

Dra Maria Ruiz

Welcome to La Vida Boquete: Chronicles and Narrations of Boqueteños, with Boqueteños and those who have also impacted the lives of Boqueteños. Today we have as our guest:

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

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Milagros Sánchez Pinzón, a historian from the Chiriquí area, has conducted a study on the history of Boquete. Within that aspect of history, Milagros, why is history important, and what does it leave each of us as a legacy?

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

We like to always use as a basis, as a foundation, the thought of the American historian David McCullough, who says that it is important to teach history, especially to our youth, to our children, because it is like an antidote that allows us to know that everything we enjoy today - technology, science, the whole range of benefits we have, that we enjoy - has not been a spontaneous product, it hasn't been generated in some magical way.

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

It has cost something; what we have in the present in terms of health, education, technology, in all branches of human endeavor and knowledge. That's why history must be taught, and we should always keep it at hand because it helps us value that effort, that sacrifice, that blood, that sweat, and those tears. As Winston Churchill would say:

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

The men and women of the past, including our relatives, our great-great-grandparents, our great-grandparents, our parents, have left behind so that we can have the quality of life we have today. So it has been, generation after generation, that they have contributed. Some more, others less. There have been bitter and sweet moments because that's part of human life. We must value and recognize the legacy they left us, those who came before us, and that is history. Valuing what they left us, what they worked for, and what we can enjoy today.

Dra Maria Ruiz

You created a work in your early days as a historian. I understand it had to do with the historical features of the Boquete district. What have been three striking things or things that really stood out from your work on Boquete?

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

Well, first, Boquete always holds a special place, not only in Chiriquí but in Panama, and it was necessary to gather information before we lost the silent witnesses, as we call them- our elders-who hold in their minds that treasure chest of information and knowledge. So we saw that we would hardly find any more of Boquete's pioneers because we're talking about a town born in the mid-19th century.

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

So we began this work in 1999, specifically 26 years ago, so we would encounter a second generation, but they were also primary sources. As children and teenagers, they participated in this process of building the Boquete that would begin in the 21st century, so it was essential to make that contact - to access that primary source.

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

That was a pleasure for us, sitting for hours and hours, talking with people from all social strata, because let's remember that is what Boquete is today - it is the product of the effort of many, of thousands of people-men and women - from all socioeconomic conditions, all religious beliefs, different origins because we have the natives and we have the foreigners.

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

That cannot be overlooked, the mixture of cultures that existed here in Boquete-of our Indigenous groups, of the mestizo, which is the mix of Spanish and Indigenous, of the Black contribution, which isn't very strong in this town, because this town from the republican era isn't from the colonial era, like other towns that do have this strong African element.

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

So, it was necessary to knock on the doors of these pioneering families, both national and foreign. So that's one of the first elements: identifying those valuable people with that information. Another thing we really enjoyed in this documentary work, which, as you rightly said, was a reference point that later led to other works, and we hope more will continue to come, was collecting photographs.

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

At that time, we didn't yet have cell phones as a tool. I collected about 300 invaluable photographs for the families, which were emotional for them, so I committed to returning them one by one after we finished the work because those were such personal memories for the families of their ancestors and their experiences. So that was another element.

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

Well, that collection of photographic material was interesting. And third, for me, what was valuable in this work was the relationships I was able to establish with these families - the

bonds of friendship with the Sandberg family, the Ruiz family, Don Plinio and Doña Elisa, the Peterson family. Some were of longer standing, others more recent. Mrs. Inga, the Laws family.

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

There are so many that I would have to mention. I remember Don Tito Ruiz, Mr. Leopoldo Castillo, the Gaitán brothers from Los Naranjos, and Don Tito López over there in the Arco Iris area. Not just in Boquete, in the center, as we call it, but in Caldera, in Palmira, the Velázquez family in Caldera, the Ríos family, well, so many names that I can't mention them all. For me, each of those families represented a bond of affection that was established, relationships that, despite the passage of time - 25 years since that research - still endure.

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

So that is a very great treasure.

Dra Maria Ruiz

Yes, and based on that, there's still a lot of data to work on.

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

That's why a call is made to the new generations to review it. Now, many people upload information with the technological tools available, such as the internet. Many digital reference fields can further enrich it. The collection is the rescue of Boquete's historical memory and its people. And the people are the most important. Yes.

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

So that work remains to be done.

Dra Maria Ruiz

That also gives us a lot of information about the future.

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

Of course. A lot, a lot, a lot of room for our young people to not only dedicate themselves to traditional activities. Yes, get involved with the countryside, with research. There are thousands of topics to investigate: the origin of coffee here in Boquete, some religious traditions, the basis of horticulture, architecture, how it has changed over time, and tourism, which now also has new facets.

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

There are dozens of topics to investigate. We can create thematic documents.

Dra Maria Ruiz

Exactly.

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

There's a guy who likes - well, I like - the birds of Boquete, an aspect of nature. And he could make a piece about that. There's a lot to explore.

Dra Maria Ruiz

Well, that's a call to the new generations, too.

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

Exactly.

Dra Maria Ruiz

In Boquete's history, what values have you gathered that emerge in each part of that review?

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

One piece of information that never loses value - on the contrary it has been very relevant - is discovering world-class figures who chose Boquete to settle, the value of the land. They arrive here, some hopeless due to terrible illnesses, and instead, they come on vacation. Even some come before leaving for their homeland for good and fall in love with Boquete, its lands, forests, fauna, rivers, and famous figures who stood out on the world stage. For me, one of the most notable figures is Mr. Toileff Monique, the Norwegian who built the safety locks of the canal and who,

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

this system had not been used yet, and he decided to stay in Boquete and strengthen one of the coffee and horticulture farms because he also had renown in that field and gave that importance to Boquete's natural side. Thanks to him, many naturalists came. He was a host to many. George Champion, for example, and Polar, and another series of researchers who came looking for orchids, who came looking for insects.

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

And so, Boquete became a center of natural research for people from various places around the world. That appeal has existed since the 19th century and has continued into the 21st century. We've been at it for 200 years now. That means we have to preserve it. We have a commitment to maintain that magic of Boquete. We need to take the right actions in the present so that it continues to be that place that attracted people in the 19th century.

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

Because there are landscapes like this in Switzerland. And in other countries. But what's so special about Boquete that people have stayed here? They've stayed here! So we have to preserve those elements. And one of those is this beautiful river, the Caldera River. That

lush vegetation still adorns the mountains surrounding this valley. And well, I imagine the people, too.

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

The idiosyncrasy of the people. What it means to be a Boqueteño, which identifies what it is to be a Boqueteño, is also essential so that someone arrives and feels the warmth, identifies with it, and decides to stay here because it's both the natural and the human aspect.

Dra Maria Ruiz

Thank you so much for this brief introduction and for the understanding of what it means to be part of history - to understand why we have to preserve it. What we learn through history as well is to be able to understand what those elements are that identify us as Boqueteños.

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

Well, thank you, and we hope that, above all, the new generations value and recognize that what they enjoy today in Boquete is the sum of that daily effort. Because it's not something that happens today and not tomorrow-no, it has been constant for almost 150 years. The steadfast work of men and women.

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

Remember that women came with men to found this town, to colonize this valley that was a wild jungle full of fierce animals. So we can't forget all that. It's essential to value that past. And to recognize their contribution and what we enjoy in the present, we owe it to them.

Dra Maria Ruiz

Thank you very much.

Milagros Sánchez Pinzón

Thank you.