



Homage to Vilma and Quique Morey, April 27th 2018, TTT Mérida

Joanna Rosado began our celebration by introducing Fr. José Vieira Arruda from St. Luke's Episcopalian Church in Mérida.



He offered a beautiful memorial service for Vilma with assistance from member Nancy Walters, who read a scripture about love, and Joanna Rosado, who read Psalm 23. Fr. José's sermon was about Vilma's life of goodness and generosity. He talked about how important it is to be a good person and a good friend.



Afterward, several of Vilma's and her husband, Quique's, relatives and friends spoke a few kind words, including Vilma's nephew, René, Eddie, a close friend and personal assistant, Marie Barchus, Eric Uc Canche, Connie Burk, Fiona Wilmot for Claudia Amaro, Joanna Rosado, and Oralia Gutierrez Lopez.



We then shared a meal together in honor of the lives of Vilma and Quique.



All the event photos were taken by Josefina Campos, and generously donated so that all might feel a part of the celebration.



Vilma Morey (ByF 2008)

by Beryl Gorbman

We all know her. She's gorgeous, she's gracious, and she has an elegant, spiritual manner. Her smile is slow and contagious and her laugh tinkles. We visited Vilma in her wonderful house in La Ceiba this week. Her husband Quique was in and out of the room and there were cats meowing loudly in the carport.

Vilma has a unique background. She is an unusual combination of Yucatan and New York City - she was born and raised in New York City and her parents are both from Merida. Her parents both emigrated to New York, where they met and were married within a few months. They both took classes and learned English quickly. They worked hard and did well in the USA, a true immigrant success story.

Vilma was brought up bilingual in Manhattan during the depression. She fell in love with her husband Quique, originally from Puerto Rico, when he returned from World War II. She was only fourteen. To distract her, Vilma's mom took her on a wonderful trip to Mexico. They stayed in DF and in Merida each for three months.

They had a ball in Merida, she says. "I was a novelty here. They treated me like a foreigner. We stayed with my mother's brother and I met cousins and relatives I didn't know before. We went to all kinds of parties, dances and carnivals. I didn't forget Quique, but I met a lot of nice people."



She recalls that on that visit, the building that now houses the Sanborns in Fiesta Americana was a fancy country club, where balls were held for "high society." She toured the ruins, visiting Chichen and Uxmal before there were tourist facilities.

Vilma's hardworking mom was a seamstress, who had trouble getting work during the depression. When World War II broke out, there were lots of jobs and she worked in the garment district in Manhattan. Her employers recognized her talents and her job was to make the sample dresses used for modeling and sales.

Vilma can't sew. "I didn't take to it," she says.

Her dad got a wartime job too – using a pick and shovel to help build New York's Southern State Parkway. Later he became a bartender and then worked in the exploding garment industry.

The family eventually made their way out of Spanish Harlem and moved up to pleasant, breezy Washington Heights, near the George Washington Bridge. Her whole childhood, Vilma was surrounded by numerous cousins, aunts and uncles who had all moved to New York from Merida. She was surrounded by warm relationships, great food, and wonderful music.



Although Vilma became engaged to Quique at sixteen, he waited for her until she was nineteen when at last, they were married. "I've been with him just about all my life," she says with a smile.

They lived among family and friends in New York and had a great social life. "We'd go out and have a drink and dance," she says. "We heard almost all the big bands live – Harry James, all the greats. We saw Dorothy Lamour at the Roxy. I saw Carmen Miranda, Danny Kaye, and Jerry Louis. We went to great theaters like the Capitol and the Paramount, where they had a movie with every show."

When Vilma's first son was six, the family moved out of the city proper to Levittown, Long Island. "They didn't want Spanish people there," she said. Like many Hispanic families, the Moreys worked hard to blend

in.

Vilma and Quique stopped talking Spanish to their kids. They wanted them to be completely “American.” Vilma now says, “That was a big mistake.” Although her sons are familiar with their culture, they aren’t bilingual. And the grand-kids don’t know any Spanish except what they learn in school.

Vilma has a great love for music and entertainment. From the time she was very young, her mom took her to the movies. “Remember when there were movie theaters everywhere?” she reminisces. “All the Loewe’s theaters looked like *Gone With the Wind*.” And Vilma’s dad took her to Radio City Music Hall every time the show changed.

Later, when she moved to Levittown, Vilma and her friends squirreled away mad money to go to shows in Manhattan. “I saw *Mame* with Angela Lansbury, and I saw *Fiddler on the Roof* twice – once with Herschel Bernardi and once with Zero Mostel. That’s Quique’s favorite show,” she says. “And I saw Barbara Streisand in *Funny Girl*. She wasn’t famous then, but what a beautiful voice.”

Vilma took her two boys to shows and all else that New York had to offer – the museums, the zoos and parks, the Cloisters, the planetarium, ice skating in Central Park, Coney Island. “Did you know Coney Island is all Russian now?” she says. “Russian Mafia.”

Vilma and Quique first came to Merida together in 1976. They went on an American Express tour of Mexico, stopping at many cities. When they got to Merida, the last destination, Quique said it reminded him of Ponce, Puerto Rico, his home town, and said he’d like to retire here. She didn’t like the weather and thought it was too provincial for her. He won. When they retired, they made the move.

“In the beginning, I didn’t like it here,” Vilma says. “It was too hot.” Now I use positive thinking and put the heat out of my mind.” Also, she says, “The mentality here is different. Even though my parents were Yucatecans, I was born and raised in the States and I was an American. It was hard to get used to life here.”

When we asked at what point she started to like Merida, Vilma says with a big grin, “When I joined the Women’s Club. My aunt belonged,” she says. “Her name was Conchita – they called her Connie. We hadn’t really settled yet and we were living out of suitcases, all our furniture was stored, and everything was hard. One day, Connie told me to get ready – she was taking me somewhere. At that time the Womens Club met in the American Consulate. When I walked in and saw all those American English-speaking ladies, everything changed. I felt at home.”

“When we first moved here,” she says, “they didn’t even have coffee. They had Nescafe. If you asked for coffee, first they brought a cup of hot water and left it there while they went to get the jar of Nescafe. By then, the water was cold. Yes, I missed a lot of American things when I got here, but now we get everything, even bagels.”

Vilma derives comfort from her spirituality. She says she doesn’t believe in organized religion, but she deeply feels the power of positive thinking, guardian angels, and kindness. Her guardian angel gets her through a lot of difficult situations and keeps her and the people she loves safe. She believes in “the power of now and always living in the moment.”

Vilma says there is almost no one she dislikes, but “if someone has negative energy, I throw white light on them. I feel that this works.”

She says spirituality doesn’t allow for gossiping or being judgmental.

We asked Vilma what her secret was to a happy marriage. “Communication,” she says without hesitation. “If something is bothering us, we say it, and we don’t stay mad at each other. When we were younger, sometimes it would last up to three days, but now if we disagree, it’s over right away. We don’t have time for that.”

Vilma's Bracelets (ByF 2009)



From Marianne Kehoe: Ever notice the multitude of gold bracelets worn by Vilma Morey on her left arm? Each one was a gift from her husband, Hector, to commemorate their anniversaries. The beautiful double gold strands represent the births of their children, and time has worn some single strands thin. This year this wonderful couple celebrates 59 years of marriage, and I expect we'll see an especially shiny addition on Vilma's wrist.

Vilma adds: Actually, it's a Puerto Rican custom. Quique's mother had all her bracelets and I just thought it a great idea to get a gold bangle on my wedding anniversary. I got a double twisted one the year we had a child. He doesn't buy me bangles anymore as gold is too expensive and I have too many already. I sleep & shower in them. I never take them off.

A Golden Friendship

As we celebrate Vilma's life, we shouldn't forget to recognize the very special friendship that blossomed and lasted for years between Vilma and another IWC member, Su Lu Gebser, who passed away several years ago. They were like sisters, rarely apart. They took care of each other. And during Su Lu's later years, Vilma took especially good care of her.

(Su Lu was IWC member Becky Gebser's mother-in-law.)

