

## PARTE A

The history of Quinceañera dates back to the Aztecs around 500 B.C. The word is comprised of two parts: "quince" (fifteen) and "añera" which is a derivative of "años" (year); and refers to a girl's fifteenth birthday. By age fifteen, boys were expected to become warriors and fulfil their father's expectations. For girls, this was the time in their life when they were presented to the community as young ladies, instead of girls. Fifteen-year-old Aztec girls were considered women and were given the instruction and responsibilities of womanhood and although this is a hugely significant rite of passage, it is also an enormous honor, one that Mexican girls today look forward to with pride and happiness. Every other birthday before and after may come and go without major celebration, but throughout the history of Quinceañera, this event has been full of ritual and tradition.

To celebrate the Quinceañera, the proceedings begin with a Thanksgiving Mass (Misa de Acción de Gracias). The young Quinceañera (the girl whose fifteenth birthday is being commemorated) is accompanied by a head chamberlain (chambelan), other chamberlains, maids of honor (damas), her godparents (padrinos) and of course, her loving mother and father. Everyone is dressed formally and the scene resembles a wedding complete with bridesmaids and the Quinceañera will wear something that stands her above the rest, usually a ball gown and some stunning jewelry. In ancient times, when ball gowns didn't exist, she would still have been attired in a manner that would distinguish her from everyone else.

The Mass is held in the family's church and in the old days, would have been conducted in the community's gathering place. The ceremony is a reaffirmation of the baptismal vows made by her parents.