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THE AMERICAS**

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A Glimpse into Another Realm Part 2- Gloria Lopez Mendez

GUATEMALA CITY, Guatemala

April, 2000

By Chenoa Egawa

Gloria Lopez Mendez is the granddaughter of Don Julian Lopez Mendez, subject of my previous letter (CE-17). I met her last fall at the same time that I met Don Julian, at their home in Palin, Guatemala. Even though Gloria is only 18 years old, she emanates qualities and maturity beyond her years. Some who have met her call her a very old soul, who has acquired great knowledge and understanding through many lifetimes. I see her as a person whose heart and spirit are open and pure, uncluttered with excessive worry,

doubts, fears, jealousy or judgments of others. She is a person whose sensory perceptions are fine-tuned to the energies and lives of people, the environment, the presence of spiritual forces and to events of the past, present and future. With all of the natural abilities she possesses, Gloria is humble, reserved and respectful. Like any teenage girl, she has many of the interests normal for her age group, but her commitment to the path that she was gifted as a spiritual medium requires in her a high level of responsibility and devotion that surpasses what is expected of her peers.



Gloria in Tikal on the day of her ceremony

I have talked with Gloria on several occasions about her understanding of the spirit world and her own personal connection to other realms. She, like Don Julian, has been chosen to work on "*este camino*," as she calls it — this spiritual road or path. I understand "this road" — the traditional road — as it is called in many North American Indian cultures, as the direct connection to sacred knowledge. On this road there is a wealth of teachings and wisdom that transcend the confines of measured time. I believe that every culture, at some point in time, had this connection. I believe that through that connection and understanding certain people possessed abilities to work with higher

powers, forces and energies to heal others, to heal the environment and to nurture harmony and balance in all things.

I used to think that those ways had been lost forever, and that I would know them only as stories of another time, as told by the elders of North American tribes. My travels have shown me otherwise. These ways have never been lost to indigenous peoples, even though their spiritual beliefs and practices have continuously been misunderstood, attacked and forbidden by other cultures and religions that have feared them, or viewed them as a hindrance to their own progress — progress constituting the appropriation of indigenous lands and resources.

Over the years, I have come to understand that sacred knowledge and wisdom of this earth has always existed. It has never vanished; we have only become blind to its presence. There are still many cultures and individuals, who maintain this connection, but in today's world, where most often value is placed on the material and not on the spiritual, it seems that one has to search a lot harder.

There are those like Gloria, children of the younger

generations, who still receive gifts from the spirit world and use their gifts to help others. This gives me hope. Gloria gave me permission to share her story about how she came to receive her power as a spiritual medium.

* * * *

"I was four when my father died and my sister, Carmen, was six," Gloria began. "My mom thought it would be best for all of us to move in with her parents, my grandparents, Julian and Maria. We have lived with them ever since, and for that I am very grateful.

"My relationship with my sister, Carmen, is really good," said Gloria. "Sure, we have moments of disagreement, but for the most part, we get along very well."

The relationship the two of them have with their mother is even better.

"She always understands us," said Gloria. "Whenever Carmen or I has a problem, we talk together with my mom, usually in the evening before we sleep, because the three of us share the same bedroom. Mom always knows when something is wrong and we can talk with





Gloria and her sister Carmen

her openly. We have a lot of understanding with one another. We are very close."

Gloria's mother, Clementina, is also the favorite auntie and grandmother to all of her nieces, nephews and grandchildren.

"All of the kids love to come to our house to eat, to drink coffee and especially to visit my mom," said Gloria. "It's because she has a such a beautiful character. She is always looking after all of the children, caring for them, protecting them. And they all love her. Everyone in my house calls her, 'mama-Tina,' everyone!" she said with a big smile.

Clementina has one sister and seven brothers. All of them, with the exception of an estranged brother, look after their extended family with the same level of affection and dedication.

"Since Carmen and I lost our father, my uncles took it upon themselves to make sure that the two of us had everything we needed to attend school. My grandfather provided us with food and a roof, and my grandmother supported us in many other ways."

Gloria's father was only 25 years old when he passed away. His death was sudden and completely unexpected. According to Gloria, her father was to become an *ajq'ij* (healer), but he did not understand that at the time. She said that it was his inability to fulfill his obligation to the spirit world that took his life in the end. When he died, the *don* (gift) that he was to re-

ceive and develop did not go with him. It stayed with his family, and Gloria was the one who received it next.

"My father was a *campesino*. Each day, he would leave the house early in the morning, before sunrise, and walk up to the base of the volcano, Aj'pu. There he worked the land, tending to the family's fields and orchards. A long time ago, before my dad was married to my mom, he had gone to work in the *campo* like every other day, but on this particular day he encountered a beautiful flower. He didn't know what kind of flower it was. In all the time that he had spent in the *campo*, he had never seen anything like it before. He picked the flower and when he returned home late that afternoon, he put it in his closet. When my grandmother was cleaning his room, she found it. She didn't say anything about it to my father, but later on, when he discovered that it was missing, he asked her if she had seen it. 'I burned it!' she told him. 'But why?' he asked. 'You should have never picked that flower in the first place!' she shouted. 'Why didn't you tell me about it?' She was really angry with him."

Gloria told me that in Palin there are a lot of stories about people who found strange and unique things such as this flower. Most often, when a person finds such a special object it is a sign, a message to that person that they are to receive a special gift or ability. The grandmother had never seen a flower like this before either, and she automatically assumed that it must be something bad. Being brought up as a Catholic, she was taught to believe that anything to do with Mayan costumbre (spiritual customs and traditions) was evil, that it came from



Gloria (right) and her auntie selling at the market

the devil, that it was black magic or witchcraft, and that it went against the teachings of God. Since she was taught to fear such things, she burned the flower.

"My grandfather Julian says that it was the act of burning that flower that killed my father, because he had work to do in this world. He was supposed to become an *ajq'ik*. Neither my father nor my grandmother understood this, though. Had she not burned the flower, he most likely would have learned what to do next through a dream or vision, or through the guidance of another *ajq'ik*."

After Gloria's father died, her grandfather investigated the death of his son-in-law in his own way. The answer was clear to Don Julian in the *frijolitos*, the small red beans that are used by many *ajq'ik* for divining. The burning of the flower — the negation of his gift — was the cause of his death.

Two years after Gloria's father died, she began seeing his spirit. She was just six years old, but still remembers it clearly today.

"It didn't matter where I was, I would see him everywhere," she said. "Even if I went into a dark room I would see him standing there. I couldn't even go into the bathroom, because he was there too."

Don Julian had already become an *ajq'ik* by then, but he was unable to help his granddaughter in this instance. As I mentioned before, each *ajq'ij* works in his or her own special way, with different forces, skills

and abilities. Don Julian brought Gloria to see his friend, Don Catarino.

"Don Catarino had the power to heal through the palms of his hands," said Gloria. "When he saw me, he told my grandfather that it was a good thing that he brought me to see him when he did. If he had waited any longer I would have died. And then, without us ever mentioning anything to Don Catarino about that flower he said, 'The flower that Gloria's father found was to be his good fortune, but because he didn't use it, he died. That flower contained a spiritual force or power for him to use. He was supposed to be an *ajq'ij*. That was to be his life's work. He died because the flower was burned and he was unable to fulfill his destiny. The same force that was once within that flower is entering Gloria. It has chosen her now.'

Don Catarino told Don Julian that Gloria could not carry out the work yet, but that in time, they would learn how that power was going to work through her. They would wait to see what would happen next.

"And so that's how it was," said Gloria. "For the time being, the old man healed me, and I stopped seeing my father's spirit everywhere."

Two years later, at the age of eight, Gloria began to have attacks.

"I was sick a lot," she said. "Sometimes I would go crazy. I remember one time during that period when it was raining and raining and I was out walking when I

slipped and fell. I was knocked unconscious, but in actuality, I died. When my mom realized what happened, she called together all of the *ajq'ij* she knew and they came and conducted a ceremony for me right there. When I woke up, I remember that all of the *ajq'ij* were gathered around me. Everyone was crying, because they thought I was dead. My mom told me that when they found me there on the ground I wasn't breathing, and that I had no pulse. I was that way for twenty minutes. I really had died."

Don Julian talked with the other *ajq'ij* who were present that day and they all agreed that it was time for him to start Gloria on her path. He told her mother how to prepare the two series of seven medicinal plant baths for her, seven for 'purification' and seven for 'clarification.' Following the fourteen baths, he would take her through seven presentations to the spirit world before his altar, drawing that realm ever closer to her. If everything went well, she would then be initiated and begin working with her own medicine bundle and altar.

"That is how my grandfather began walking me along this road," she said.

Don Julian was still worried about Gloria, because she was so young, too young, he thought, to have so much responsibility with this work. In order to be absolutely positive that he was doing the right thing, he took her to see another *ajq'ij* before initiating her. By this time Don Catarino had passed away, but there was another man who worked through 'concentrations.' In a concentration for Gloria, he consulted with the Saints and asked them whether or not it was time for her to begin her work. They confirmed that it was and that she must be initiated right away. If



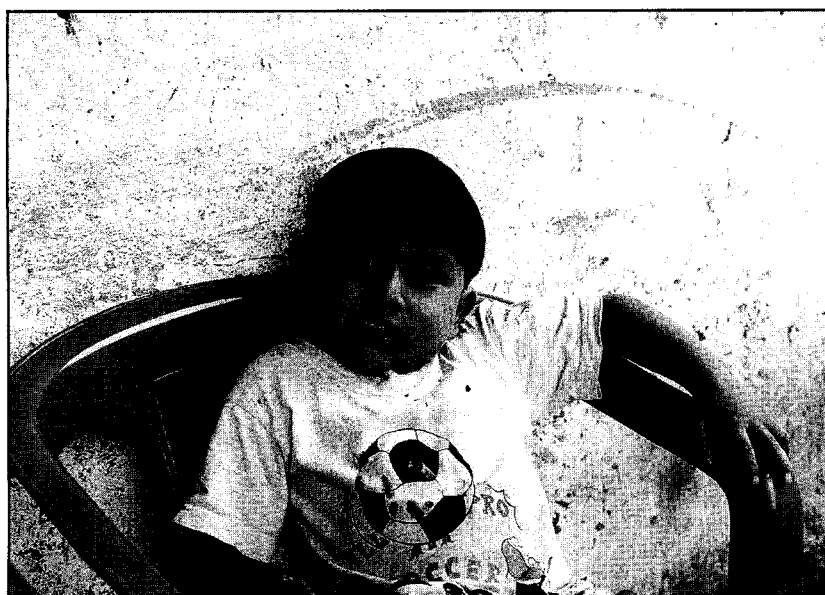
Evelin, Gloria's cousin and my little friend

not, she would get even sicker and die.

And so, at eight years of age, Gloria was initiated. Don Julian told me that people came from all over Guatemala to attend her ceremony. Normally, such a ceremony lasts for one or two hours, but Gloria's went on for four. There were so many people who participated, and each one prayed over her individually.

"When they prayed for me, I remember how my hands began to cramp up," said Gloria. "It felt like I couldn't move them at all. Then a cold sensation came over my whole body, like a chill that filled me. I told my grandfather what was happening. 'Don't worry,' he assured me, 'those are the sensations that come when different spiritual forces enter. This always happens.' They put *guaro* [alcohol] into my hands and massaged them until the cramps subsided. Even during the ceremony, nobody knew how that power would manifest itself in me. That would remain to be seen.

"It was several months later, September 14th," said Gloria, "I was sleeping, when all of sudden I began to feel those same cold sensations going throughout my body. That's all I remember. I didn't feel anything after that, but my mother and sister told me later that I went crazy that night. They said that I was screaming, flailing and kicking. I had thrown all of my blankets off in a fit and flew out of the bed onto the floor like a crazed animal. My mom said that my uncles tried to grab hold of me to restrain me, because they thought that I was going to hurt myself. They tried to catch me and hang onto me, but in an instant I had slipped out of their arms and before they knew what was happening I had run to the



"Chapito," another little cousin who was often at the house when I would go visit
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other side of the room. Even though I was just a small child, they couldn't contain me. I had an immense force, an immense energy. I wouldn't let anyone come near me.

"That same night, there were many *ajq'ij* meeting at our house, because it was nearing the Mayan New Year. My mom said that I was calling out, screaming for my grandfather, '*Anciano* [elder] Julian! *Anciano* Julian!' I was completely agitated. My mom went for my grandfather and he and the other *ajq'ij* came to see what was happening with me. They started to call me, to try to get through to me, to 'concentrate' me. My grandfather already knew how to do concentrations, so he began to call out to all of the Saints and forces that he summons in his ceremonies, asking for their sacred presence, their sacred blessing. And for the first time, he 'concentrated' me as a spiritual medium. In that concentration *la Princesa del Encanto* [Princess of Enchantment], also known as *la Princesa de Ix'kik*, came through me.

"You see, earlier that day, my grandfather had been working on a young boy who had fallen from a tree. In that time of year, late September, the people were harvesting *jocotes* [a small, plum like fruit]. The boy had been up in a tree cutting *jocotes* when suddenly he fell from the branch. When he hit the ground, he struck his head. For several days, he had lost his memory and forgotten how to do even the most basic things. His parents had taken him to a doctor, but the doctor couldn't help the boy, so they brought him to my grandfather next, hoping that he could cure their son. When my grandfather saw the boy, he knew that it was *la Princesa del Encanto* that had gotten him. The Princess is the spirit of a little Mayan girl, a princess who is the keeper and ruler of the mountains. She has many powers and the ability to transform herself into serpents and iguanas and other animals that live in the mountains. When my grandfather told the boy's parents that it was *la Princesa del Encanto* that had hurt the boy, the family prepared an offering for her and took it to the mountains to ask that she take pity on their son. They brought her grilled pork, chili, tortillas and salt, because that is what *la Princesa* likes.

"When I did that first concentration, *la Princesa* came through me and talked to my grandfather. She told him that he was right, that it was she who had caused the boy to fall from the tree. She said that he had been doing a lot of bad things, and she punished him to teach him a lesson. 'I want him to realize that he cannot get away with these things,' she said. 'He will be fine though; he will recover completely.'

"I woke up after the concentration, but again, I started shaking and trembling as if I were really cold. My grandfather said that he had to concentrate me again. *San Miguel el Arcangel* came through me then. He spoke with my grandfather and told him that they had given me the gift of being a spiritual medium, and he explained to my

grandfather that this was going to be my work. Ever since that day, I have been helping my grandfather in this way.

"And the boy?" I asked.

"He was cured," Gloria said.

"And did he change his ways?"

"Yes," she said very seriously, "His mother even came to see us later to thank us for our help. She said that her son's character changed a lot from that point on, that he had become a much more respectful person."

Gloria told me that a few months later she concentrated *la Princesa* again. The year was 1990. During that time there was a confrontation between the *guerrillas* and the army up in the hills above Palin. Gloria's uncles were up working on the base of the mountain cutting coffee when they heard an armed conflict break out nearby. They were fleeing the area when a bomb went off on the hillside next to where they had been working. When they got back to the house that afternoon, they were completely shaken up. They told the family what had happened in the hills that day.

"My grandfather and I did a concentration for my uncles that afternoon," said Gloria. "*La Princesa* entered." 'Do you realize what happened up there today?' she asked. 'That bomb was heading straight for your sons,' she said to Don Julian. 'It was dropped right above where they were cutting coffee. It was I who protected them from that bomb.'

"She helped them," said Gloria smiling. "Many beautiful things happen on this road."

Gloria is 18 years old now. Most of the time she works at home, preparing the meals for the family, cleaning the house, washing the clothes and babysitting nieces and nephews. Sometimes she works in the market with her mother and auntie selling *tostadas*, tomatoes, avocados and limes, but she has found that she cannot spend too much time away from home where she and her grandfather both have their altars.

"There was one time when I got a job outside of the home, but I fell ill almost immediately and was forced to quit," she said. "In a concentration, I was told that I have my work already and that I need to focus on that. I know now that this will always be my path and I am happy with it. I feel very blessed to be able to do this work and to be able to spend a lot of time with my grandfather. He and I travel together sometimes. We go to meet with other *ajq'ij* throughout the Highlands and occasionally help out with ceremonies. I really enjoy those times. When my grandfather and I are traveling on the bus he always tells me lots of stories about things that have happened in his life, how things used to be



Lake Atitlan, Solola — one of Gloria's favorite places

and how they have changed. I learn a lot from him."

I have been with Gloria when she works with Don Julian in concentrations. When I watch her I can tell when her spirit is beginning to leave her body, because she begins to rock back and forth in her chair. She seems to become tired and she starts to yawn and exhale in slow deep breaths that blow the candle flames on the altar before her. Usually, a spirit enters within a few minutes and Don Julian can begin asking questions. When it is too cloudy or overcast, however, the spirits are unable to enter and the concentration has to be held off until the skies clear.

"My grandfather uses the red *frijoles* [beans] to divine most of the time, but sometimes he needs my help," said Gloria. "Some things are difficult to read in the *frijoles*, so the best thing to do is concentrate me. That way, he can see better and ask for an explanation for things he does not understand. He receives information about the patients he is working on, what their ailments are, which plants he should prescribe to heal them, which colors of candles he should burn and how many. Things like that."

I asked her how she goes into a concentration and what sensations she feels in the process.

"In order to concentrate, I have to look into the glass of water, because that is where I feel the strongest connection to God," she said. "The glasses of water on the altar create that connection, like a pathway. The candles are used to give light to the road; they light the

way. Without them, the road is really dark."

Gloria sits in a wooden chair before Don Julian's altar, and he stands behind her, placing his hands on her shoulders. He opens his prayer by inviting in the forces of the four directions, the heart of the sky and the heart of the earth. Gloria's concentration is focused on the water. He prays in Spanish to invite in the Saints and in Pocomam to invite in the Mayan forces, asking them for their sacred presence, for their sacred blessings.

"When I first began doing this, it was really hard for me, hard on my body," said Gloria. "I wasn't used to it and when I'd awake from a concentration my body would be in a lot of pain. Now it's easier for me. When I concentrate I feel a cold sensation that enters through the top of my head; it moves throughout my whole body. From there I don't feel anything, yet I am aware that I am still present. My spirit leaves my physical body. Sometimes I go up to the ceiling in the corner of the house and I can watch my body from above, but I can't hear anything. There are times when I feel like I am transported, way up into the clouds. This happens when there is a lot of wind. With the wind my spirit is able to elevate more and more. When it is time for me to re-enter my body, sometimes I go back in on my own. Other times, I feel like the spirits come and get me and lead me back into my body."

Since August 1999, Gloria has been able to go into a concentration on her own, without the guidance of her grandfather. This ability came to her following a ceremony that was conducted on her behalf at the Mayan

pyramids of Tikal. The focus of the ceremony was to bring her fully and completely into her own power. Others prayed for her asking that she become more self-reliant in her work, that she be given the ability to hear, witness and remember what was said during concentrations. I was with her that day. There were many of us there to support her. That afternoon, we climbed to the top of the Temple of the Moon in the Main Plaza. When the ceremony began with prayers and songs I felt a shift in the energy surrounding us, a vibration so strong that it was at once elating and completely humbling. I looked over at Gloria and her gaze was fixed, solid and unwavering, on the Temple of the Sun, which sat directly across the main plaza from where we stood. Gloria told me later on that Xmucane, the oldest divine Mayan grandmother according to the Popol Vuh,¹ had appeared to her during the ceremony. 'Xmucane,' she said, 'was standing at the top of the Temple of the Sun, directly across from me, clothed in a *huipil* and *corte* of exquisite colors and designs. Her head was covered with a long woven cloth of the same beautiful fabric and she was pregnant.'

As the sun neared the horizon, it cast its last rays of light upon the green jungle canopy and the white and gray stone of the ancient pyramids. Rich shades of yellow and gold, of pink and violet emerged on the landscape. They shone brightly among the royal blue of the sky as billowing, rose-

colored cumulus clouds slowly drifted by. Everything glowed with warmth and brilliance.

We closed the ceremony upon the Temple of the Moon, descended from the immense pyramid and walked over to the North Acropolis to where the huge stone carving of Chac, the Rain God, was housed underground. Gloria wanted to make a final offering to Chac, to ask for his blessing and to acknowledge the strong connection that the Pocomam people have always had with the spirit of water.

We descended the stairs into the base of the North Acropolis and entered a dark, narrow tunnel. The air was stifling — hot, dense and humid. Within moments, sweat was rolling off my skin and my clothes became soaked from the dank, stagnant air below. Using candles to light our way, we followed the path to the end of the tunnel to where the huge stone carving of Chac had been rediscovered during an excavation years earlier. After the prayers and offerings were completed, we emerged from the belly of the temple and sat for awhile on the stone steps of the North Acropolis enjoying the freshness of the air. Within minutes it began to rain. Big heavy raindrops pelted down upon us. A few moments later, the rain stopped as suddenly as it had begun, and the sky cleared revealing directly overhead, an enormous rainbow. □

¹ Tedlock, Dennis, 1996 Rev.ed. *Popol Vuh, The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life*. Simon & Schuster. On page 32 of Dennis Tedlock's translation of the Popol Vuh, he describes Xmucane and Xpiyacoc as an elderly wife and husband. He says, "Xmucane is a divine midwife and Xpiyacoc is a divine matchmaker." They are both "*ajq'ik* or "diviners," who know how to interpret the auguries given by thirteen day numbers and twenty day names that combine to form a calendrical cycle lasting 260 days. They are older than all the other gods, who address them as grandparents, and the cycle they divine by is older than the longer cycles that govern Venus and the sun..."

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