

# Quinceañera!

## by Veronica Maciel

*Traditions and rites of passages from the cultures of adopted children can be particularly meaningful because they are opportunities to acknowledge connections that are sometimes made more sensitive because of the child's experience of adoption. For adopted Latina's, a quinceañera could be the perfect opportunity to incorporate connection to your child's particular ethnicity or even her birth family if you have contact with them. Remember, your daughter and your family can create your own version of the quinceañera, in a way that suits her needs and yours. If you are not the same ethnic origin as your daughter, this could become an opportunity to cultivate new or existing connections with people who are. If you don't already have connections try contacting Catholic Churches with Latinos in their congregations or cultural centers for tips and advice on how to begin to help your daughter plan her own quinceañera.*

A quinceañera is a big celebration, a rite of womanhood that is given for all Latina girls when they turn 15 years old. Families throw a big party, often in a rented hall, but first they go to church for a Mass. The quinceañera is supported by damas and chambelanes (kind of like bridesmaids and best men) who work hard for days practicing the waltz and helping plan the celebration. In Mexico, the damas are usually younger than the quinceañera but in the US they are any age, sometimes even older than the quinceañera.

Quinceañeras are kind of like a small wedding in a way, but it's actually like a family letting friends, family and society know that their daughter is no longer a little girl, but a woman. The word quinceañera refers to both the girl who is turning 15 as well as the party.

The quinceañera takes several godparents who provide almost anything she needs for her special event. The quinceañera looks for the right friends or family members and chooses them as godparents (if they accept). She might have a godparent for the cake, a ring, a chain, a crown or anything else that she might want, even a limo.

In Mexico the quinceañera would walk from her house to the church and then back to her home for the celebration. In a typical US quinceañera, after the Mass everybody goes to the hall for the party. First they dance the waltz; then, after that is over, everybody dances to the music the DJ plays. The music usually ends at around midnight.

Planning the quinceañera is a lot of hard work for the quinceañera, the damas, the chambelanes and the quinceañera's parents. The damas, the chambelanes and the quinceañera practice everyday for the waltz. It sometimes takes up to three hours daily to get it right. First, the quinceañera has to gather up the girls and the guys who are willing to come out in it and she has to make sure that they show up the final day.

All the damas and the quinceañera go to the hair salon to have their hair done; they take measurements for their dresses, buy their shoes and all the other things they need for the day. The quinceañera dress is any color she wants, but girls usually choose white. The chambelanes go get measured for their tuxedos.

The parents are responsible for organizing everything: they have to talk to the priest to pick a day for the Mass, rent a hall for the day, order the food and make sure there is enough for everybody, send out the invitations, gather the party favors...and the list goes on. They not only put in a lot of time but money as well.

Mexican American quinceañeras have changed the customs and traditions from the way they are celebrated in Mexico, but the best traditions continue to be passed on from generations to generations.

*Veronica Maciel is a young girl who had recently planned her own quinceañera when she wrote this article. Reprinted with permission from Nuestra Vecindad, August, 1996*