

Freshmen celebrate Quinceañeras

tiona MERRITTE

Rushing through the aisles of Micheal's craft store, Melanie Chavez, freshman, looks for "Beauty and the Beast" themed decorations for her birthday celebration.

May to September is when many Latina girls have their fifteenth birthday celebrations known as Quinceañeras, or Quinces. These celebrations are not always set on the girl's birthday as they are preferred to be held during warmer weather.

"For only one night, your friends and family will gather around to celebrate you going from a girl to a woman. This is a beautiful part of Hispanic culture," Chavez said.

One custom of many Latino cultures that Chavez chose to participate in was the shoe and crown ceremony. During the crown ceremony, Chavez's main chambelan, or main male friend, presented her crown to her godmother and godfather to put on top of her head. This symbolizes that she mastered childhood and is ready to conquer adulthood.

The high heels were also presented by Chavez's main chambelan, but this time to her mother and sister. During Quinces, it is important for the girl to wear flat shoes until the shoe ceremony.

"They put the high heel on your foot to signify you becoming a woman. From flats to heels, from childhood to womanhood," Chavez said.

Melany Lagarda Santos, freshman, will celebrate her Quince in early 2023, as these celebrations typically take a year or longer to plan. One of the traditions she will observe during her Quince will be the 15 candles tradition.

"The 15 candles is where the girl chooses 15 important people in her life to give a candle to and help her blow them out," Santos said.

Common in Cuba, the birthday girl blows out 14 candles, representing her previous 14 years. Then finally, the cake is cut and the last candle is blown out for her fifteenth wish.

Although the origins of Quinces are uncertain, LatinAmericanStudies.org states that Indigenous tribes like the Aztec and Mayan peoples held initiations for their daughters to celebrate the end of puberty and the beginning of allowing their daughters to marry.

Abigail Rosales, freshman, explained that Quinces have two main parts: the church mass and the reception. The mass portion is a ceremony where the birthday girl receives a blessing from a priest and reads scriptures from the Bible in Spanish in front of her family and the congregation.



▲ Melanie Chavez decorated her Quince celebration with bright golds and reds. Her extravagant party decorations resemble the glamorous nature of the Quince tradition. Photograph by Ana Marroquín

"A Quinceañera is kinda like strengthening your relationship with God," Rosales said. "It's a really special sacrament."

At a required retreat to prepare for her Quince, Rosales said she was with other girls who were to have Quinces. They talked about the history, culture and importance of Quinces and the girls keeping a relationship with God.

After the ceremony, the party begins. Rosales said most Quince traditions have common themes of growing up, maturing or being blessed and thankful.

One of the most common traditions is the father-daughter waltz, representing the birthday girl's first dance as a young woman.

"There's a dance that translates to your last doll. It's like an initiation to womanhood," Rosales said. "My mom dresses up a doll to look like me and she gives it to me while I dance

with my dad."

The birthday girl also does dances accompanied by her court, which consists of her damas, maids of honor and her chambelanes, or escorts of honor. These dances are surprises for the family and friends in attendance and are silly, light-hearted and for fun memories.

"It's a really important sacrament and I feel like it helps me get to know my culture more and helps me feel more a part of the Latino community," Rosales said. "It really accentuates that part of me because being Mexican plays a big role in my life and doing this is a really big deal for me."

Illustrations by Emma Tyulyayev



▲ Melanie Chavez, freshman, poses in her Belle inspired Quince gown. She chose the theme for her celebration based on her love for the movie "Beauty and the Beast."

▼ The venue for Chavez's Quince was decorated to match her theme. She has a magic rose, and the entire room is adorned with red and gold. Photographs by Ana Marroquín



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Gifts for the Quinceañera

Religious Relics

Items such as a Bible, Rosary or medals featuring saints or other religious figures are perfect for a more traditional Quince with a religious mass.

Jewelry

Necklaces, earrings, pendants, bracelets and more can be customized toward the interests of the Quince.

A Party Item

For family members or friends, find something to make the day perfect for the Quince. This could be a dress for the after party or a sentimental religious item for the mass.

Gift Basket

Gift baskets can include a wide variety of things from candles or soaps to items more traditional to Latino culture such as Latin American treats.

Tiara

A tiara is a gift that can make the Quince feel special on this important day. It can be as simple as a piece of jewelry or can be more personalized with an inscribed message.

