

Guendolyn K. Bennett

U. N. — Guatemala = Ambassador

Dec. 7, 1968

Dear Doctor and Mrs. Garcia and the girls:

Although I am not very good about writing letters these days with all the things that keep me so busy, I do think of you very often and remember the wonderful hours spent with all of you. My visit to Corpus Christi was one of the most moving and memorable experiences in my life. Never before have I known such high-minded dedication to a principle, such thoughtfulness and such tremendous kindness.

I have taken the liberty of writing about the privilege I had of meeting and working with Doctor Garcia at the United Nations, and later later having the honor of visiting Corpus Christi and meeting the people for whom he is fighting so hard, in my Christmas letter which I send to my friends around the world. I am enclosing a copy. Some of my friends have already answered me expressing the highest of admiration for Doctor Garcia and wishing that the U. S. Government would again choose such an outstanding person, who speaks a language other than English, in order to bridge the gulf that exists between the U. S. and the many other countries which have such close ties to the U. S.

One of my friends wrote: "I was most happy to hear about Doctor Garcia being a U. S. Ambassador at the U. N. and speaking Spanish. We do so little in the way of showing that kind of courtesy around the world. I felt under Kennedy we tried to make a start in some of our Embassies, but the State Department fought him on his appointments of Ambassadors who spoke the language."

At the U. N. so many people remember you, Doctor Garcia, with such great admiration, and when I tell them that I did have the privilege of visiting with you and your family, and meeting the many people whose leader you are, they tell me that they wish they could see for themselves.

Please convey my greetings and wishes for a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all the members of the American G. I. Forum. I will send them a Christmas message through you, and would be most delighted if you could convey it to them.

I hope sometime next year to come through Corpus Christi again, and at that time I would love to see you and your family and the many wonderful people who surround you.

May I extend to you my sincerest wishes for a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year together with your loved ones and may I thank you again for the privilege of getting to know you, your people and the work you are doing for them. I will never forget the great moments I was so fortunate in sharing with you in your work for the American G. I. Forum. I felt that it was a great honor.

Again with many thanks, kindest regards and hoping to see you soon,

*Sincerely,  
Queen Sofu H. Serrano*

November 12th, 1968

My dear Friends all over the World:

I trust this letter finds you in good spirits, happy, healthy and wealthy, and that the Holidays: Christmas, Hannukah or Ramadam bring you much joy and harmony with your loved ones, and PEACE ON EARTH.

Believe it or not, this is my last year's Christmas letter, plus this year's annual report all wrapped in one. The reason is that I never got around to writing my last year's Christmas letter, because the last 3 weeks of the U. N. General Assembly there were night meetings practically every night up to the closing, which was December 22nd, and Christmas parties scattered in between. Needless to say I was a bit done in!

1967 was a marvelous year for me. It seems that ever since I am no longer in my early twenties...!!! I have been having a ball, meeting most interesting and worthwhile people, learning a great deal, discovering that I can do a lot of things that I never dreamed I could do, and finding life in general more exciting and interesting all the time.

January I went skiing with Leonor Iturbe in Vermont and practically froze into a little icicle. February, the Honduran Ambassador asked me to substitute for him at the United Nations, as he was sick. The U. N. is always very interesting, because one cannot help but meet some of the most brilliant minds in the world there, and as a member of the weaker sex one is treated with such gallantry that it does wonders for one's ego.

In March, my father and his wife, Margaret, suddenly showed up in N. Y. They had just taken a little trip to Acapulco and Canada and without more notice than an enigmatic cable 12 hours before, they announced their arrival by train, and could I meet them. I had sublet my apartment since I was planning to leave and was staying with Lennie Christie, wife of George Christie who is with Communications Satellites in Washington D. C. After sending Margaret back to Honduras to take care of the farm, my father stayed on for a week, and dined and wined me and all my friends in such an energetic manner that we were all exhausted, but happily so, when he left and had to recover for about two weeks. His daily schedule was something like this: shopping all morning, then a big lunch, more shopping in the afternoon, or a movie, the circus, the U. N., etc. Back to his hotel, and before Lennie and I could catch our breath he would telephone and ask whether we were ready to go out for dinner and dancing till the wee hours of the morning! My father loves to dance and one evening took his wife, Lennie and myself dancing: danced the 3 of us one after the other, and wondered the next morning why we sounded tired on the telephone!

April I was in Washington D. C. and saw Al Keogh who was being sent by his office to interview people all over Europe, and very influential people too, such as Members of Parliament, the Mayors of certain cities, VIP;s in the press. I sure would like to have that kind of a job. He wrote me enthusiastic post-cards to Guatemala, but in his enthusiasm didn't put enough stamps on them... so, I thought all sorts of thoughts! But finally I learned everything was OK. In Washington D. C. I stayed with Aminta de Knight and her husband, who have a beautiful home. Spring was glorious the two weeks that I was there.

May 1st I arrived in Guatemala, and my mother, my sister, my two darling nephews, the maid, and I think even the dogs came to the airport to welcome me. My stay in Guatemala was delightful. Having gone to school there I know a great many people, and it is always thrilling to run into someone whom you haven't seen for maybe 10 or 15 years, and they still look the same. I think that during my entire stay in Guatemala I was invited for lunch and/or dinner practically every day. The Castañeda Bros, my favorite Guatemalan earthlings, were absolutely delightful to me, and sort of adopted me like a little sister. Julio is married to a former classmate of mine, Trancuila, and Neco and Enrique have been friends of my sister and mine for years. Quique is the best-looking of them all! And Neco was very disappointed that I did not mention him in my last Christmas letter two years ago, because he is not someone to be overlooked! So, please take note, he is charming, good company and he together with Quique and Julio have a tremendous sense of humor, and one can have a ball with them.

In Guatemala also met someone very interesting, a Spanish economist, Arturo Martinez Holgado, who did something phenomenal, and had so many interesting things to tell that he got me extremely enthused about doing the same. He went by bus and train practically all the way from Guatemala to Peru and Bolivia, finding the most extraordinary wooden carvings, weavings, furs, antiques, etc. in the most remote and out of the way places. A specialist in Central American economic development and history, I learned more about Honduras and Guatemala from him than I had ever before. From Ecuador he brought me a small shrunken head, of course not genuine, and a wooden madonna from Peru. If anyone is adventuresome enough to want to undertake such a trip with me, please let me know right away. I am game!

But I think the high point of my visit to Guatemala was a motorcycle ride, with a good friend of mine, Detlef. I hadn't ridden a motorcycle in at least ten years, and was out of practice, and was I scared! At first when we went around a curve (You are supposed to lean into the curve, if you don't know!) I leaned the other way, and we almost crashed on several occasions, until I decided that the best was just to hold on to good old Detlef for dear life, and stop shaking so much. It was marvelous once I got into the swing of it again. He took me pretty close to the guerrilla country, until I mentioned to him that I wasn't too keen on meeting these characters person to person. But it was a lovely afternoon, and riding a motorcycle is really fun!

From Guatemala I went to San Pedro Sula to visit my father and his wife. Their ranch, El Coco, is one of the most efficiently run in Central America, and the cattle is first class. Proof of the pudding is that in the Central American cattle show last Summer he got 27 prizes for his cattle, everything that was best he got a prize for, and naturally he and Margaret are very proud of the record. They are delighted to receive visitors, so if you are in San Pedro Sula take an afternoon off and visit them on the Rancho "El Coco", a mile beyond the new university.

From SPS I went to Tegucigalpa, and there was again treated like a queen. The Director of the newspaper El Dia, for which I write, Don Julio Lopez Pineda, put his chauffeur and Mercedes-Benz at my disposal. I stayed with Florencia Suarez and her mother, was invited to dinners, lunches, cocktails, saw the top people in the government, my good friends Jorge Fidel Duron and his wife who took me to a reception at the Italian Embassy where I was promptly photographed with the President of Honduras, General Oswaldo Lopez Arellano. I also wrote a number of articles and helped the young painter Carlos Garay in presenting 2 one-man shows.

August, I was back in New York with many happy memories and a lot of anticipation, since I had been told that I would be nominated as Delegate to the U. N. for the General Assembly. Although the waiting seemed endless, this did materialize, and you can imagine how thrilled and highly honored I felt at being named "Delegate". It is no doubt, one of the most interesting positions one can have, but you really only feel that you have made the grade at the U. N. when the guards at the gate and the door do not stop you, but smile at you and sort of wave you in. Even a Foreign Minister has trouble getting in if the guards don't know who he is, and he's got to explain that he is Foreign Minister.

When the U. N. opened, I was delighted to run into my dear friend Henri, who was here with the French Delegation, and whom I have known for over 10 years. The world is indeed small when one meets at the U. N. after so many years. Also at the U. N. were Tahseen, who was with the Arab League, Mr. Beck from Hungary, Mr. Caranicas from Greece, Leah Shandar from Israel and many other wonderful people whom I had met the year before. I worked with the Fourth Committee (There are six committees at the U. N. each dealing with different problems), and it dealt with colonial problems and trusteeship territories. Quite an involved subject. The United Kingdom was the main target of attack in spite of the fact that the U. K. Delegate kept saying, "look at the record, we have liberated 55 million people in the last 20 years!" Naturally many countries of the Afro-Asian group still felt very bitter about the colonial rulers, but that violent anger should be expressed among high-ranking diplomats seemed to be quite incredible. The Middle-Eastern issue was continuously inserted in the debates by the Arab Delegates, until the Israeli Delegate, Ambassador Arie Eilan in the most beautiful Oxford English pleaded not to bring up the Middle-Eastern Arab-Israeli Conflict, because otherwise he would be left no alternative but to answer each accusation in the most detailed manner, prolonging the meetings most likely until the wee hours of the morning. Needless to say, this issue was not mentioned again.

One of the most popular ambassadors among the Latin Americans was the U. S. Ambassador, representing the Mexican American minority West of the Mississippi, Doctor Hector P. Garcia from Corpus Christi, Texas. Latin Americans were delighted that he spoke Spanish, even with a Mexican accent, since he was born in Mexico, and when he spoke on several matters of particular interest to Latin Americans, he spoke in Spanish. I think the high point of last year's U. N. Assembly for me was when I gave a small reception for some of the members of the 4th Committee and Ambassador Garcia together with a number of others came to my party. I felt highly honored!

The daily receptions, lunches, cocktail parties and dinners are both very exciting and very exhausting. At one reception I told Ambassador Arthur Goldberg that I would write an article about Doctor Hector P. Garcia, and when I did, several months later, and sent him a copy, he wrote me a very charming thank you letter.

Christmas was a round of parties, at Luz Bromley's, Humberto Lopez Villamil, Ambassador of Honduras to the U. N., Lennie and George Christie's, Leda Reitano's and many others. I hardly had enough time to sleep. I received some lovely presents, among which were two boxes of beautiful assorted Swiss cheeses, and a Topaz ring. I devoured the first and wore the second. A very thoughtful friend gave them to me.

And so, 1967 ended for me: a most eventful year for me. And this is just the beginning!

1968 has been tremendously exciting too, so far, but I shall try to be brief. After completing my U. N. report, I flew to Austin Texas, where I know people at the University of Texas, which by the way has one of the best departments on Latin America. I attended some of the seminars. I met a very nice family there, the Yarchacks, and they were most charming to me. Then on a street corner on a rainy afternoon I saw someone who looked very familiar -- I looked and looked and indeed it was Bob Nutter, whom I had not seen in eons, and who was the very first boy I ever dated. I had a rain hat on pulled over my ears and kept calling, and he must have thought 'who is this crazy kid?' Well, when he recognized me he couldn't believe it either. He and his wife were most charming to me, throwing a big party, Texas style, for me, and just being most hospitable and nice. Bob left the service after graduating from West Point and is now in the pre-fab house business and doing very well. My family has known his family for easily 30 years, when Bob's father was still alive and a very prominent medic in Honduras.

In San Antonio I was at the opening of the Hemisfair, which was inaugurated by Lady Bird. Hemisfair was delightful, much more fun than the World's Fair here in New York.

Then I went to Corpus Christi, where I had been invited by Doctor Hector Garcia and his family (he was the U. S. Ambassador at the U. N. whom I mentioned earlier), and my visit there was the most overwhelming and unique experience that I had in a long time. Doctor Garcia is the leader of the Mexican American minority in Texas, founder and president of the American G. I. Forum, which helps, guides and fights for the rights of the Mexican minority, particularly the thousands of soldiers who fight in Vietnam, and the hundreds who have died there. Doctor Garcia is one of the most popular and venerated men in Texas, and a close personal friend of President Johnson. When I arrived he asked me to speak to the groups of the American G. I. Forum and make them feel that their heritage is a very rich and beautiful one. I did, and it was very touching to see the importance they gave to what little I had to say. I spoke at a funeral of a Mexican American soldier, at women's meetings, soldier's homecoming and numerous other occasions. And then there was a write-up in the newspaper about me, they put me twice on TV and twice on radio, and believe me, I felt like Queen Elizabeth in person. Doctor Garcia's wife and daughters were terribly nice to me, and his sister, Doctora Clotilde Garcia threw a party for about a 150 people for me. It was really overwhelming. I kept wondering what I had done to deserve such great kindness and consideration. People would stop me on the street and say 'weren't you on TV?' I met some terribly nice people that way, one of them has been in touch with me ever since, and we have become good friends.

Doctor Garcia's chauffeur drove me to the border, Laredo and from there together with Lydia Amador, a girl from Corpus who wanted to spend her vacation in Mexico City, we went by land to Mexico City. I had wanted to go all the way by land from New York to Guatemala but didn't quite make it. In Mexico I saw the piramids, the Museo de Antropologia, and had a marvelous time because my aunt and my cousins just spoiled the living daylights out of me. Also saw Jorge Celiz from Vision and had lunch with the Mexican Ambassador to the U. N., Doctor Carlos Peon del Valle.

My goodness, this is a long Christmas letter... Anyhow from Mexico I flew to Guatemala where I was very happy to see my Mother again. She had had a very serious operation, having had a piece of her hipbone taken out. But she is an extremely courageous and very cheerful person, and is happy and healthy and never complains. On the contrary, my Mother always comments on how good life is to her. She goes swimming twice a week in the hot sulphur baths in Amatitlan, and takes care of my sister's two growing sons. She has given up one thing however, which she used to do when visiting her sister in Germany, namely go motorcycle riding!

Was very briefly in Guatemala, and then was lucky again in that I was invited to drive overland to Honduras, which I always wanted to do. In a VW red sportscar, nearly flying over the road, the trip which usually takes 11 or 12 hours took us 7. It was like Speedy Gonzalez zipping around the curves! In Tegooos (short for Tegucigalpa) I stayed again with Florencia Suarez, who is becoming quite an actress. Saw Juan Manuel Galvez who always used to invite me to lunch when I dashed down to Washington D. C. and he was working at the Inter-American Development Bank. Carlos Garay gave me a painting. Saw the Minister of Foreign Relations, Doctor Tiburcio Carias Castillo, who told me I would be nominated to the U. N. again, come Fall. Fito Midence, whom I did not have time to see, has built himself a sky-scraper, the first one in Honduras, right next to the Cathedral. Seems he does not have acrophobia! And should anyone say he has his head in the clouds, he can point out with great pride where! It is a striking building, and a feat of accomplishment.

Stopped briefly in San Pedro Sula, where my father and Margaret have been accumulating a few more dozen prizes for their outstanding cattle. Also saw Luisa Bennaton de Jardinez, my dear aunt, the Fasquelles, and last but not least Dona Blanca, Sasan and Tito Funes, who have the most beautiful resort place on the North Coast of Honduras. It is called Ronassari. It is a resort hotel with a whole bay to themselves. Incredibly beautiful and restful. I never miss going there when I go to San Pedro Sula.

Back in New York, I have been extremely busy with a number of different things. Last year I got a real estate license, and among other things I may be involved in doing a series of documentary movies, besides trying to keep up my writing for the Honduran newspaper EL DIA, and keeping in touch with the U. N. and seeing who is doing what to whom!

I forgot to mention, last Winter I was invited to a very lovely day in the country at the estate of the Ambassador of the United Arab Republic to the U. N., Amin Hilmy. All the other guest were top ranking ambassadors and VIPs. The most exquisite Arab delicacies were served, and I gained at least two pounds. In August, I was again invited by the Hilmys to the wedding of their daughter. A traditional aristocratic Arab wedding is most impressive. The daughter looked like Queen Nefretiti 3 thousand years later, with an enormous headdress, silver braids together with her own going down to her waist, and the big eyes of the Egyptian women. Belly dancers, telling the bridegroom how beautiful the bride was, were part of the ceremony. The guests to the wedding, came from as far away as Des Moines, Iowa. I considered myself highly privileged to be invited to such a lovely occasion.

This Summer when I came back from Central America I saw 3 of my dearest friends: Larry Hill in Cape Cod, living and writing there. He is most interesting, during World War II he was thrown out of practically every country in Europe for the hot stories he wrote, he is an authority on the Far East, the theatre, politics, history, personally knows people like Marlene Dietrich, and one can listen to him for hours on end.

He has a beautiful home on Cape Cod and together with Enid, a girl with whom I roomed briefly, we went up for the 4th of July. When I told him that Enid was getting married, he promptly invited her and her husband to spend their honeymoon with him, which they did since they didn't have any place in particular in mind, and the Cape is really so delightful and beautiful. I thought this was terribly nice of him. Larry also told me that he would check-out all my boy-friends, and that I was welcome to bring them all up. Well, we will see.

*One by one, that is!*

Then of course I saw Fred Joachim again, whom my sister and I adopted as sort of an Uncle at least ten or more years ago. All my girl-friends like Fred so much that they also adopt him, and having been married 5 times, Fred gladly gives them free advice on any romantic problems or questions. Enid and John have also adopted Fred into their family.

Then I was very happy to see Charlie Hollatz again, who has always been a very good friend, is great fun at parties, and whenever I have needed good advice and an objective opinion, he has dispensed with his wisdom most kindly. When I have been away and friends of mine come to New York, Charlie has also been very nice to them.

So, I have adopted all three of them, since they are all so sweet to me.

Recently, romance has been in the air for me, and perhaps certain developments could be expected, but I only say PERHAPS, since there is a matter of distance, as well as the problem of time, and I am still so very busy. Anyhow, I will, if there are any serious developments, let you know next year! In the meantime, keep all your fingers crossed.

I was just this week nominated again to the U. N., but the papers have not come yet, and until all the red tape is cleared I cannot function. When the Foreign Minister of Honduras and his wife were here, I saw a good deal of them, had them over for Sunday brunch, went shopping with Dona Daisy and saw them practically every day. Also saw Ricardo Midence, Ambassador of Honduras in Washington D. C. and his wife, and he invited us for lunch which was very nice. Margaret Levick brought me coins from all over Africa, India and Europe, and my collection has really grown. Well, I think I have finally said it all! Please excuse the length of this epic, but it has been a most interesting year for me, and last year started it all, AND my good and patient friends who always complain that they don't hear from me, will at least not be able to complain any more. And to those whom I haven't written in 10 years, I will at least have brought them up to date.

As I close, I want to wish you again, with all my heart the joy of Christmas: sharing with your loved ones many happy hours, and may 1969 bring you & yours the fulfillment of a harmonious and active life and much health, wealth and happiness. I think of you often, and I would love to hear from you.

My best to you, sincerely,

  
Gwendolyn K. Bennaton

32 Gramercy Park So.  
New York, New York 10003

P. S.: I believe I will be in Honduras in January, where you can write to me to:

P. O. Box No. 56  
San Pedro Sula, Honduras, C. A.