



El Padrino (The Godfather) probably conjures up images of small Italian men with thick cigars and hat brims pulled low over his eyes. *La Madrina* is perhaps a not so glamorous image, but what a crazy turn of events followed my acceptance to be the Godmother of a five year old Mexican boy named Jesús.

My acting the role of the *Madrina* is a good indication of how fully we were accepted into the lives of the people of this small community. The freedom with which we were allowed to enter their homes to measure their tiny rooms and inventory their personal belongings often astounded me. It

## La Madrina

by Laurel Miles



(Jesús and I)

was amusing, to say the least, to reverse the situation in my mind, and to think of myself asking a Canadian family to open its doors, and walk through the house measuring everything from the porch to the washroom, and drawing diagrams of their furniture layout. None the less, these people welcomed us out of the sun and offered us cool drinks, and learned things from us at the same time that we learned things from them. It is with this trust in mind that I accepted the role as *madrina*, and worried myself sick over my lack of knowledge of what exactly were the duties of the Godmother.

I admit I was very sceptical about the whole situation as there were some politics involved with how the rest of the community would view one of the Canadians being so tied to a specific family. I feared that hard feelings might arise, but something about the way that Jesús yelled "*Madrina*" from down the end of the dusty road, or how he was capable of being impishly shy if the situation required it, won me over in the end.

I found myself in the air-conditioned office of José Navarrete, our contact in Zihuatanejo to whom we ran when the pipes to our sink began flooding, when we could not light the hot water tank, when we ran out of propane, and this time for the definition of *Madrina*. In his half smirking way he asked me what could possibly be the matter, considering I had already survived the flooding of our house and all of the other daily disasters I am sure he associated with his fledgling group of Canadians. He did not exactly calm my fears, but here is the summary. There are many godparents in Mexico, specific to special occasions during

Then, the flower arrangement. José tried very hard to describe the kind of flower that is given to little boys on this day, Narcissus, if I remember correctly, but at the time, the word in Spanish meant little to me, so with a little ink sketch in hand, I went off to find the perfect arrangement. The variety of costs and sizes of this kind of arrangement both astounded and bewildered me, and with luck or possibly ill fate I ran into the older sister of my little charge who guided me to the arrangement that she thought was most beautiful, and WAY too expensive for my budget. We ended up settling on an

*Bien qu'étrangers, nous avons été accueillis à bras ouverts par nos nouveaux amis. En particulier, j'ai eu l'honneur d'être choisie marraine de Jesús pour sa graduation de l'école primaire. Cela m'a donné quelques angoisses au début car je ne savais pas quel seraient mes devoirs. En fin de compte, je me suis bien amusée.*



At the kindergarten celebration

the life of the child: the Godparents of the Marriage for example, and the Godparents of the Kindergarten Graduation, for which I had the honour of being chosen Godmother. By dividing up the responsibilities of special events, you also divide up the cost to the Godparent. The actual responsibilities seemed quite simple, buy a gift, buy the traditional flower arrangement that the Godparents give on this specific day, and SMILE! I'm not sure at what point I realised I was in for more than I had bargained for...

The gift seemed easy enough, until I realized that I do not know anything about five year old boys, and even less about what they would like as a gift, and ultimately, I think that any attempts I made at being a COOL godmother failed miserably. I cringe as I think of the cute T-shirt and shorts that I was so pleased with, and the look of disappointment on his face as he opened the box. Has it really been so long since I was a kid to remember that clothes are not the preferred gift?

arrangement that was more within my price range, and that seemed to please her, although it was not really to my taste.

The day of the Kindergarten Graduation, my little charge scrubbed clean and dressed in a sparkling white shirt and navy suit, looking as angelic as he could, we set off for the morning of dancing. Although my responsibilities from this distance are not as clear as they might be, that day they were acknowledged by all. Help him with the costume changes, and be as proud as one could be while holding a flower arrangement that was garish and oversized in comparison to the more modest ones that were possessed by everyone but me. We didn't miss any costume changes, and I was very proud, and the children could not have danced more beautifully than on that warm morning in August. In the end it was the source of much laughter, and also a fine example of how the people of La Esperanza shared their trust and their traditions with us.

*A pesar de ser un grupo de extranjeros fuimos muy afortunados en ser aceptados en las casas y la vida diaria de los residentes de La Esperanza. Como ejemplo de su confianza puedo mencionar que tuve el honor de ser invitada para apadrinar a un niño de la comunidad. Al principio, yo estaba nerviosa porque no estaba familiarizada con los deberes y roles de una madrina, pero después de mucha confusión y risa, la experiencia resultó emocionante.*