

# **DIVINE INTERVENTION: TWO RELIGIONS IN ONE GUATEMALAN HOUSEHOLD**

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## **Introduction**

One of the first things I noticed on my first day in Guatemala driving from Guatemala City to the Lake Atitlán area through the countryside and various *pueblos* was the amount of political propaganda that dotted the landscape. The different political parties had their trademarks painted on the sides of buildings and houses, mountains, poles, and stonewalls that line the roads. Although I noted the number and permanency of these political signs, which is something I am not accustomed to seeing and that took me by surprise, I shrugged them off and attributed them to Guatemala's past and current political unrest. In a country with twenty-eight political parties and fifteen presidential candidates, it is inevitable for the political propaganda to be a prominent characteristic of the landscape. Eventually it began to blend in my mind with the mountains and farms, and I did not note them as unusual or shocking.

After I got over the initial surprise of being surrounded by the political parties' advertisements, I began to notice the vast quantity of religious propaganda that was only slightly overshadowed by politics. There were large, colorful signs that read "*Yo ✠ Jesús*" and "*Jesús es el Señor,*" among others. Coming from a nation where religion is something that is considered somewhat taboo to discuss and better left out of polite conversation, much less plastered on the walls of public buildings and sidewalks, this phenomenon is something that I still, in my two months in Guatemala, have not been able to push to the back of my mind. The churches that are found on virtually every street corner were something that I expected because of the nature of the Spanish conquest and the Spaniards' forceful attempt to convert the "savage" Indians from their traditional religion to Catholicism, but what I was not expecting was how many churches were not Catholic at all but rather Protestant. I had never realized that so many Latin American people had been converted to Evangelism and that it can be considered a dominant religion in the region.

My first night in Santa Madera (The name of the town and the names of my houseparents and other people have been changed to protect the privacy of the characters involved in the research. The town of Santa Madera does not exist in the Lake Atitlán region.), my housefather and I took a walk around the tiny town, and there was music and shouting coming from loudspeakers from at least three different areas. I asked Guillermo, my housefather, where the sounds were coming from, and he told me that it was coming from the local Evangelical churches. He said that Santa Madera has four Evangelical churches and two Catholic churches and that someone is in the process of building a new Evangelical church in their house. This information stunned me because I never would have imagined that a town so small would need so many churches. When I arrived in Guatemala, I did not count on the religiosity of the Guatemalan people, but religion and people's belief systems are phenomena that are not easily explained. Even now when I think about the religious trends in Guatemala and in the town of Santa

Madera, I struggle to not impose my personal beliefs and perspectives and to not think of their traditions or customs as strange or inappropriate.

Every individual has his or her own personal beliefs, but who is to say whether they are right or wrong? Some people say that people should not marry inter-religiously because there will be a contrast of values, but others say that if you love the person, it will work out. Surely there will be compromises that have to be made, and you will have to decide in which faith you should raise the children. In this study, I am examining one Guatemalan household in which the father was raised Catholic and the mother was raised Evangelical, the issues that this difference in ideological backgrounds raises within the family unit, and the ways that they make it work. During my stay in Santa Madera with this specific indigenous family, I witnessed religion influence their lives and the lives of their family in many ways. I present these observations and experiences as a case study for inter-religious marriages and why or why not they can be successful despite the contrast of values, traditions, and customs.

### **Topic Evolution**

My biggest problem with the completion of my research was the selection of the topic to be investigated. My thought process underwent many changes, and I found it difficult to settle on a viable subject that also really interested me. The themes that I initially came up with were either not able to be completed satisfactorily in the limited amount of time that I had in the field or they were out of the scope of my abilities and knowledge. I found myself changing my topic up until the very last minute. I reached my final decision for something that would be reasonable for me to do and finish only two days before the end of the program and had to use the information that I had already gathered.

Before the program started, while I was pondering what type of research topic I would be interested in studying, solid waste disposal never crossed my mind, but when I first arrived in Santa Madera, I was struck by their method of disposal of their garbage. As you walk up the mountain to get to the town and approach the third curve in the road, you literally have to walk through one of the town's sites for garbage dumping. The garbage flows down the side of the mountain, across the road, and into a river that dumps into the lake, and there is no avoiding it. Upon further inquiry, I discovered that the town has two other sites identical to this one. Although the other two are more hidden from the general public, I was especially interested in why the people of the town would choose such an exposed, public location for their refuse, as well as why so many people just throw their garbage on the ground or on the floors of their houses.

This method was initially accepted by the program directors, but I decided against it for two reasons: a similar study had been done in Panajachel the year before and I did not think that I would be able to develop a good enough relationship with the town to investigate such a potentially sensitive subject. Although the study done in the 2002 Ethnographic Field School, "A Foreign Concern: Solid Waste Management in Panajachel" by Anna Wex, was done in a different municipality in the Lake Atitlán region and there have been no similar studies done in Santa Madera, I did not want my research to be too redundant and felt that Wex's work was applicable to the in which I lived. The deciding factor was that I was only going to live in Santa Madera for less than two months, and I did not want to rustle any feathers in that short period of time. I was

not in the position to impose my Western values on a town that has been relatively untouched by other communities and cultures and that might not think of what I saw as a problem of waste management as something with which they needed to concern themselves. I was merely a visitor in their world and not someone that had the right to criticize this world.

My second idea was to research language conservation and the measures that were being taken to keep their native language of Kaqchikel safe against the threat of the invasion of the Spanish language. Throughout my stay in Santa Madera, my housefather attempted to teach me how to say things in Kaqchikel, but I was unable to make many of the sounds that originate in the throat. During one of these learning sessions, while my housefather was laughing at my unsuccessful attempts, he told me that the language is slowly blending with Spanish and that he thinks it is very important to keep the Mayan language as pure as possible. As the necessity to speak Spanish grows and the schools have begun to use Spanish in the classrooms, the national language has begun to slowly integrate with Kaqchikel. Examples of Spanish usages are numbers and religious terms in church services such as “*hermanos*” and “*Dios*.” The *madereños* only speak Spanish if they have to, the older people, especially the women, know very limited Spanish, and the young children that have not yet been to school only speak Kaqchikel because it is the language spoken in the home. I wanted to study how this invasion of language has influenced their culture and their town, but the directors of the program did not think that it was a topic in my scope due to my inability to speak Kaqchikel.

My interest in the conservation of the culture of Santa Madera was still sparked, and I thought that I could combine this with my interest in gender roles and work with the women’s role in cultural conservation. I made the assumption, that women, as the parent that usually spent the most time with the children, would bear most of the responsibility for the cultural transmission between the generations. A majority of the fathers have the responsibility of earning the money for the household and spend much of their time away from the home working, while the women generally stay at home and care for the children. Another factor that indicated to me that women would play a part in cultural conservation was that a vast majority of them still wear the *traje*, or traditional Mayan dress, and there is not a single male in Santa Madera that still dresses in *traje*. I thought that, because *traje* is one symbol of more traditional values, this might indicate that the women held on to these values tighter than the men. It was pointed out to me that, not only was I not absolutely sure that women had a strong role in cultural conservation, but I did not have any strong evidence that there was any avid effort to conserve the *madereño* culture by males or females.

Cultural conservation as a topic by itself was too general to research in six weeks and to do a thorough job, but it was suggested that perhaps I could focus on two or three more specific aspects of the culture. I debated between doing themes such as religion, political organization, *traje*, leisure activities/hobbies, oral literature, etc. I never seriously thought of doing religion until I realized that it has only been a few decades since the introduction of Evangelism to Santa Madera and that there would be people in the town that I could talk to about how the town and the people have changed since the new religion came. Further investigation into this possibility led me to the knowledge that my housemother’s father and the man that owns the local ice cream stand were the first two people to convert and bring Evangelism to Santa Madera. I then became

interested in the history of religion in general in the *pueblo* and how the town has evolved with the evolution of the religions.

I was originally going to continue with the theme of cultural conservation and compare the differences between the Evangelicals and Catholics. The hypothesis was that the Evangelicals would be more willing to embrace change because they had converted to a new religion and rejected the traditions of the Catholic religion and, in turn, turned their back on many of the traditions of the town, such as the festivals that commemorate the saints. Theoretically the Catholics would be more likely to hold on to the old values and traditions and be quicker to resist the evolution and the progression of the town and the people. In just my conversations with people and primary inquiry, I was not finding that there was much of a difference between the attitudes of the Catholics and Evangelicals towards change or cultural evolution. I still wanted to study the various religions because of the relatively recent foundation of the Evangelical Church, so I thought that I could research the different stages of the town from when virtually the entire town was Catholic, to the introduction of the Charismatic Catholicism, and to the introduction of Evangelism. When I began to seriously research this, but again realized that it was too big of a project to do in the quickly diminishing amount of time, so I decided narrowed it down to the history of Evangelism.

With the history of Evangelism as my decided topic, I set out to conduct interviews, observe church services, and also get the point-of-view of the Catholics that did not convert. I conducted formal interviews with Evangelical pastors, the man that started the first Evangelical church with my housemother's father, and men that were involved in Catholic Action, as well as talking with my family to get general information. My frustrations quickly began with the results of these interviews. The most immediate problem was the language barrier. As it turns out, it was not just a problem that I do not speak Kaqchikel, but my Spanish abilities were not adequate to fully communicate as well. The practice of my Spanish, in the past, has been limited to classroom experience. Before this program, I had not had much conversational experience, my vocabulary is very limited, and a majority of my teachers at school have been from Barcelona, so I am not familiar with Central American terms and slang. As I said before, Spanish is the second language of the people of Santa Madera, as well as the other communities around the lake, and their grammar and vocabulary is also limited. In the beginning, I attempted to translate the interviews myself. I had recorded them all on my mini-tape recorder just for that purpose. I knew that I would have to listen to the interviews repeatedly to be able to fully comprehend, but I was not prepared for the extent to which I would not be able to understand. My inadequate Spanish and their inadequate Spanish made it impossible for me to make any sense of the interviews. My housefather volunteered to help me when he saw my frustration, but he was not able to fully understand what the respondents were saying either. Finally I had to get a native Guatemalan from Guatemala City to assist me with the translations, and even she had some trouble. She said that they were using words incorrectly and using words that she had never heard of.

The second and biggest problem with these interviews was that I was not getting straight answers to my questions. The respondents would answer with propaganda for their respective religions. I asked each person what Santa Madera was like before the introduction of Evangelism. Examples of the answers that I got to this question are: "People were spiritually lost because they did not know God, who he is, or how he is,"

(personal communication) and “Before there was no Evangelism, but now there is. We are evangelizing the people voluntarily” (personal communication). Some of the answers to the questions were straight quotes from the Protestant Bible, mainly about the coming of Jesus and how the people that have not converted are going to be held in judgment. I wanted to learn from the pastors that decided to start their own church the reasons behind their decision. They replied that they had problems but did not want to talk about it. When I asked the man that was involved in Catholic Action what the Catholic Church did when people started to convert to Evangelism and what he did in his involvement with Catholic Action, he told me that they were mad that they were losing people from their church, and he gave money to the Church. I know that for some of the questions, they did not completely understand what I was asking, but it was also apparent that for some questions, they were being purposefully vague.

After spending a good amount of time trying to get information from various people about the changes that Santa Madera had gone through after the installment of Evangelism and realizing that I was not getting anywhere concrete with the investigation, I decided to change my topic one last time. Because I had focused the greater part of my research on religion and had many field notes about religious activities and conversations that I had participated in with my family, I changed my project to the topic of religion in my household. The situation is interesting because of the different ideologies and religious backgrounds of each of my house parents’ families, and I was able to observe and experience the influence that the ideologies of Catholicism and Evangelism have had on the family as a unit.

### **Research Setting**

My research was carried out in a small town of Santa Madera in the Lake Atitlán region in Guatemala. The town is situated in a curve high on a mountain next to the lake and is relatively isolated because there are no roads that lead in and out of the town. There is a sharp division between the tourist section on the lakeshore and the residential section up the mountain, which requires a hike due to the fact that there is no public transportation. It is rare to see a tourist wandering the streets of Santa Madera; although, there are a few foreigners that have set up residence and befriended the native residents. Although the *pueblo* itself is a very small collection of houses collected around the town center, the municipality includes the surrounding villages of Tzununá and Jaibalito. The population of Santa Madera has grown exponentially in the past few decades, from 400 people in 1936 to 2,000 people in 2003, but has remained steadily and consistently indigenous with only a handful of exceptions. (Rojas Lima 278)

The main source of income for the *madereros* is the production of crops such as corn, avocados, bananas, beans, and various other fruits and vegetables. These crops are cultivated on the top of the surrounding mountains, harvested, and mainly sold in the nearby markets of Panajachel and Sololá. Some of the *maderera* women produce textiles, but these fabrics are generally only sold within the town rather than in the artisans’ markets. Santa Madera is one of the poorest municipalities in the nation of Guatemala as well as the Lake Atitlán region and also one of the least affected by outside and foreign influences.

The household in which I lived was an exception to this general rule. My family was economically secure in relation to the other households in the area, and my

housemother's job was to raise the children, clean the house, wash the clothes, and cook the food, while my housefather left the home to earn the money. Guillermo was a carpenter with a reputation for doing good work and being a hard worker. My family was also under some sort of foreign influence. Guillermo spent a total of a year in Germany, where he studied his vocation to better himself at his job, and had several foreign friends, mostly of German nationality. His international experience gave him a different mindset than most of the other people in Santa Madera and a drive for financial ambition and multicultural appreciation.

### **Brief Religious History**

Prior to 1974, the major religion in Santa Madera was Catholicism with a heavy influence from the traditional Mayan idolatry; Evangelism had not touched the town. On May 10<sup>th</sup> the entire community would gather to celebrate the *fiesta* of Santa Elena de la Cruz, the town's patron saint. The citizens would join in drinking, dancing, and having very lively festivities, including fireworks. The *madereños* felt an unusual sense of unity and respect for each other because they had common religious beliefs, morals, traditions, and customs.

Few Evangelist missionaries would visit, but they were feared and received with hostility, if at all, by the *madereños*. The people would slam doors in their faces, yell at them, run from them, and accuse them of being thieves and murders. The missionaries would never stay for long, never accomplished much, and never successfully converted any of the *madereños*. In 1972 a man, who had been traveling to Panajachel on a regular basis to sell his corn in the marketplace, befriended an Evangelist missionary. The missionary would talk to him about Christianity and the Bible and would teach him the word of God. He liked what the missionary had to say, and the missionary liked him because he was not angry at the preaching. The man decided to accept Jesus as his Lord and Savior and the word of God as the truth and converted from idolatry to Christianity. He returned to Santa Madera and began to preach to the people and try to spread the word. The *madereños* did not take it well and became angry. Seven men attacked the newly converted man, beat him, and threw him in jail for two days and one night. Slowly people began to accept what the man was saying and to join him in his mission to convert the people.

In 1975 the first Evangelical church was built in Santa Madera, and the church set out to reform the deviants that were seen as "spiritually lost", such as the alcoholics and thieves, and show them a better, happier life with Jesus. When the local people saw the reformation in the lives of these people, more and more began to convert voluntarily. Now there are a total of four Evangelical churches in Santa Madera, and the number is continuing to grow. The Catholics and the Evangelicals have learned to tolerate each other's life style and difference in opinion, but the town is no longer a united entity that shares the same traditions, customs, and morals. Because the Evangelicals are not permitted to drink alcohol or dance, they are no longer able to participate in the *fiestas* of the saints of the town and have initiated traditions and customs of their own.

They are irreversibly split in two main religious groups but have learned to live in relative harmony. The last night that I spent in Santa Madera was the anniversary of the Charismatic Catholic church and the weekend of their celebration. They erected a shelter

for their *fiesta* in front of the Catholic church in the center of town and held services outside. During the Catholic celebration, the Evangelical churches broadcasted their services over the loudspeakers as always to drown out the competing religious sects. All five churches vied for air space but did nothing to actually interrupt the services.

### Methodology

The majority of my data for the study was collected by participant observations and informal interviews or casual conversations. As a temporary member of the household, I inevitably participated in certain family functions and was involved in some family discussions. Many of these activities were religious in nature, if not directly than often indirectly. Both of my house parents many times used me as a confidante and counselor, and in these talks that we had, I gathered much insightful information into their personal beliefs and their contentment and disappointments with the contrasting beliefs of their partner. There were times when I was not directly consulted but was present during family discussions and witnessed issues that were raised within the family. One problem with this method of data collection is that many of their private conversations were spoken in Kaqchikel, so I was not able to understand, and often times Rita, my housemother, would speak in Kaqchikel and Guillermo, my housefather, would reply in Spanish if I was present. In these cases I would be able to infer the subjects of their discussions, but I would only be hearing his side.

I attended some of the family events with the immediate family as well as the more extended family to get some insight into how religion affects their lives outside of the home. I accompanied Rita to church and temple and watched how she acts and reacts in these environments. These observations could be tainted because it is possible that she was changed her natural behavior because of my presence. I never observed her in these situations when she was not aware of my presence. I conducted a time allocation study on my housemother to see if or how her religion functions in her everyday life directly, but again she was aware that I was observing her and could have possibly changed her conduct and activities.

Many nights Guillermo and I would sit at the dinner table after the family had eaten and talk. He voiced his complaints and commendations about his life and his family life. I also attended his father's funeral with him and observed his behavior at the service. This observation has the same problems that I had with my housemother because it is possible that he acted in a certain or unnatural way because of my being there.

Although I feel that I have been able to get a proper overview into how religion is having an effect on the family, I was not able to acquire certain details that would have benefited my study further. This is because I changed my topic at the last minute and had been studying other topics for a majority of my stay in Santa Madera.

### **Data and Analysis**

Upon arrival in Santa Madera, my housefather greeted me at the bottom of the mountain, and he took my overweight duffel bag and me to the house up the mountain, where we sat and talked to get to know each other. We exchanged general information about each other's families and asked the usual questions. When one of the first things that Guillermo asked me was whether I am religious or not, the question took me slightly

by surprise. I told him that I was not a religious person, and he replied that he was not religious either but that his wife is. As a matter of fact, the reason that she was not there to greet me was because she was in San Juan at some sort of religious ceremony. He told me that she goes to church almost every day and is very involved in the church's activities. He then asked me if I drink alcohol or smoke, and when I told him that I do drink occasionally but do not smoke, he told me that the same was true for him, as well. I knew right away that Guillermo was going to be someone very easy to talk to because he obviously enjoyed meeting new people.

When I met Rita, my housemother, she was a little more reserved and less of a natural conversationalist. I also met their two children, boys the ages of 5 and 3, Antonio and Carlos, respectively. Carlos had accompanied Rita to the ceremony in San Juan, but Antonio spent the day with Guillermo's parents, who lived literally next door. His mother, Maria, would often talk to the family through the walls when we were in the kitchen preparing or eating a meal. For weeks I never saw her face because she did not actually come to the house to visit. She did not leave her house because her husband, Guillermo's father, was severely ill, and the family knew that he did not have much more time to live. When I finally did meet Maria, I needed no introduction because I recognized her immediately from her voice. I never had the chance to meet Guillermo's father because he was bed-ridden and died before he ever got better. Rita's father had died three years prior to my arrival, and her mother, Patricia, ran the family's *tienda* on the lakeshore.

My first impression of my family was that they were a very loving, happy family that respected each other and would, in turn, respect me. They appeared to be a perfect family like something out of a storybook; they were young, happy, and healthy. There was a poem by Guillermo to Rita written on the large, wooden table on the outdoor patio of the house that overlooked the lake. The poem read, "*Te amo, pero sin tu amor estoy perdido. El amor, hay que tratar siempre con respeto...*" Translated to English, the poem reads, "*I love you, but without your love, I am lost. Love, one has to treat always with respect...*" and it was a philosophy that they seemed to live by. As time went by, I realized that they have differences and arguments like any other normal family. I slowly began to discover that the root of their problems seemed to lay with religion and the differences in their religious upbringings. Guillermo's family is Catholic, and there are members of his family that were heavily involved in the Catholic Action. (Catholic Action is the reform movement by the Catholic Church to repress the surge of Evangelical missionaries and the number of conversions to Evangelism.)

On the other hand, Rita was raised devoutly Evangelist. Her father was one of the first men to bring Evangelism to Santa Madera, is known in the village as the town's Father of Evangelism, and was a traveling pastor in the various towns around Lake Atitlán. As has been previously said, the difference in religious beliefs results in a difference in values, traditions, and customs. The contrast in values that I found to be most prevalent in the community was the outlook on drinking alcohol and smoking. It is a strict rule for the Evangelists that they are not permitted to drink or smoke because it poisons your body and causes you and your life to lose control. The Catholics, however, are permitted to drink and smoke because according to the Evangelist population, the Catholic faith "has no rules." Other vices and problems are assumed to go hand-in-hand

with the drinking and smoking, and it is seen as living a life of sin, being “spiritually lost”, and not having a personal relationship with God.

Before marrying Rita, Guillermo lived with a woman, who he was not married to, and together they had two children. Guillermo left this woman and his two daughters to be with Rita, but they were not permitted by Rita’s father to marry if it was not going to be in the Evangelist church. Guillermo’s parents did not feel strongly about the matter because they just wanted their youngest child to be happy, so he decided to convert from Catholicism to Evangelism. Although he went through the rites to convert, his personal ideologies did not change because he still drank and did not go to church on a regular basis. On a number of occasions, he would voice his complaints to me about how Rita would nag him about his alcohol intake and his church attendance. He would tell me how he loves Rita and the children, but he and Rita have very different lives and very different goals for their lives. My housemother would tell me stories about the earlier years in their marriage when Guillermo would come home drunk, would start yelling at her for various things, and would hit her. She said that when this would happen she would go home to her parents’ house, and her father would tell her that she did not have to stay with her husband under those circumstances. She decided to stay with my housefather, they talked about their problems, he stopped hitting her, and she was now happy being with him and her family.

Within my first week in Guatemala, the noise and the lively music from the churches had completely captured my attention and fully sparked my curiosity. After my first week, on a Wednesday at about 8:30am, I asked Rita if I could accompany her to her church while she went to temple. I was expecting some sort of church service, but instead it was just a few people individually praying loudly. They were gathered in a group in the front of the church and kneeling down in front of the center altar. This activity is called *ayuno*, which literally translates to “fast” or the act of fasting. I sat in the back of the church and watched as different worshippers wandered in and out of the temple. Rita had told me that she would be there until noon and then would return to the house to prepare lunch. I admit that I could not fathom what anyone could possibly pray about for nearly four hours straight, and she joined the others in their prayers just as loudly and passionately as the rest. For someone who is normally very quiet and timid, it was a shock for me to see her in this altered state, and I knew that she must feel much passion in her heart and truly, strongly believe in her faith to make this immense transition. It also occurred to me that she must either feel that she has many problems and requests to pose to God or much to be thankful for...or possibly both. It takes much dedication and devotion to remain kneeled in front of an altar for an entire afternoon in a community where time is such a valued commodity and every daylight hour is used to the full capability. On the days that Rita would go to temple or make house visits, she would be washing dishes and clothes and cleaning the house well into the night, and she would then wake up at dawn the next day to start the routine over again.

Rita was elected the previous year as president of the *Consilio Misionero Femenino* (Feminine Missionary Council), which is a committee of four middle-aged women, at Asamblea de Dios, which is the church that her father helped to found and was the first Evangelical church in Santa Madera. Every Wednesday the committee uses the church’s money to run errands for the church, such as buy food for the pastor and go to the market to buy fresh flowers for the temple. Every other Wednesday morning, these

women would go to *ayuno*, and on the alternate Wednesday mornings, they would go to *hogares* (“homes”) and make house visits for the prayer. In the evenings of every Wednesday, the committee would sing during the church service. The church was the only organization that Rita was involved with and the only activity that she participated in outside of the home. There were other committees that did these activities on the other days of the week, and their members are decided by age and gender.

The same Wednesday that I went to temple with my housemother, I accompanied her to the service that evening. I asked her if I could attend the service while we were sitting with the family at the dinner, and my housefather gave me a look that suggested that I might have possibly lied to him when I told him that I was not a religious person. Rita’s committee sang a song that night, but I was not able to understand the words of the song or the message of the sermon because they were mostly in Kaqchikel. Antonio had come with us to the church, and although he spent most of the time playing with his toy horses, when the congregation began to pray, he would place his head in the crooks of his elbows and close his eyes to respect the prayer. After returning to the house, Guillermo asked me if I thought that the service was as boring as he does.

In the year 2000, Rita’s father was walking on a remote mountain path that runs between Santa Madera and a neighboring town, and some men that were hiding out attacked him. These men cut him with a machete and tried to set him on fire, but instead of these wounds killing him immediately, it took three days for his body to die. The reasons behind this brutal murder were never indulged to me, but it seems to me that it was more than a routine robbery. Three years after her father’s death, it would still sadden Rita enough to cause her to have to pause in her chores and sit to cry. Likewise Guillermo was devastated when his father died in June. The family had been gathering for weeks to sit at his bedside and pray in their sad, desperate way for their beloved husband, father, grandfather, etc. Many people remarked to me how amazing it was that he had such a large family and was able to keep them all financially secure. My housefather invited me to attend the funeral and the walk to the cemetery, so I accompanied him to the Catholic church and sat with him in the back of the room. He did not make any attempt to join his brothers and sisters in the front until one of his nephews came to ask him to go and kneel in front of the altar. In the procession to the cemetery from the church, he fell back to the rear of the group, while his siblings stayed in the very front and walked behind the musicians. I was not sure if he was holding back because I was there, trying to keep me company because he had invited me, or if that would have been his natural behavior if I were not present. Rita had stayed home instead of going to the funeral despite the fact that she had spent all of her spare time cooking and cleaning for her in-laws and keeping them company.

After his father’s death, Guillermo’s drinking habit intensified. He would fail to come home after work, was often absent for dinner, and would not stay home long if he did make it home for dinner. He spent most of his time at the bars in the hotels drinking with his foreign friends and trying to erase the memory of his father’s death and trying to forget that he lived in Santa Madera. When he did make it home, he would either go straight to bed or pass out at the dinner table. Maria, his mother, had begun to spend a majority of her time with us and eating meals in our kitchen, and she would cry when Guillermo would come home too drunk to spend time with his family. In the mornings, Rita would cry to me and tell me that her husband would come home drunk and talk

about throwing himself into the lake because he was so sad about losing his father, which would make her feel worse about her own father's death.

One day when Rita and I were sitting in the kitchen preparing lunch, the pastor from her church and his wife stopped by to make a house call. They chatted for a while, talked about the family, and talked about Guillermo's family, and when the visit was coming to an end, the three of them knelt down in the kitchen and prayed for approximately ten minutes. Again in the presence of prayer, Carlos put his head in his hands, perhaps out of respect, but appeared to be playing with his feet instead of concentrating on the prayer. It was evident from what little I could understand of their conversation that they were discussing the strain that Guillermo's father's death had put on the family and on the relationship between Guillermo and Rita. Immediately after leaving our house, the pastor and his wife paid a visit to Maria in her house, and their prayers could be heard through both houses' walls. It was the only time that I saw or heard of the Evangelical pastors going to a Catholic household for religious purposes, but I knew that their congregation also used them as counselors for their personal and familial problems.

As my time passed by in Santa Madera, Guillermo talked more and more about his discontent with his life's situation. He detested the fact that Rita was repeatedly lecturing him about how his actions and his lifestyle were not in accordance with the religious morals that he supposedly adopted when he converted to Evangelism. It drove him crazy that everything he did and said would make Rita cry. The concept of separation and divorce often came up in conversation with Guillermo, and he would hang his head in despair and frustration thinking about how his life would be if he was not tied down with a family and other responsibilities and was free to travel and experience the world as he wished. He could not understand how having a few beers after work could be considered a sin or why it would prompt the grievous reaction from her. He was brought up to think that there was nothing wrong with a little bit of alcohol intake or with not attending church services on a regular basis, which was the opposite of what Rita held to be true. For Guillermo it is enough that he believes in God and worships him in his heart, but Rita expected more out of her husband and wanted Carlos and Antonio to be raised in a more strictly devout environment, an environment where they would not be exposed to moral contradictions and would clearly understand the differences between what she saw as right and wrong. My housefather was much more nonchalant about the religiosity of the household and the upbringing of Carlos and Antonio.

I asked several religion-affiliated people what the main difference is between Evangelism and Catholicism, and every respondent, Evangelical and Catholic alike, replied that Evangelism implemented more rules. Correspondingly, in the structure of the household, the Evangelical parent, Rita, implemented more rules when dealing with the children. It bothered Guillermo that Rita was so quick to scold the children or stop them from doing something that they wanted to do. He was always the first to give them money for *dulces* and tell Carlos that he did not have to go to school if he did not want to. Carlos made good grades on his report card in all of the subjects scored, except for attendance, in which he received the lowest possible. Every morning Rita would try to make him get ready for school, and Guillermo would come in for breakfast, tell him he did not have to go, and give him one or two *quetzales* (Guatemala's national currency) to take to the *tienda*. One day Rita told me that she tried to give Carlos a choice, as a

majority of the other children in Santa Madera had, between going to school for the day or going to the top of the mountain to collect firewood for the town. On the days that he did not go to school, Carlos would join Antonio and his cousins at Maria's house and play, rather than do any kind of work. This lack of self-discipline bothered Rita, but Guillermo did not see it as an urgent problem in Carlos's developing character. Antonio was still too young to attend school or contribute to the household or community chores. If Guillermo ever had to handle matters with Carlos and Antonio, he would mutter under his breath, "*Esto no es mi trabajo*" (This is not my job.). Although he considered the supervision of the children Rita's responsibility, he would still openly disagree with her methods of discipline and management.

It was apparent that at the base of their marital problems lay their religious differences, and even after 6 years of marriage, the differences were too deeply rooted to truly overlook and/or overcome. Small things, that on the surface would not appear to be significant to the survival of the relationship, would deep down be silently killing it. The exhaustion of trying to be patient with each other and learn to accept their inherent moral differences were driving them to no longer have the desire to compromise with each other.

### **Conclusion**

Although this research only describes the relationship of one family in a small, remote town in Guatemala, the data can be applied to the study of inter-religious relationships worldwide. I have found that the happiness and survival of these relationships depends on a few simple, but essential, factors. The extent to which one or both of the individuals is involved with their religion and convictions, obviously, has a strong influence on the way that they behave and treat the other person. Due to the difference in beliefs and morals, and consequently in behavior, one has to be willing to compromise in their lifestyle and conduct. When the readiness to compromise dies, the motivation to keep the relationship functional and peaceful will die with it. If there are children involved, an agreement must be made as to how the children will be raised and the morals that will be instilled into them. It can be confusing to children to be told by one parent that something is wrong to do and see, at the same time, the other parent doing the very same behavior. These are only a few of the many factors that keep a marriage working happily.

In Santa Madera, the concept of Evangelism is still relatively new to the people, and the Evangelists and the Catholics are still learning to coexist and to tolerate the new religious diversity. Evangelism has had a deep impact on the traditions and customs of the town and has inevitably and irreversibly affected the feeling of unity among the population. Previously, the people did not have to concern themselves with successfully marrying inter-religiously and is still something that they have to figure out. As time goes by and the people learn to be more open-minded and tolerant of other people's differences, it will become easier and more ingrained in the continuously evolving culture of Santa Madera. In the case of Guillermo and Rita, their relationship most likely will not survive their religious differences, but this does not mean that other inter-religious marriages are not able to work through their disparities in beliefs, customs, and traditions, and be able to successfully keep their relationship intact.