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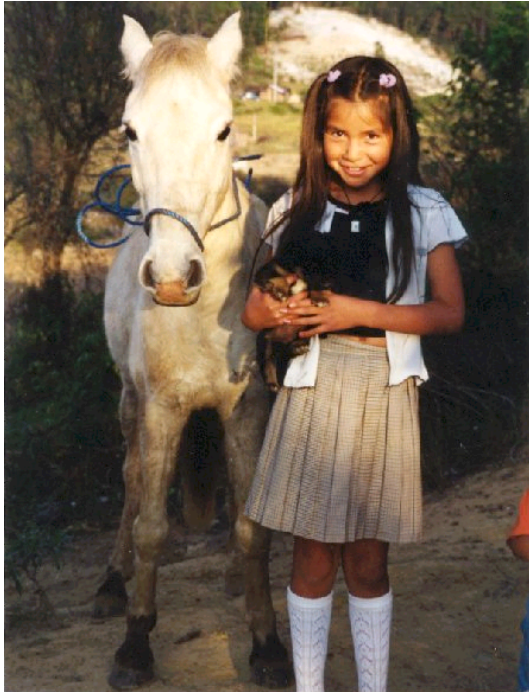


## Berenices and Life on the Ranch



By Adrienne Donnelly for Berenices

My name is Berenices Espinoza Garcia and I'm a fifth grader at San Cristobal school near the El Rosario Monarch Sanctuary in Michoacan, Mexico. My school is participating in the Journey North Program and we just received Symbolic Butterflies from the students in the north.



I live with my grandparents and five other siblings on a ranch way up in the mountains. I love living here and playing with all my animals. I have sheep, puppies, cats, hens, piglets, turkeys and two parakeets that live on the porch outside my house.

My mother is away working and my father works in the United States, so my grandparents are very close to me. My grandmother and grandfather are two of the very few people left who can still speak the ancient otomi indigenous language. This is very rare these days, since the language began to be replaced by Spanish almost 500 years ago.



My grandfather is 69 years old, but he still does all the same work he's done since he was a little boy. Just like my great-great-grandfather who first lived on this ranch, my grandfather works the earth with a horse and tiller to harvest the corn and wheat we grow.



We all help him — my brothers and sisters and I — because we depend on that same harvest to make our own tortillas and bread. The top priority in my family is to make sure the crops are harvested, and this means we have to stay home from school sometimes to help. My older brother and sisters stopped going to school after sixth grade so that they could help my grandparents.

I still go to school, but I have to keep up with my chores as well. I wake up early in the morning and go out to our mill to get corn for the day's tortillas. Then I help around the house with dishes and taking care of the animals. Luckily for me, my

school runs in shifts and I don't have to be there until noon for the afternoon shift. When I come home, at around 6 at night, I do more chores. My favorite responsibility is helping my grandmother make her special bread.



My grandmother is famous in the towns near our ranch for the wonderful bread she makes and sells. Her Pan Hecho del Rancho is made from the same traditional recipe that our ancestors have used for hundreds of years.

When my grandmother makes bread, she kneels barefoot on the ground and kneads the dough. Some people ask why she doesn't stand up or sit in a chair, to be more comfortable. But she tells them that



her ancestors have always knelt this way and she wouldn't think of making her bread any differently.



Once the dough has been kneaded and cut into pieces, we lay it out on trays and carry it out to the woods behind my house.



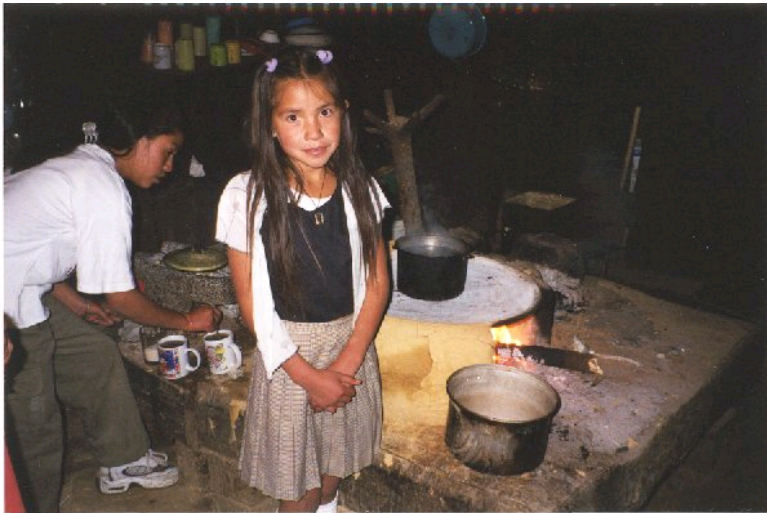
Here is the ancient stone "horno" that we use to bake the bread-it's faster and hotter than modern ovens even though it's nearly 200 years old. To bake the bread, my grandfather starts by dusting away the ashes inside the horno. He does this with a tool he's made out of pine branches and a carved stick.



Next, he places the bread trays on a wooden paddle and sticks the bread beside a fire deep inside the horno. We close up the door with bricks and wait about 15 minutes-then it's ready to eat. My grandmother's bread is better than ever right when it comes out of the oven. I eat it as soon as it's cool enough not to burn my mouth!



After we've baked all the bread my grandmother will sell the next day, my family and I go into the hut near our house where we have a merienda snack. This meal right before bed is common in Mexico and it's one of my favorite times of the day.



In this hut, my grandmother makes tortillas in a sort of stone kitchen. First, she crushes whole kernels of corn with a stone roller. She adds water to the corn and it becomes a wet dough. Next, she lays it over a stone stove heated by burning logs.



After we've all eaten our tortillas, she throws two extra thick ones on the stoves for my dogs, who wait outside for their dinner. When we're all full and finished talking, my brothers and sisters and I go back to the house to sleep. My grandparents stay here, near the stone oven-and sleep on the floor. We all sleep deeply, tired and happy from a long day's work!