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THE LENTEN SEASON IN OAXACA



(A real Oaxacan beauty, Concepcion H. Garcia.)

Oaxaca is famous all over Mexico for it's religious pageantry and many of the events which occur here during the lenten season are unique to this area which takes pride in preserving it's heritage.

On Friday, March 2nd, between 7-9:00 a.m., university students from all over the city will converge on Benito Juarez Park, commonly known as "El Llano". The girls stroll (this called a paseo) in groups around the large park and the boys bring flowers to give to the girls whom they consider the prettiest. This is the perfect time for flirtation.

Finally, after competition, one of the girls is chosen and awarded the title of "Madrina de Viernes". This is repeated for seven consecutive Fridays. Various bands play during the festivities including the State Marimba Band.

On the 5th Friday (Mar 30th) at 12:00 noon, is the celebration of Samaritan Day. This is in honor of "La Samaritana", who, according to the Bible, was able to give Jesus some water in defiance of the Roman guards.

Altars decorated with bouganvilla and other flowers are erected at the front entrances to all churches and flavored waters (fruit drinks) are dispensed, free of charge, from huge earthenware jars to the public who arrive with their own containers.

Some of the flavors offered are: horchata (cinnamon & almond), chilacayota (pumpkin with brown sugar and lemon rind), tamarrind, melon, pineapple, jamaica (a dried flower), etc. The same afternoon dances are held at schools and government offices with marimba music for dancing.

On the 7th Friday, Apr 13th, at 7:00 a.m., another paseo is held in the Alameda (like the earlier ones held at El Llano) and it's worth a visit to go to the nearby Juarez Market to try the tamales made with vegetables.

At the beginning of Holy Week (Apr 9th) all churches will have daily religious services. Check the Oaxaca Times for special ceremonies.

PROFILE

Sister Maryagnes (that's her spelling) Curran is a heavy duty feminist, activist, Catholic Missionary Nun of the Order of St. Francis of Assisi, based out of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Now that's a heavy description, and if it sounds strong so is the woman herself. Ruddy complexioned, 50ish, outspoken and self confident, you won't find a pious nun in a black habit saying a rosary. No Sir! She dresses in comfortable every day clothes without a cross in sight.

Sister M. has been coming to Oaxaca for 5 years and is the founder of the Centro de Estudios Para la Promocion Integral de la Mujer (C.E.P.I.M for short) which is housed in a building at 2 Sur #105, Colonia Cuauhtemoc, Oaxaca.

The object of this organization is to, quote "Awaken women to their dignity as human beings" unquote. Classes are offered in literacy, sewing, cooking, knitting, manual arts, and aerobics. Since the participants (50 at present) are from lower income families they are charged the minimal amount of 2500 pesos monthly to engage in all the activities. The part-time instructors, who are not volunteers, are paid the equivalent of \$US40 per month. There is also a children's day care center.

Meetings are held to teach women how to dream of a future, to share, to develop their potentials and to find solutions to their problems.

Three times a year Sister M. visits Rio Grande, Xocotepec, and Ciruelo, 3 towns in the

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Oaxacan Personages:

Luis Valencia



One of the most original and talented artists in this part of Mexico has to be Luis Valencia, a sweet-tempered man of 35. Married, with 5 children, he lives and works in the small town of San Antonino, about 30 kilometers from Oaxaca, very near Ocotlan. Luis, a Zapotec, spent many years as a farm laborer before being apprenticed to an artisan who produces clay figures, masks, etc. for the commercial market in Oaxaca. Here he worked and learned for 5 years before deciding to go on his own and realize his own potential. Luis specializes in bas-relief, which in his case is 3-dimensional hand-molded clay on a base usually designed to hang on the wall or sometimes to sit on a table to be viewed from above.

His subject matter can be religious, comic and even semi-erotic. He also shapes free standing figurines and masks and is experimenting with painting on hoja de San Pablo, a large dried leaf with the texture of velvet. His imagination seems to be endless.

He has his own traditional kiln and hand paints all his work with vivid colored acrylic paints. In 1988 he won the Grand Prize for original art in Tlaquepaque, Jalisco, and is scheduled to have a one man show in Philadelphia in Sept 1990. Also in the works are shows in Cleveland and in San Francisco, and he has even been invited to travel as far away as India. Some of his work can be seen at the Mano Magica Gallery on Alcalá St. in Oaxaca.



Bienvenidos amigos

Welcome, reader, to the OAXACA, TIMES Oaxaca, is a beautiful, clean, colonial city with friendly people and a nearly perfect climate. OAXACA TIMES aims to provide you, the English-speaking visitor, with valuable information which will enhance and enrich your stay. Write, call (6-34-43), or come by our office (Guerrero 311) with your tips and recommendations about Oaxaca. Our office is 2 1/2 blocks east of the Zocalo at the Institute of Communication and culture, A.C. Come by and get acquainted. But, above all, enjoy our beautiful Oaxaca.

Yolanda Garcia C.
Publisher

THE GENTLE ART OF BARGAINING

Oaxaca is well known for its crafts, and most visitors hope to take back a momento or two of their stay in the region. Bargaining offers a fine opportunity to interact with local merchants and villagers in a way not possible in the more structured economies of the U.S. and Europe.

During our stay in Oaxaca we were fortunate to be able to accompany an importer of Indian crafts during one of his visits to a nearby village. These comments are gleaned from our time with him, as well as our own attempts at making deals. As you would expect, the most common way to save money is to eliminate the middleman and go to the source of the crafts in the pueblos surrounding Oaxaca. But this is far from foolproof, for the artisans are aware of the prices charged in the city. In addition, many of the best pieces end up in the shops along Alcalá St. in the city. But rather than only seeking bargains, your time will be better rewarded by an interest in a lifestyle different from your

own. Often the moments incidental to the actual buy (the sight of village life: beautifully-clad women making fresh tortillas by an open fire, or the peek-a-boo look of a child around the edge of a door) will be the memories that will endure.

Unlike the pretense that prevails in other cultures, there is no "real" price to an item. But this is not to say that you will be able to pay whatever you like. On your side, the price will vary according to your knowledge and sensitivity of the culture. The seller may "read" your manner of dress for signs of wealth as well as indications of familiarity with his culture (shorts, etc.). And of course he will take into account your knowledge of Spanish. Language ability is a quick way to judge a person's knowledge of a culture. Here even minimal amounts of traveler's Spanish will help a great deal.

Concerning the actual negotiations, only a few general comments can be made here. First,

don't be intimidated by a look of astonishment (or worse) towards your offer. On the other hand, don't treat the negotiations as simply a game. This is the livelihood of the seller; when disagreeing it's crucial to retain an attitude of respect. The best results that I've seen are those negotiations which proceeded in a slow-paced and grave manner. Patience is a great virtue; try sitting silent for a while as if your thoughts are occupied by other matters. It helps as well if you don't allow yourself to become attached to a given piece; the flexibility will work to your advantage. Finally, too often people are distracted by what they're "supposed" to pay for a piece. A few bucks either way won't make a difference once you are at home. The most important criteria: whether or not you enjoy the work.

RESTAURANT BAR MADEIRA

Quite new on the dining scene but already popular is Restaurant Bar Madeira, 102 Murguía-Casa de Cantera. Housed in an old colonial building, it is part of a complex of shops called Casa de Cantera. The tables are arranged around an outside courtyard and with comfortable chairs (on wheels), white walls and a profusion of large well-maintained plants, it is a very pleasant setting for dining. The a la carte menu is quite extensive and features a variety of appetizers, soups and salads. The ensalada mixta is a combination of iceberg lettuce, tomato and onion in a mild vinaigrette dressing. The cream of tomato and spinach soups with croutons are both excellent. Main courses, which range from 10-22,000 pesos, include chicken, quail, filet of beef and several seafood dishes. The brochette of large shrimp served on a bed of rice with french fries and broccoli flowerets was very well prepared, though the vegetable was a bit overcooked. All the plates are attractively presented and the service professional. Hardboiled quail eggs and spiced peanuts are placed on the table as you study the menu. I suggest their selection of music at lunch be toned down.

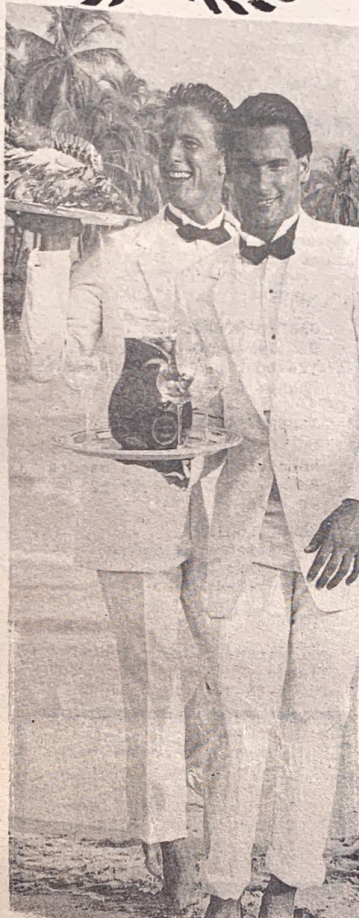
This is a place for that special night on the town. Open from 1:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. Sun 1-6. Live music at night. For Res. call 6-94-21

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coastal area of Pinotepa, where a chicken farm and other projects have been established. She returns to the U.S. every summer on fund raising trips. If you care to contribute to this worthwhile organization, the address is:

Centro de Estudios Para la Promocion Integral de la Mujer (C.E.P.I.M.)
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Col. Cuauhtemoc
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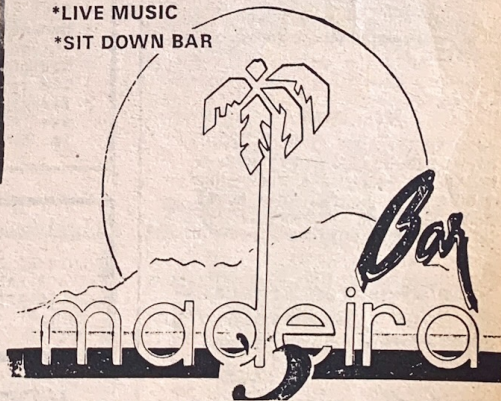
La Casa del Mezcal, El Salon de la Moda, La Barca de Oro, La Farola, La Morenita, El Jinete, La Perla, El Tiburon, El Mocambo, etc.

These are just a few of the names of the cantinas you will find all over Oaxaca. Hours differ depending on the license, location and owner's whim, but when they are open most of them do a brisk business. Selling mezcal at from 500 to 1000 pesos a skot, they also serve beer, brandy, rum, etc. at rock bottom prices. Many are jammed with patrons between 2-4:00 p.m. when free snacks are served, usually caldo de camaron, tacos or other inexpensive, easy-to-make dishes. Many are visited by roaming musicians who live up the action to a high pitch. Sound like fun? Wrong. Alcoholism is a problem here and many of the patrons are poorer men who are trying to drown their problems with booze and perhaps spend all their money in the process. This can cause violence not only in the cantina but also later in the home. You might also notice in your walks around town that there are an abundance of Alcoholics Anonymous chapters. This might tell you something. This is a man's world. Women do not frequent and are not welcome in cantinas except perhaps in the red light district. We do not recommend that tourists visit these bars. Just one wrong word, look, or remark, no matter how innocent, may lead to a fight, perhaps with tragic results. Stick to the Zocalo or bars that cater to tourists.

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WEDDING IN XOXOCOTLAN



There are weddings and there are weddings. There are elegant ones where the bride and groom leave lovely Santo Domingo Church under a hail of rice with a big black limo all decorated with ribbons and flowers waiting outside to whisk them off to a posh catered reception and later to the airport for a European honeymoon.

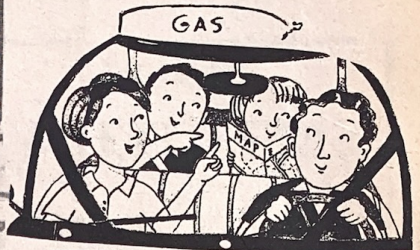
Then there are the simple traditional ones held in small towns all over Oaxaca. Money is saved long in advance, preparations made, food prepared, dresses sewn, and it seems as if everyone pitches in to help make it a true celebration. I attended such a wedding not too long ago in Xoxocotlan, a small town on the road to Cuilapan. The small church was beautifully decorated with lots of white flowers and ribbon and the bride and groom were resplendent in their wedding finery. After the ceremony the wedded couple preceded by a brass band walked from the church through the Zocalo and down dusty streets to the bride's house followed by the entire wedding party.

Lots of guests were already there, a bank was playing, tables were being set and the food readied. Mezcal, beer and soft drinks were passed around to the crowd which by now was considerable. Suddenly another bank arrived on the scene followed by another crowd, many of them dancing and carrying large baskets filled with fruit. These were the "canasteros" bringing gifts to the bride. At the same time a rather bizarre dance was performed with a live turkey as the unwilling partner.

After the dance all the fruit was thrown to the guests who scrambled to catch it, and it was quite a sight watching all those oranges and limes and apples flying through the air! Meanwhile the newlyweds were ushered into a small dark room which had an altar decorated with candles, flowers and burning incense. The atmosphere was rather spooky. The couple knelt before the altar on 2 heart-shaped lace pillows and received benediction from the immediate family and close friends. This is done by standing in front of the kneeling couple, taking the right hand and making the sign of the cross first to the groom and then to the bride, who in turn, kiss the hand of the person giving the benediction, who then gently knocks their heads together. I hope this is clear. The newlyweds then left the festivities and went to the groom's house where another equally large celebration was taking place. They never returned to the bride's house where now the party was in full swing. Since there were so many people, we ate in shifts. Chicken macaroni soup was served first followed by barbacoa (goat), rice, and a stuffing of "masa" which was cooked along with the goat. There was also a huge multi-tiered cake and the refreshments were continually being replenished. During all this a rock band played and with its huge amplifiers I'm sure it could be heard in Mexico City! Before I left I was invited to yet another party to be held the following day.

These people certainly know how to live it up!

COLD SHOWER ANYONE?



We take many things for granted in the U.S. of A., and one is gas piped onto the home for cooking and heating, etc.

In Oaxaca there is no such luxury. Most everyone here depends on gas for food preparation and for heating water. Hot water is usually supplied to the bathroom only and cold water is used to wash dishes and to do laundry (mostly by hand) unless you care to heat it up on the stove.

Gas is sold in 20, 30 and 45 kilo metal tanks which you initially buy and then pay for refills. The gas companies have their routes (just like the water companies) and someone has to be at home to drag the empty tanks out to the street and to drag the full ones back to the house and reconnect them. This is not an easy job as the tanks are heavy and unweildy and four hands are needed to lift the larger tanks when full.

If you happen to be away when the truck passes you're in deep trouble! First, you have to have a car or truck, and second, you have to take the empty tanks to one of the 2 gas depots in the city. Sometimes there are long lines of people with empty tanks and it is not unusual to spend hours waiting your turn. Some newer homes, hotels, etc. have luckily installed big storage tanks which are refilled by tank trucks. If there is a rumor of a price increase (which recently happened) everyone tries to fill every available tank which results in longer lines, short tempers and a gas shortage. Cold shower anyone?
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