

**Chapter 13: My
Mother Went to Town**



All Pianos Have Keys & Other Stories

by José A. Cárdenas, 1994
IDRA Founder & Director Emeritus

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Chapter 13: My Mother Went to Town

Back in the good old days, we didn't have any bilingual education or English as a second language programs. Those of us who were not very proficient in English were placed in regular classes where we either learned to swim or sink. Some of us learned to swim; a lot of us sank.

As we tried to survive in school, we did receive some form of assistance in the form of English language development activities. Invariably such activity dealt with the structure of the English language, the conjugation of verbs, and the occasional reminder that whereas in Spanish the adjective follows the noun, in English syntax the adjective precedes the noun. Instead of saying, "the car red," we were supposed to say, "the red car."

Following the conjugation of a verb, we always had an exercise that began with, "Make a sentence using..." This was followed by the verb and the specific tense, person and/or number.

One day, we had spent considerable time in the conjugation of the verb "to go." The teacher then called on the class to make a sentence using the past tense of the verb "to go."

"O.K., class, who can make a sentence using the past tense of the verb 'to go'?"

Immediately, Raquel raised her hand. Raquel could always make a sentence using any tense of any verb.

"My mother went to town," responded Raquel.

"Very good! Who else can make a sentence using the past tense of the verb 'to go'? Simón?"

Simón stood up and very slowly and carefully gave his sentence, "My father went to town."

Simón was followed by María, who told the class, "My brother went to town." Maria was followed by Luis who informed us that his "sister went to town."

This went on and on as each of us made our somewhat repetitious sentences using the past tense of the verb "to go" using members of the nuclear family and even getting into the members of the traditional extended Hispanic family.

Finally, there was only one student in the class who had not gone through the conjugation exercise. "Lupe, will you make a sentence using the past tense of the verb to 'go'?" asked the teacher.

Lupe was the biggest student in the class. He was twice as big as most of us, and he was always the last one to be called upon and the last one to volunteer for recitation. As he stood up, most of the class was already giggling over what he would say.

“My..., My..., My... That’s no fair, teacher! These *cabrones* used up all my relatives.”