



The Journey Of La Quinceañera

Jerry Grasso

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“It takes a village to raise a child.” The [Quinceañera](#) celebration tells such a story. It is about strength, human frailty, and yet persistent innocence in the face of a cold, hostile world. It is about family, respect for tradition. It is about loyal friendships and loving patrons and generous sponsors. This essay depicts one young lady’s symbolic transition from childhood to becoming a mature woman who is capable of independence and making her own decisions as she faces the challenges of life ahead.

In this reimagined version of these ceremonial events, I attempt to use montage to tighten the cohesion and balance of the story elements. I also wanted to convey a sense of motion, energy, innocence, and transition within the range of these sequences.

My wife, Jayne, and I had the honor and privilege of attending and participating in the [Quinceañera](#). This Mexican fiesta, De Quince Años, is a celebration of the 15th birthday of the young lady (la Quinceañera). These coming-of-age customs presented here highlight God, family, friends, music, food, and dance.

The [Quinceañera](#) celebration traditionally begins with a religious ceremony. A Reception is then held in a banquet hall. The festivities include food and music, and a choreographed waltz or dance performed by the Quinceañera and her Court.

It is traditional for the Quinceañera to choose special friends to participate in what is called the Court of Honor. These young people are her closest friends - the special people in her life with whom she wants to share the spotlight.

The Quinceañera wears a ball gown, with her Court dressed in gowns and tuxedos. Guests received small tokens, cápias, to commemorate the celebration.

The basic reception has six major parts with dances taking place while a traditional Mexican meal is served.

1. The formal entry (La Entrada) – A grand entrance made by the Quinceañera once most guests have been seated.
2. The formal toast (El Brindis) – An optional but usually featured

part of the reception, generally initiated by the parents or godparents of the birthday girl.

3. The first dance – Starting with her father, and then with her mother.
4. The family dance – Involving just the immediate relatives, the chambelanes, godparents, and the closest friends of the girl.
5. The preferred song (Baile Sorpresa) – This particular day the surprise song included a dance with a potential suitor!
6. The general dance.

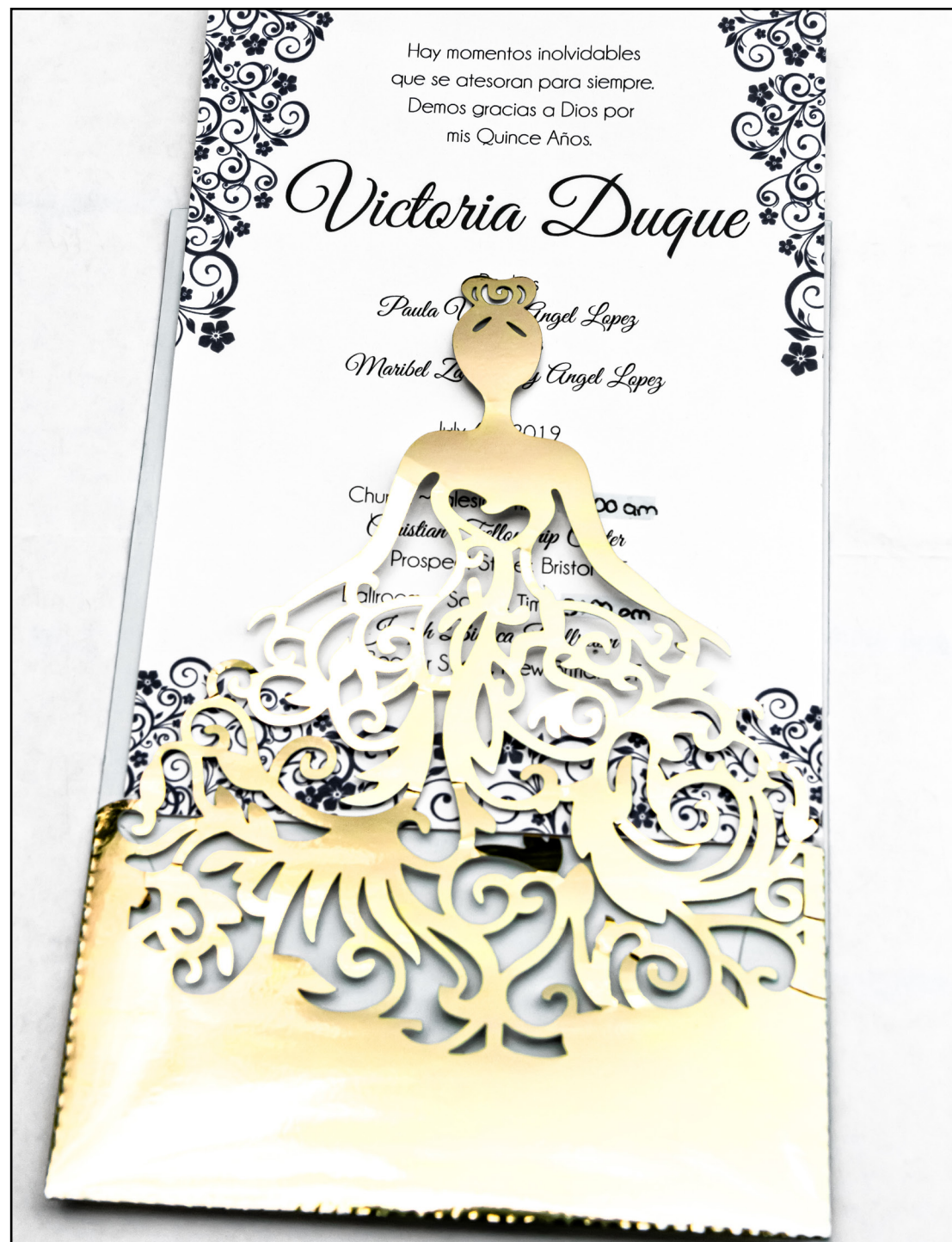
Additional ceremonial items presented to the Quinceañera are listed below.

- Tiara - Denotes a “princess” before God and the world; a triumph over childhood and ability to face the challenges of life ahead.
- Cross or Medal - Signifies faith in God, in herself, and in her world, given this day by her tio, uncle.
- Ring - This day, the Quinceañera received a ring from her mother.
- Bible (or Prayer Book) - Important resources to keep the word of God in her life.
- Scepter - Symbolizes authority, and more importantly, responsibility for her life, that is now being given to the young woman.
- The first flower bouquet - The birthday girl receives a bouquet of flowers which is symbolically the first flowers she is offered as a young woman.
- The Traditional Ceremony Gifts - Special signs of loyalty and commitment to God, family and the community.

As this can become a costly event with all the prices of each ceremonial aspect adding up, the young woman may request the help of sponsors, which can be comprised of both family members and friends. It is courteous for the girl to thank her sponsors and influencers in her speech at the event to demonstrate her appreciation for all the help that they put into supporting her through this transition to womanhood.

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Enjoy life!



The invitation



The beginning



Service musicians



The prayer book presentation



The blessing and the anointing



Mentor greeting



Last minute mending



The adult portrait



The table of the Court



Hall perspective



Small tokens, cápias, to commemorate the celebration



The greeting of the guests



The formal entry of la Quinceañera (La Entrada)



Into the spotlight



The first dance as an adult



Choreographed waltz or dance performed by the Quinceañera and her Court

Alternating



The last doll and the end of childhood



The first adult shoes





The Tiara crowning



The mother's traditional ceremony ring gift



The uncle's traditional ceremony cross necklace gift



The family dances



The hor d'oeuvres



The formal toast (El Brindis)



Thanking the sponsors, the influencers, and the patrons



The general dances: time to have some fun!



Stepping around



The Court of Honor



Revealed



Laughter



The spins



The preferred song (Baile Sorpresa) and dance with a potential suitor!



Transition to womanhood completed!

My Artistic Mission

Child-like wonder and inquisitiveness

are qualities frequently put aside once we become adults. We tend to slowly become sterilized by our right-or-wrong kind of world which too often has too little time to explore the what-if's and the what-could-be's. I believe we all need to re-connect with these qualities to re-enrich our lives. A first glance at a photograph of an onion often reveals the fact that, indeed, it is an onion. But what also lies beneath its surface? We won't know until we peel back its layers.

Animation innovator, Walt Disney, recognized this and tried to bring back the power and importance of imagination. Inspired by his spirit, my mission therefore is to encourage the use of viewer imagination. My work attempts to explore and suggest what often lies hidden within the personalities and mysteries present in the world that was, and the world that is around us.

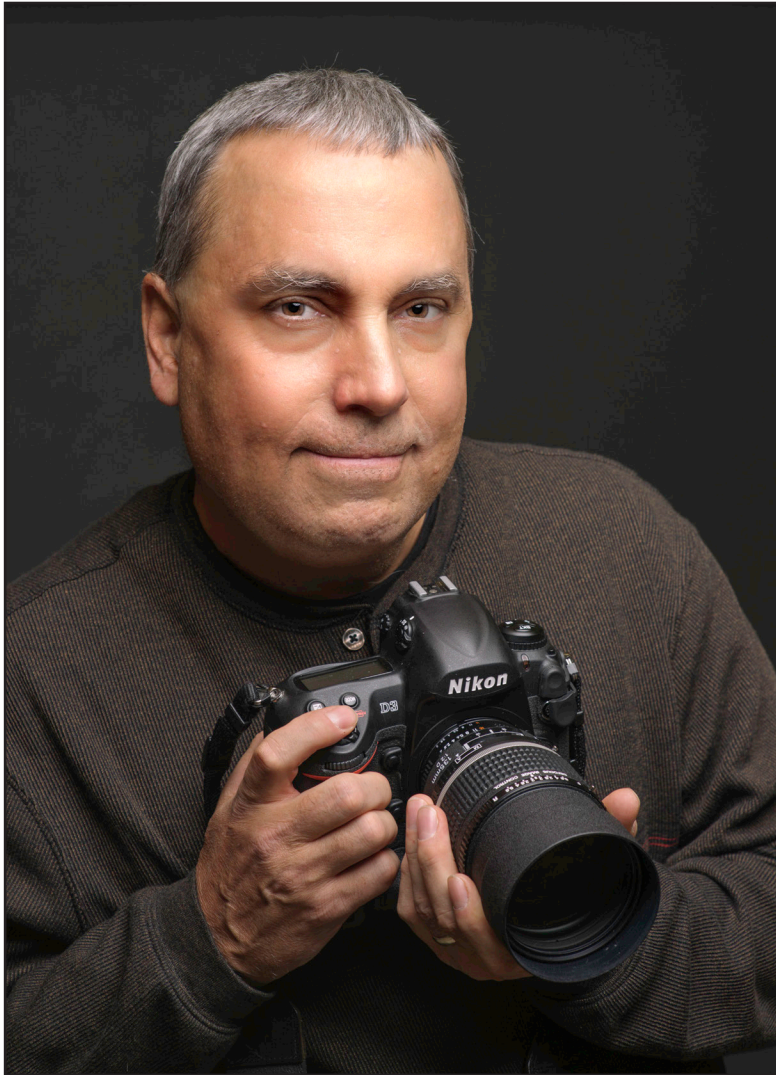
For me, my photography often is not so much about the decisive moment. Rather, it is about creating an awareness of place and a sense of history, with an aura of mystery. It is the starting point for my artistic journey, not the destination. I try to use what I produce

as personal metaphors for my reactions to what I saw and felt. My favorite motivational quote is that "Life begins at the edge of your comfort zone." My works attempt to reflect this as I probe the emotional, mind's eye after-image that was captured by both the eye and the heart, and which often defies logical explanation by the mind.

My goal is that my projects will serve as a springboard into inventiveness and exploration with the hopes of awakening my viewer's inner child. I try hard to show the connections and implications of things that others may not readily see. My hope is that my work may also help viewers discover the beginnings of their attempt to understand and perhaps even learn to tolerate and sympathize with the human condition and the world in which we live. I will try to do whatever I can to make viewers linger longer in front of my works so as to ignite their imaginative response through discovery and inquisitiveness.

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Enjoy life!



JERRY GRASSO has been an award-winning, international fine art photographer and visual artist since 2002. He has mentored locally with photographer, [Mallorie Ostrowitz](#), and then with internationally-renowned visual artist, [John Paul Caponigro](#). Photography is only the starting point for many of his projects. His favorite motivational quote is that “Life begins at the edge of your comfort zone.”

In addition to his travel photography, Jerry specializes in the intimately abstracted architectural photography, the photo essay, and the photo composite series.

Jerry’s mission is to awaken his viewer’s inquisitive inner child by creating an awareness of place and a sense of history, with an aura of mystery.



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