
La Chatona

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San Andres is a small town located in the north-western shore lake Peten Itza, in the state of Peten, which is in the North of Guatemala. San Andres is known for their vast forest and the abundance of the chicozapote tree, which produces gum resin. Back in the 30's a lady named Petrona and her father arrived to San Andres from Campeche, Mexico looking for work. Soon after their arrival, they were hired to collect gum resin-which is the raw material for gum and tires and other products. Gum resin is collected by making cuts around the chicozapote tree and placing a leather bag to collect a milk-like solution that hardens when cooked.

Since the collecting season goes from June to November, every year, by the end of November, all of the gum resin collectors come back to town and celebrate the end of the collection season by having a big party with lots of food, drinks and music. Surprised by the party, Petrona started dancing with children, women & men. Everyone in the town was drawn to her happy spirit and inviting smile. After that, every November 21st the town would get ready for the end of the gum collection season and would wait for Petrona to come and dance with them.

One year, Petrona didn't show up to the party and the children were asking for her, but the youngest ones were not able to pronounce her name and would say tia "tona" (untie tona) and in time, that name evolved to "La Chatona". Years went by, but she never showed up in town again. One day, one of the gum collectors missed her so much that he decided to create a concrete-made statue in her honor—which is currently located in the heart of San Andres. The statue wasn't enough, because the community also wanted to keep dancing with her and remembering her as the happy person with a smile on her face, so they made the statue out of wood and fabric, a hollow and mobile statue, so anyone would be able to dance with her.

To this very day nobody knows what truly happened to her. Rumors spread around the town that she had last been seen entering the forest, but nobody saw her coming out. It was known by everyone that Petrona enjoyed spending time in nature and loved all types of animals from birds, monkeys, and reptiles. But the forest is also home to dangerous animal life and it is believed that she was fatally bitten by a snake, perishing in the forest of San Andres. To this day, every November 21st La Chatona is taken out to dance on the streets of San Andres, where she's accompanied by a live band, children and adults, all dancing at the rhythm of La Chatona.