded to all the departmental capitals with crowds demanding the president's resignation every Saturate.

The idea of a failed state which has plagued the country seemed not far off as major players in the government continued to step town. More strongly, these peaceful protests elicited analogy to color revolutions around the world. At least sixteen revolutions around the world had followed the pattern of peaceful protest and the selection of a significant color, starting with the Philippines in 1986 and their yellow. A rainbow of hopeful change from Georgia, Ukraine, Myanmar, Lebanon, Belarus, Kuwait, Iraq and Moldova had brought significant changes through citizen protests. Some in the paper were calling this the "primavera chapín," or the "Guatemalan Spring" analogous both to the previous 1944 revolution in the country and the more recent Arab spring. As elsewhere, these protests are organized through Facebook and Twitter. As pictures of massive crowds in front of the palace were published, the pale sky blue of the flag was the standout color, so my husband and I started calling it the "celeste revolution." We wondered where it might end.

The quest for good governance had drown out every political and social stripe—business, students from all the universities, artists and housewives with their children, religious leaders praying at 6 a.m. in the park, and a coalition of civic organizations. Students from the private schools in cooperation with student from University of San Carlos working alongside one another make this different than a left/right, rich/poor movement. Their slogan: "Indifferent and silent never again." The hospitals had come to a halt for lack of money, so professionals were on board the moment they realized how much money was being syphoned off by the corruption.

I could not help but admire the citizen action which continues despite a history of repression. Earlier in the year highway blockages protesting the imposition of Monsanto grains forced congress to change the law. Miners in the north periodically stop traffic to protest inadequate compensation or environmental care by the gold-mining company. But it did not surprise me that a theory quickly floated that these stoppages on a work day into the city coming with no advance notice were designed by pro-government efforts to help discredit the anti-government demonstrations which had been widely publicized and considerate.

Things started looking up after we exited Guatemala City and the tropical storm seemed to have played itself out and we drove in a nice dry landscape along the same Atlantic Highway that we had driven back on from Rio Dulce.

As we traveled we saw so many of the posters for those running for president this coming September, all of whom had modified themselves with the help of Photoshop: one man had made his skin slightly darker, one woman had made her skin rather perfect, her eyes a little farther apart. The front-runner had added pictures of himself with ordinary Guatemalans to soften his rather stiff accountant image. A new face, a television personality, had "not corrupt, not a thief" as his slogan, and though new, he had shot to third place in polls. The polls showed high negatives for the two familiar front-runners, and with the general dismay at the state of government, anything can happen.

At 85 kilometers from the City we reached the turn-off north to Cobán, and started to climb toward the cloud forest corridor. As we reached the colder, higher green forest we could see light clouds gently draped on the top of the mountains, a foggy veil through which trees were still visible.

We finally arrived at our chilly and damp hotel seven hours after we had set out, delayed three hours by the blockages. We had supper in a room filled with testimonials on all four walls from people who had seen the quetzals, a hopeful and encouraging sign, but no guarantee. We were told that being up at 6:30 a.m. might give us a chance, plus they often came by again in the afternoon.

Thanks to some good cold medicine, I got a solid and uncongested night of sleep. We were awakened a little after 6 by a knock and an excited voice saying "Quetzales! Quetzales!" and I rushed out in my pajamas. Amazing…there was the male with his long tail, quite visible, perched among the leaves. The female, also colorful but without a long tail, perched in another tree. And then, breathtakingly, the male flew to another perch, tail flowing behind just as one has seen on so many artistic representations, including every piece of currency in the country.

For about twenty minutes we followed them, taking pictures, watching, noticing how the stereotypic graphic images are real. The male really twists off in flight, tail making little graceful "s" shapes like waving streamers, red breast showing, the shadowed underside of the wings lifting away. For a long time the male perched on a branch where there were no trees behind, giving us the profile view so familiar in artwork. The female hovered in foliage near-by.

Another couple, the woman with a good camera, walked with us and we all shared this moment of delight in something unusual and wonderful. In some lights the quetzal looked blue green, and at others a soft light green. At one point the light was right for the iridescence green and red to be completely startling.

After they left we felt delight, awe, privilege, gratitude. As the day went by we also added our comments to the wall: "Quetzals free forever!" "God's creation is precious—I saw a male and female quetzal." And mine: "As beautiful as all their pictures!" My quest to see a quetzal had succeeded and I was satisfied.

We were reminded how fortunate we were to have seen them and just how elusive the birds can be when they did not come again in the afternoon, and when the next morning a female appeared briefly and then they went down lower and the other guests who had arrived seemed a little bleak as they walked around with their cameras.

The cloud cover was much lower, and as we drove away we went through the lush green forest on a mysterious, misty morning. While Guatemala's future remains as on-the-edge as ever, the news included the international success of Guatemalan singer Richard Arjona's musical tour, "Viaje," or "Journey." Already the sixth highest grossing tour ever, it has time to climb higher with more dates already set. Once home, out of loyalty to my much-loved country, I listened to his top hits while writing up my memories of the trip.

With so much unfinished business, I need to keep traveling. Arjona's repertoire is rich with not only haunting love songs, but social comment, and

one of his kick-off hits a call to reality rather than religiousity, *Jesus es un verbo no sustantivo.* Part of Arjona's song to Guatemala, *Mi Pais,* tells of leaving his poor neighborhood (one, in fact near Antigua that I know well), and yet still feeling rooted by his country, his thinking formed by the country. It somehow seemed so appropriate to my own journeys in a country now my own:

More than my nation, my roots
More than my homeland, the womb
That taught me to give birth to thought,
My country.

More than my nation, my roots,
More than my homeland, the womb
That painted my road,
My country, my country.

I never wanted to be anything else
Than the happiest kid on the planet
And though nothing was easy
And the president forbade having dreams
I went to the moon and came back on a bike.

More than my nation, my roots
More than my homeland, the womb
That taught me to give birth to thought,
My country.

More than my nation, my roots,
More than my homeland, the womb
That painted my road,
My country, my country.

Appendix A

(Some) Guatemalan Justice Heroes

Elaine D Elliott
January 2015, La Antigua Guatemala

This is a list to which I hope to add, so if you know of something or someone you think could be included, please tell me. The order is topical (those who died, political leaders, some of our friends, artists and educators, international assistance), then somewhat chronological within those topics.

Those who died

"Martyrs of the Conflict"

A list prepared by the Archdiocese to honor numerous Catholic leaders who died. www.odhag.org.gt/pdf/Testigos%20fe%20paz.pdf

In exhumation/reburials, at times those who were massacred and placed in mass graves have been identified as martyrs www.mimundo.org/2007/01/27/the-martyrs-are-home/

Martyr´s Cemetary in Guatemala City
http://centralamericanpolitics.blogspot.com/2012/02/martyrs-cemetery-museum-of-armed.html

Priest of the San Francisco Church in Antigua , Father Augusto Monasterio,OFM. A memorial to him and other Franciscans is in the church, including a beautifully done painting,

A total of 13 assasinated priests in Guatemala in this time:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assassinated_Catholic_priests_in_Guatemala

Father Stan Rother—Martyred in 1981 in Santiago, Atitlan, his story was told by Henri Nouwen in *Love in a Fearful Land* and efforts are underway for his canonization as a saint in the Catholic church. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stan_Rother

Alberto Fuentes Mohr

Talented economist and political leader, he was assassinated in 1979.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alberto_Fuentes_Mohr

Manuel Colóm Argueta

Progressive Mayor of Guatemala City who was assassinated in 1979
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manuel_Colom_Argueta

Journalists

Journalists who died trying to advocate justice in Guatemala works out to one a month over 36 years, one of the highest in the world:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_journalists_killed_in_Guatemala

For example, Jorge Carpio Nicolle http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jorge_Carpio_Nicolle

Irma Flaquer http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irma_Flaquer

Guillermo Monzon, father of Journalist Marielos Monzon

Manuel Saquic
Presbyterian Pastor www2.unil.ch/lefaitmissionnaire/pdf_des_publi/Samson_SSM_13.pdf

Bishop Juan Gerardi
Led the effort for the Catholic Church "Nunca Más" that documented massacres; killed two days after presenting it in 1998. A human rights movement has made him an icon and important celebrations occur on the anniversary of his death. The story is well-told in *The Art of Political Murder*.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_Jos%C3%A9_Gerardi_Conedera

Myrna Mack
Anthropologist who documented suffering of the displaced and was killed; she worked at AVANCSO, a research organization. The organization founded by her sister in her honor is a leading voice in reform today, and was the first to successfully prosecute and bring intellectual authors to accountability and require an apology and reparations from the Guatemalan government. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myrna_Mack

Diego Velasco Brito Was an Ixil Maya congressman from 1990 to 1993 and was President of Peace Commission and member of the Human Rights commission in congress. Was killed mysteriously in 2002.

Religious leaders

Raquel Saravia A nun who started with service but became integrally involved in the human rights movement and service to refugees. www.alandar.org/spip-alandar/?Raquel-Saravia-profeta-de-la#.VGqNaoepV_s)

Bishop Quezada Toruño He headed two important organizations in the peace process, the National Reconciliation Commission, which he headed from 1987 to 1993, and the Assembly of the Civil Society, which he headed from 1994 to 1996
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rodolfo_Quezada_Toru%C3%B1o

Bishop Ramazzini
A voice for justice regarding the mining issues current in the country
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%81lvaro_Leonel_Ramazzini_Imeri

Political leaders

Nineth Montenegro de García
Founder of *Grupo de Apoyo Mútuo* (GAM) that demanded accountability for disappearances; members took a dangerous and high profile role starting in the mid-80s and some were killed. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nineth_Montenegro

Rigoberta Menchu
Nobel Prize Winner, advocate for Mayan causes, presidential candidate. Best known for her book *I, Rigoberta Menchu* Her father Vicente Menchu was an organizer in CUC, a largely Mayan group of peasants who organized numerous protests. He and

others were killed when their protests led them to take refuge in the Spanish Embassy. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rigoberta_Mench%C3%BA

Rosalina Tuyuc
Leader of CONAVIGUA (*Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala*), the Mayan Widow´s group that demanded accountability and supported exhumations.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosalina_Tuyuc

Amilcar Mendez
Founder of "Council of Ethnic Communities Runujel Junam (CERJ) which organized masses of people to resist participating in civil patrols. Some members killed.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Am%C3%ADlcar_M%C3%A9ndez_Ur%C3%ADzar

Otilia Lux Cojti
Mayan member of the Historical Clarification Commission that produced *Memories of Silence.* Alfredo Balsells Tojo was the other Guatemalan member of the commission
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_Clarification_Commission

Fernando Moscoso
Forensic Anthropologist and co-founder of the FAFG, Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala and first director. http://tracework.blogspot.com/2011/03/fernando-moscoso-on-forensic.html

Returning refugees
Organized in Mexico, made demands that were met for their safety before returning starting in January 1993 before the peace accords. A large "citizen´s movement."

Peace Accord Negotiators http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Esquipulas_Peace_Agreement
Took from 1987 to 1996 and some key figures in the process include:

Bishop Quezada Toruño—he headed two important organizations in the peace process, the National Reconciliation Commission, which he headed from 1987 to 1993, and the Assembly of the Civil Society, which he headed from 1994 to 1996 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rodolfo_Quezada_Toru%C3%B1o

Álvaro Arzú—Brought the process to a conclusion.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alvaro_Arzu

Luz Mendez—Brought women´s issues to the forefront which then became UN policy in negotiations. Was a student leader at the University of San Carlos and had to go into exile in Mexico to save her life.

ODHAG
Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobizpado de Guatemala, successfully prosecuted the Gerardi case, and continues to prosecute and do human rights education.
www.odhag.org.gt/ 6a Calle 7-70, Zona 1, 2285'0456, 2232-8384

Helen Mack
Founder of the Myrna Mack Foundation that successfully prosecuted not only her sister´s murder in Guatemala and in the InterAmerican Court. Has served on a commission to reform the police. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helen_Mack_Chang

Marielos Monzon
Journalist and winner of 2003 Courage in Journalism award.
www.iwmf.org/marielos-monzon-2003-courage-in-journalism-award/

CONAPREVI
A coalition of women´s groups successfully passed laws regarding the protection of women, the creation of shelters throughout the country, and penalties for domestic violence. Key names in the coalition included Lorena Robles, of Sector de Mujeres, Fabiola Ortiz, of CONAPREVI, Alba Estela Maldonado Guevera who did research and served in congress, Hilda Morales and Yovana Lemus of Red de la No Violencia Contra las Mujeres.
http://conaprevi.blogspot.com/

CALDH
Centro por Asistencia Legal de Derechos Humanos successfully supported exhumations and the legal support for human rights cases, including against Ríos Montt. One of the founders, Frank La Rue, continues to publish a column in *Prensa Libre* drawing attention to issues and problems. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_William_La_Rue

AJR
Asociación para la Justicia y Reconciliación that mobilized victims of the conflict who have brought lawsuits against all of the presidents and military leaders involved in the human rights abuses.

Fredy Peccerelli
Director of the Forensic Anthropologists who has taken great risks in directing the work of exhumation throughout the country.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fredy_Peccerelli

Justice Cesar Barrientos
Supreme Court Justice who was responsible for many judicial reforms. Died in 2014.
www.ictj.org/news/ictj-mourns-death-guatemalan-supreme-court-justice-cesar-barrientos

Claudia Paz y Paz
Nominated for a Nobel Prize for her work in streamlining and improving the justice system, bringing many cases to trial that had been stuck in the system.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claudia_Paz_y_Paz

Yassmin Barrios Aguilar
Judge in the Ríos Montt trial and in several other important human rights trials that found perpetrators guilty.

The **International Women of Courage Award** is an American award presented annually by the United States Department of State to women around the world who have shown leadership, courage, resourcefulness and willingness to sacrifice for others, especially for better promotion of women's rights. Yassmin was recognized in 2014, Norma Cruz (see below) in 2009.

Norma Cruz
Founder of "Sobrevivientes" which is particularly working on the issue of femicidesand violence against women. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norma_Cruz

PROPAZ
Has important alliances and work on governance, i.e. improvement in systems of justice as part of this. http://ibisguatemala.org/contrapartes/fundacion-propaz/

Dr. Yuri Melini
Working on mining and logging issues.
http://iglesiadescalza.blogspot.com/2009/05/guatemala-heroes-and-martyrs.html
Received the 2009 "Frontline Defenders" Award.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Front_Line_Defenders

Gert Rosenthal
Guatemalan representative to the United Nations from 1999-2004, and 2008 until the present. He served on the Security Council from 2012 to 2014.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gert_Rosenthal
Interview with him in the REVUE: www.revuemag.com/2012/10/gert-rosenthal/

Antonio Caba Caba
Past president of AJR, interviewed in the two recent films on Ríos Montt. Had accompaniers to protect him in Ilom, a small village in the Ixil area, during his six years as president and beyond. He prepared witnesses for the recent trial.

Tomás Guzaro
A pastor who led his congregation and friends to safety and has continued as a community leader. His story is told in *Escaping the Fire.* This is currently being prepared for publication in Spanish. https://utpress.utexas.edu/index.php/books/guzesc

Julio Cochoy
Maya K'iche' who lost family, organized widows from his community to support one another emotionally, obtain their government mandates recompense, and create a small business with them. He published their memories and has a new book coming out: *My Journey from Hate to Hope.*

Fundación Nahual
Founded by Ignacio Ochoa, the organization focuses on training community leaders to access government sponsored community development. Has held dialogues between army and guerilla leaders of the past. Also supports youth arts programs.

Petronila Brito
Ixil woman judge in Nebaj in charge of justice for seven municipalities who lost family. Her Ixil coworkers also have similar experience.

Proyecto Alternativas a Violencia
Interactive workshops on conflict resolution and trauma healing available to any group willing to sponsor. Guatemalan facilitators are trained volunteers.
www.facebook.com/pages/PAV-Guatemala/487014941416433

Antonio Sandoval
Continuing work begun in his position as an assistant pastor at Iglesia del Camino, Antonio does character education with the police department.

Arts and Education

Miguel Angel Asturias
Nobel-prize-winning author whose novels include critiques of racism, the banana companies, and the overthrow of the government by the CIA.

Ricardo Falla
Documented the massacres in the Ixcan in "Massacres in the Jungle".
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ricardo_Falla-S%C3%A1nchez

Arturo Arias
A noted social justice novelist and professor.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arturo_Arias

Gaspar Pedro Gonzalez
The first Mayan novelist. His work is in Q'anjob'al Mayan and Spanish with social justice themes. He is also a poet. www.yaxtebooks.com/catalog/instock.htm

Victor Montejo
Mayan novelist with social justice themes. *Mr. Puttison's Adventures Among the Maya* is a "must-read" for foreigners with a desire to help.
www.yaxtebooks.com/catalog/instock.htm

Francisco Goldman
A social justice novelist, who also wrote non-fiction re the Gerardi murder.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francisco_Goldman

Muralists with human rights focus
Social justice murals at numerous sites in Guate, notably at the Gerardi house, and in Comalapa. See *El mural de Comalapa : un camino hacia la paz.*

Rina Lazo, muralist who worked with Diego Rivera and who painted her own critique of the 1954 overthrow in addition to assisting Rivera with his.

Comunicarte
Youth filmmakers with a justice focus. http://asociacioncomunicarte.blogspot.com/

Daniel Hernández-Salazar
A photographer whose haunting images became the cover for *Nunca Más*.

Jean Marie Simon
A photographer who boldly went to morgues and took many striking pictures during the conflict published as *Eternal Spring, Eternal Tyranny*.
www.envisioninghumanrights.com/jean-marie-simon/

Guatemalan National Police Archives
A resource for uncovering the truth of the past that has a vison of creating a museum.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guatemala_National_Police_Archives

Museums with human rights focus
Casa Museo Luis de Lion Created by Mayarí, daughter of the professor and author who was killed, it is located in San Juan del Obispo. Besides the museum there is a library and arts program.
¿Por qué estamos como estamos? http://iiars.org/ Ixmucane, a Mayan woman from San Martin Jilotepeque whose family was affected, gives a tour with important personal narrative.
Museo Comunitario Rabinal Achi www.museo.rabinal.info/
Museums of the Missing
http://bigstory.ap.org/article/guatemalans-use-portraits-museum-seek-missing
Casa de la Memoria Kaji Tulam 13 Calle 2-72, Zona 1. Wilver Asencio, 4032-7169
http://hyperallergic.com/109683/a-living-history-of-the-maya-in-guatemala-city/

International Support

MINUGUA (United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala)
UN mission that worked to implement the Peace Accords in a 10-year process ending in 2044. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MINUGUA

CICIG
UN commission that works alongside the Guatemalan Justice system to strengthen it. UN was helpful in the peace process and the early implementation phase and these efforts to improve the justice system have made significant progress. http://cicig.org/

Accompaniment
Peace Brigades International started simply "being present" with Nineth Montenegro to try to help her stay alive, and this system of not doing anything other than being there has become a useful tool throughout Guate by many other organizations and throughout the world as well. www.pbi-guatemala.org/?L=1

Centro de Paz Barbara Ford
Founded in honor of a Sisters of Charity nun who worked many years in Sololá as a nurse, the center in Quiche has extensive justice programs, including a network of government/NGO cooperation. Has done good work in trauma healing and prepared materials adapted to Mayan culture. http://centrodepazbarbaraford.org.gt/

International Justice Mission

Hires local lawyers in many countries to strengthen the system. IJM works in Guatemala alongside the justice system particularly in the area of child abuse. Gary Haugen´s book, *The Locust Effect*, documents why systems are weak, how they have changed, what promising efforts are going on.
www.ijm.org//content/every-child-deserves-to-be-protected

CIRMA

Supporting the creation of a museum on racism and the history of Guatemala, *¿Por qué estamos como estamos? ,* also supporting the work at the Police Archives, the documentation for *Nunca Más*, helped with publication of Ricardo Falla's book, etc. Historical archives of violence period. www.cirma.org.gt

Filmmakers

Some significant social justice films:

El Norte http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Norte_(film)
Precarious Peace http://resources.mennonitechurch.ca/ResourceView/50/14926
When the Mountains Tremble http://skylight.is/films/when-the-mountains-tremble/
Granito http://skylight.is/films/granito/
Dictator in the Dock http://skylight.is/films/dictator-in-the-dock/
Keep Your Eyes on Guatemala a film from University of Oregon re the police archives. www.youtube.com/watch?v=NMsNtNn50Fs

Books

Social justice books, though the bibliography is far more extensive and fascinating.

Harvest of Violence
Silence on the Mountain
Escaping the Fire
Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala
Massacres in the Jungle
Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala

And many, many more…

International Advocacy Groups

Advocacy groups such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Rights Action, Guatemalan Human Rights Commission, Cultural Survival, NISGUA all play an important role in informing international supporters on ways to take action.

Thank you for reading this preliminary DRAFT.

Please send suggestions to: ElaineAtHome@gmail.com