



Weaving Memories Reflecting 25 Years at the Weston Priory

- *The Ixcot Family*



Felipe

WHEN WE LEFT GUATEMALA IN October 1982 into Chiapas, Mexico, it was to escape the nightmares of war. In Mexico we suffered homelessness and hunger, then harsh labor and sickness, as we moved from plantation to plantation, working and avoiding deportation. It is hard then to explain how the Creator and Maker helped us to cross one more border into North America. Without a penny in our pockets we traveled until we arrived in the land of our brothers and sisters, the Abenakis¹ of Vermont, on March 24, 1984—a place of peace, joy and human warmth, as expressed by the brothers of the Weston Priory Community. We remember the tender words of our departed brother Philip—“Welcome to your home,” as the brothers showed us the house we called home for the next 25 years. It is still hard for us to believe the great love bestowed on us by the brothers that day, and that of other people, because it marked a new page in our family’s life. ■

¹The Abenakis are the original or indigenous people of Vermont.



Elena

REMEMBER WHEN SOME OF THE brothers of the Weston Priory asked me to teach them to back-strap weave. I was touched by their request. During these moments of weaving together I found myself back in my village of birth in Guatemala, weaving with my mother, friends and neighbors, laughing, sharing stories and ideas of colors and designs. I felt part of a community like the one I had left behind, surrounded by laughter and conversations. We would meet at the priory to weave, and then once

a week the brothers would come by Casa Guadalupe, the house where my family lived.

I will never forget those moments because they lifted my spirit, especially during the long winters where one feels caged-in, looking out at the cold white landscape. When the children started school, Felipe and I were the only ones home. The isolation and loneliness we experienced was hard because in Guatemala, from where we are writing these memories, even winter is green and bustling with activities. But then, in Weston, spring arrives—the snow melts, the landscape turns green, and the birds start to sing along with the piping frogs. A new world unfolds with flowers of many colors, as if winter had never happened; it is as though God had taken a magic wand and reversed the order of things. These are memories that have become part of our human existence. ■



Julio

WHEN I ARRIVED IN THE COMMUNITY of Weston Priory on March 24, 1984, the grounds were covered with snow and a group of monks welcomed my family with open arms.

Growing up and living in a guest house by the woods at the bottom of Terrible Mountain wasn't easy. It was difficult to communicate with friends who spoke English when I only spoke a little Spanish. I had to adapt to winter by wearing warm clothing and by shoveling snow in cold temperatures. During late spring the soil was ready for planting. My father and I learned a new method of tilling the earth by operating a rototiller. We encountered a lot of rocks in the land that made it hard to plant. After clearing land for the garden, we planted corn, potatoes, and lots of vegetables. These are the things I remember. ■



Alicia

HAVE A BEAUTIFUL QUILT THAT WAS made by friends who helped my family settle in Vermont and was given to me when I graduated from high school in 1995. Despite the risk involved in aiding a refugee family they supported us and helped us become the family we are today through their friendship, mentoring, and advocacy.

The quilt hangs in my room, and I have taken to observing each square closely and remembering each person who contributed a piece of themselves to my life. There is a square made by our North American “grandmother” who gave us her unconditional love and whose wisdom I still seek today. A pink square with numbers written on it was made by a friend who tutored me in math and who told me it was my ancestors, the Mayas, who came up with the concept of zero; along with my parents, she taught me to take pride in my culture and heritage. Her square is signed “love Bear and Norma.” I also have a square with a quote from one of the brothers whose opinion and wisdom I greatly respect. As a child I referred to him as “the Sage on the Hill,” but I never said it to his face—though I think he would laugh at such a statement.

Some of these friends have passed away and some of the squares have no signature, but the message and good intentions are clear. Each square, like its maker, has a story and a special place in my life.

I currently live and work in Florida and I work with students from diverse backgrounds. Through their eyes I see myself as a child, new to this country and scared—their parents, like mine, not sure what to do. I draw upon my past and the people behind each square on my quilt; through their example I hope that I too will someday add a piece to someone's quilt. ■



Sonia

WITH GREAT HUMILITY AND APPRECIATION, I thank you, brothers and friends of Weston Priory, for your unconditional love, respect, and wisdom. Thank you also for sharing 25 years of unforgettable love, support, laughter, tears, dance and music. As the saying goes, “It takes a village to raise a child.” You were and are still my village and my family. The fond memories of maple syrup, gardening, baking bread, and sledding down a hill will forever stay with me. Your encouragement during tough times with my academic life played a key role in my success. I thank you. ■



Maya

TWELVE MONKS AND A BABY! THIS may sound like the title to some comedy but in reality that was my childhood. I bet when the brothers took their vows they never thought that child-rearing would be in their future.

Because I was so young, I don't really have that many memories of my first few years at the Priory, but family and friends have been only too kind to fill me in. I believe that I often caused a disturbance during Sunday Mass and my family had to develop a system to "get her out of church before she starts running around the altar and poking the brothers in their backsides!" I am very sorry for this—but, hey, at least I grew out of that stage.

I also heard that I was very influential in the "child-proof redecoration" of the priory. This was due to an unfortunate incident involving my finger, cookies, and a mousetrap—you can guess what happened there! I don't think the brothers realized that a child gets into EVERYTHING!

Even though I am no longer that little girl running around and getting into trouble, I think back to those times with fondness. I'd like to think that the brothers and I learned a lot from each other over the last 25 years. I know I would not be the person I am today without all their love and support. Although I live in Florida now, Weston will always be home to me. ■



Juanita

MY LIFE, LIKE THE REST OF MY FAMILY'S, has been marked by movement. Somehow my journey has involved living and being in many places, times, spaces, emotions, and realities. Though the movement has carried me to many places, it has radiated from my center of learning and being: Vermont. On my last trip to Vermont, I was overwhelmed by the love that the land, the people and the earth have shared with me and my family. I was reminded that I was but yet another set of footsteps that have walked on the

sacred ground around the pond, the back-woods, and the hills. This spiritual space, "The Priory", is an example of what humanity can be. The brothers and our large Priory family showed to us this example by welcoming us into their circle of love and called us family even though we were not from those mountains.

I will forever remember everyone who helped us make it to this country, and the people who sheltered and protected us in the first

couple of years. I also recall friends who taught us English, helped us shop for our basic necessities, played with us, and planted the seeds of hope and renewal that our family needed. I thank you for helping me make it through school, go to college, and for never doubting my dreams. Though I did not thank each and every one of you individually, I remain forever grateful to the Creator that my family was protected and guided to this sacred place and to you, my extended family.

I am no longer in Vermont and my communication is not constant, but I will always remember the many lessons that you taught me. You gave me hope, love and protection. Because of your eternal wisdom and strength, I am now a young woman who can also give to others as you all gave to me, from a place of respect and gratitude. ■
