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*La Carreta Chillona*

I interviewed my grandmother, Marina Benitez Sura, who lives in El Salvador, about the legend of La Carreta Chillona, a well-known folklore story in our culture. Through this conversation, I gained an understanding of the significance of this haunting tale and how it reflects the fears, beliefs, and values of her generation.

According to my grandmother, La Carreta Chillona is a ghostly cart that appears during silent, dark nights. She tells an anecdote of hearing it about 35 years ago, always around midnight. The sound of the cart, a loud and eerie “pla pla pla,” would terrify people, especially because the noise was so distinct that even dogs would howl in response (Benitez Sura). Though the sounds were clear and frightening, no one ever saw the cart itself. My grandmother mentioned that their home was located just two blocks from the main road, and the eerie noises were a recurring event that everyone talked about the next day.

When I asked her what she had been told about the origin of La Carreta Chillona, she explained that her parents and grandparents believed it was related to lost souls. These were spirits who had failed in their earthly lives and were left to wander in a sort of limbo. The cart was thought to symbolize these souls, and its passage was a manifestation of their unrest. Over

time, people began to call it “carreta bruja” (witch cart) because of the supernatural fear it evoked (Benitez Sura).

My grandmother also noted how the village’s reaction to the legend was rooted in ignorance and widespread fear at the time. People associated the sounds with the devil or other malevolent forces. This fear was heightened by how timid and superstitious people were back then. Unlike today, where people might be more skeptical or dismissive of ghost stories, my grandmother’s generation treated such legends with deep caution and respect.

One interesting aspect of our conversation was the naming of the legend. I referred to it as La Carreta Chillona (the Screeching Cart), while my grandmother often called it La Carreta Bruja. She explained that both names refer to the same phenomenon, but “carreta bruja” emphasizes the supernatural element, while “carreta chillona” focuses on the disturbing screeching sounds it makes (Benitez Sura). The dual names show how folklore can shift slightly in meaning depending on the storyteller’s perspective.

This interview helped me realize how folklore like La Carreta Chillona serves as a cultural touchstone, connecting generations through shared stories. These legends are not just about supernatural fear; they reflect deeper cultural anxieties and ways of making sense of the unknown. In my grandmother’s community, the legend acted as a warning, a source of social cohesion, and a way to teach moral or cautionary lessons.

Hearing my grandmother’s memories also made me appreciate how these stories are preserved through oral tradition. Even though she hadn’t heard the story in decades, the details of the sounds and the fear they evoked were still in her mind. This demonstrates the power of folklore to leave lasting impressions and shape cultural identity.

Works Cited

Benitez Sura, Marina. *La Carreta Chillona*. Interview by Anderson Ramirez, 17 Dec. 2024.