



*Paulina's children: Filiberto, Anthony, Yvette,
Doris (holding granddaughter Roselynne), Elizabeth, Javier, and Vianney.*

For my seven children

Elizabeth

Yvette

Filiberto

Javier

Vianney

Doris

Anthony

and their children, my grandchildren.

*Keep this book so you will
always remember me.*

Be happy and brave.

*Try your best, trust in yourselves,
and always have faith.*

INTRODUCTION



This Legacy Letter is taken from two oral history interviews conducted with Paulina Martinez in 2011.

The goal of the Legacy Letter Project was to have participants think about questions such as:

- ∞ *What values and principles have guided your life?*
- ∞ *What important lessons have you learned?*
- ∞ *What spiritual teachings and insights move you?*

When asked to reflect on these questions, Paulina shared many of her thoughts about the importance of family, faith in God, commitment, working hard, and making the right choices.

To explain how she had come to believe in these values, she began to tell her life story, which provided the material for this Legacy Letter.

From Paulina's honest sharing of her story, her family and future descendants now have this healing, hopeful, and inspirational personal history, as told in her own voice.

WHAT I BELIEVE



The way we live and what we do in life is who we are.

— P.S.M.

- ∞ *Our beliefs make us strong.* If we have strong faith, we will always be achievers and be successful in life.
- ∞ *The truth shall set you free* is the best saying to follow. Honesty is the best policy. To be honest is to be truthful, and that makes you a good person. It shows who you are.
- ∞ *Being respectful* is also a good moral value.
- ∞ *Working hard* shows that we are very responsible and independent. To be a hardworking person is a good way to evaluate ourselves.
- ∞ *Education* gives us independence and knowledge.
- ∞ *Helping others* when we can is the right thing to do.
- ∞ *When there are challenges in a situation, if we have faith, God will help us.* There can be a lot of obstacles, but if we persevere, He gives us guidance and everything that we need.

I REMEMBER

My first teacher in school.

My confirmation day.

Spending a few years with Sr. Mary Anne Ford, in the convent. She guided me to do good things.

Teaching, and studying for my teacher's certificate.

Joining the parish group.

Leaving the convent to take care of my dad; that was a huge decision.

Working as a first- and second-grade teacher

This is my story, as I remember it.

GROWING UP ON THE FARM

I am from the village of Guinea Grass, in the Orange Walk district of Belize. The town's name comes from the grass that is native to that area.

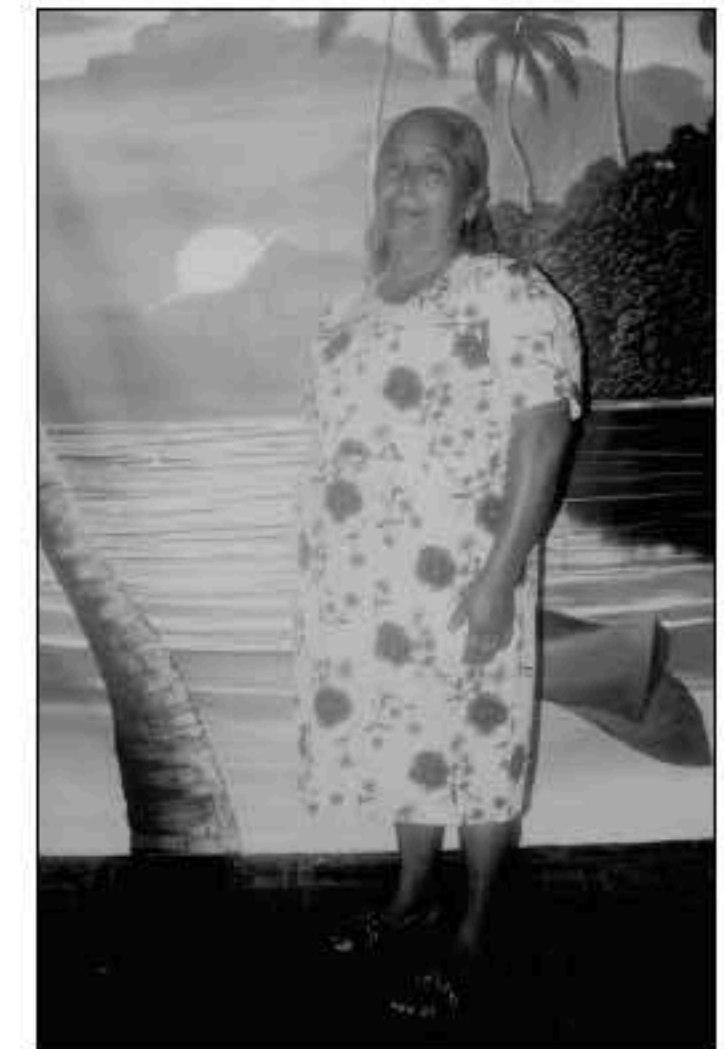
I was born on January 11, 1955 and named Paulina Eginia Santos. The middle name of "Eginia" came from the Mayan calendar, which my parents consulted, almost like an almanac, for choosing names. Both my parents had Mayan backgrounds; my mother was from the northern part of Mexico and my father was from Puerto Barrios, Guatemala. They met in Belize.

My mother, Matilda Canul, bore fourteen children, but I knew only my three older sisters, Edita, Valeria, and Inez, and two brothers, Macario and Urbano. All the rest passed away, I don't know why.

My mother died in 1957, during childbirth. The baby lived only one month, dying of diarrhea and vomiting. My dad was working outside the area and wanted to be present for the birth, but my mother said no. Only my three sisters were with her when she died. She was 38 years old. I remember her just from pictures.

Because I was two years old at that time, my sisters had to teach me what a mother teaches her daughter. I missed having a mom, and life was hard without her, but my father provided everything for us, so life was beautiful.

My father, Geraldo Santos, said that when he married my



Edita, Paulina's oldest sister.

mom, he was double her age. He said that he didn't want to get married when he was young; he wanted to travel around and know places before he married. He was much older than my mom, but she died first. He never remarried.

My father was a farmer, and we worked hard together with him. The backyard of our house was full of all kinds of fruits: grapefruit, mango, plums, and a cocoa tree whose seeds we could make into coffee.

Every morning, my father would get up and walk to his farm. He grew corn, tomatoes, cilantro, everything you needed to eat. He grew rice. We had chickens and dozens of eggs. We didn't buy a single fruit or vegetable. As kids, our chores were to clean the rice and prepare what we needed for the day.

The backyard of our house was full of all kinds of fruits: grapefruit, mango, plums, and a cocoa tree.

My father was also a hunter, and would bring home any kind of wild meat, such as deer, armadillo, and gibbon. I had a little deer as a pet once. He also fished in the New River.

We have a lot of hurricanes in Belize. I used to be scared of them. If the hurricane is coming from the Caribbean, we only get a little bit, sometimes — but even a little bit of the hurricane is bad, and destroys the farmers.

In 1961, when I was six years old, we had a big hurricane. They called it Hurricane Hattie, but in Creole we said Hurricane Hotty, because he was hot! He destroyed a lot, blowing houses away and flooding the Sarstoon River, near Punta Gorda and Stann Creek Town.

We went to a church to find shelter. For me, it was fun, picking up all the toys and things that were on the way. And my dad said, "What are you doing?" It was pouring rain and wind, and my father was trying to find shelter inside a church.

Hurricanes could destroy crops, flood the river, and contaminate the water supply, so we always had to be prepared with food and water. My dad had two big hurricane lamps ready, just in case. Hurricanes would blow people's houses apart. We used to see that!



Paulina with another sister, Inez, in the 1990s.

When I was a child in Guinea Grass, my dad would walk together with us to Orange Walk Town, a distance of nine miles. He would wake us at dawn, saying, "Get ready." We would leave early, before the sun was hot.

After five miles, we stopped and rested at Tower Hill. I was happy we were halfway. With the sun, it was hot and humid. Sometimes, Mennonite farmers would give us a ride in their cart for 25 cents or so, or sometimes we would "hitchhike" and get picked up by someone in a truck.

I was only nine years old when I got confirmed. My sister made a white dress for me and sewed daisies on it, with little rhinestones.

Even though we didn't have money to make a party, my dad and my sister agreed to buy me some cookies and lemonade, and the celebration was just at home, for us and the godparents. I was happy. The main thing was to receive the sacrament.

Christmas and New Year's are big celebrations in Belize. People save their pennies to celebrate Christmas. Having the right clothing and shoes is very important, and we had to have a special dinner, along with cake and Coke. We eat what we call the "black cake," a fruitcake with a little liquor in it.