

# From Flats to Heels, From Girl to Woman

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*The Quinceañera with her Court of Honor, before the reception*

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*Shown above is the way Aztec's used to celebrate their quinceañera*

*Photo Credits: John Pohl*

# Aztec History

*Quinceaños* is a rich ritual that has Aztec, Mayan and Spanish cultures in it, with a touch of Christian religion. This tradition This Quinceañera coming of age ritual comes from Aztec culture (Indigenous people of Central Mexico). In Aztec the mother and close older women (aunts, older sisters, close family friend, etc.) would talk to the girl at the age of fifteen, giving her guidance to good behavior, making her ready for marriage at that age

The girls at that age have the choice to give their life to faith or marry then. Rich girls would have more of a choice and poor girls would usually always marry as to “survive” and depend on someone. When the 15 year old was then married, the oldest woman of the house would carry the girl on her back. The girl wore a cape and the husband does too. When the oldest woman lets go of the bride, both the capes are joined together signifying marriage united them.



*The Quinceañera in the Mass of Thanking, along with her parents, family, Court of Honor, special people, and the priest blessing her on becoming a woman.*

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## Quinceañera Tradition

The word "*Quinceañera*" comes from the Spanish words "quince" for fifteen and "años", which means "years". It's the journey to maturity for Latin American girls. The celebration highlights God, music, food, dance, family and friends. Before, the *quinceañeras* would start their day going to a *Misa de Acción de Gracias* (Mass of Thanking), where it shows religious devotions. Then they have a reception, which is full of cultural traditions.

The *Quinceañera* rite of passage is all about her, however she doesn't have to plan it herself.

The process of planning the *quinceañera* is very long and stressing. Sisters, female cousins, and friends are always good help to plan her *Fiesta de Quinceaños*. They will give her tips with the dances, decorations, dresses, and the people for her party. Her sisters, female cousins and friends will be better help than her mother because her mother would not approve as many things as them, and would be very annoying to deal with.

## The Mass of Thanking

In the mass, the *quinceañera* is treated like a princess, her parents and her godparents escort her and she has a flower headpiece, during the mass, a tiara exchanges the flower headpiece. She is given Bible, cross and rosary by her *padrino* (godfather) and she leaves with her *caballero* (*chambelán*/gentleman)



*Father-daughter dance is the most significant and awaited part in the reception. The caballeros are waiting to waltz with the quinceañera one by one.*

*Photo Credits Aaron Eye - Filipino Photography*

## The Reception

The reception starts with introducing the Corte de Honor (Court of Honor) – which is usually 14 *Damas* who wear gowns and 15 *Caballeros* who wear tuxedos or suits, one of them being her personal caballero. Older siblings, cousins or special friends will be her *Damas* and *Caballeros*. Its better to have older people as her *Damas* and *Caballeros*, because that will ensure that they know what to do during the *Corte de Honor* because they've been through that before. The rest of the family can join the preparations and ceremonies.

The *quinceañera* makes her grand entrance. She waltzes with her father and then with her personal caballero and the other caballeros. The most awaited moment in the *Quinceañera* is the father-daughter dance, in which the father is honored to have he's daughters first dance when she has turned into a woman.

Traditionally, the girl has not worn high heels before, and the dad changes her heels from flats in the middle of the reception to show that she is maturing. There is also the last doll, which represents she is becoming a woman and that doll is kept in the family as tradition. Traditionally her mother or grandmother will give her "Last Doll" at her Party. The dress should be pastels or white signifying purity. She is done up with make up, with her hair and nails done too.

After, the *brindis* – a toast for the *quinceañera*, the 15-candle ceremony takes place. The origin of the 15-Candle Ceremony is believed to be from Argentina and somehow from the American sweet sixteen tradition. The *quinceañera* chooses 15 significant and special people for her in her life and gives a candle to them and makes a speech about them. Not long after, usually the dad says a speech.



*Nowadays, this ritual is practiced differently, but there is still a lot of culture, like having your Court of Honor*

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## The Present Time

Nowadays the girls have outrageous and extremely expensive parties, but they sometimes exchange it for a new car or a trip with their best friends (tour to Europe, Cruises, etc.) It's not so much a religious ceremony anymore; its mostly cultural if the girl wants to celebrate her coming of age with family and friends. Also, different religions practice this ritual, as long as you're culture is Hispanic. In Mexico, the tradition of the *quinceaños* still remains strong with a lot of religious devotion. In Central America and South America, in places like Panama and Colombia, the ritual is mostly about the reception and the waltz, which is more cultural and tradition, instead of religious.

Mostly no one goes to church for the *Misa de Acción de Gracias*. The flower headpiece switched to the tiara is sometimes practiced in the reception. The high heels tradition often doesn't happen anymore because most of the girls have already worn high heels. The doll is not practiced anymore. Dresses are all different type of colors and most girls wear make-up from before their *quinceaños*, so it's not a ritual item. Nowadays, close friends and family members also give speeches. Modern day, there is a surprise dance; which is choreographed from long before.

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