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March, 2017
Issue 66
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Editor's Letter

“We are at our most powerful the moment we no longer need to be powerful.”

Eric Micha'el Leventhal

March 8th is International Women's Day, and so this issue is dedicated to women. I was born bold and have never shirked a good discussion regarding the horrendous status of women in the world, I am the mother to a wonderful daughter and I am a woman myself - all of which would make it seem that writing this editorial should be a piece of cake.

However I find each time I start to write I come up against some emotion or tone that I do not want to convey: anger, hurt, dismay or the worst - sounding like a 'victim' of my 'womaness' in any form. 'Victim' has become such a dirty word, associated with weakness and pity. Those of us fortunate enough to have horrible things happen to us in places with psycho-babble help at our disposal are taught to refer to ourselves as 'survivors' because it connotes empowerment and strength rather than injury. But I am starting to wonder whether our 'survival mode' makes perpetrators less accountable. What becomes measured is our ability to deal with pain and injury rather than making those doling it out accountable. We stop talking about the 'harm' done for fear of sounding like whiners.

Somewhere between being strong and capable our softness gets brushed aside. I don't want to be a whiner and I certainly don't want to let bad experiences come to define me, but I think there needs to be a moment of being the victim- acknowledging that we become affected by our experiences. I don't want to be an emotional Navy Seal- all hard edges and ready to conquer whatever life throws at me. I want to embrace the sensuality of my femininity without hiding the scars, I want to remain open and generous in a world that challenges me to do so daily.

I think the answer lies somewhere in between. Maybe rather than cringe at the word 'victim' we need to change our connotations. Victims are not weak or to be pitied - they have been hurt. We are all victims of the human experience in some way or another - every single one of us has been wronged by circumstances or other people. This universality does not need to diminish the importance of individual experience. Possibly in acknowledging the pain and hurt, rather than simply surviving it, we can find common ground that will lead to greater empathy and compassion with those around us.

Let us honor the softness and vulnerability of the human spirit - in both men and women. Let us not have to shout to be heard but allow our whispers to shake the world.

See you next month,

Jane



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Feminism through Art

By Alvin Starkman, M.A, J.D.

It's not that Angélica Vásquez Cruz sets herself apart from other gifted female artisans in the state of Oaxaca because of her feminist bent; it's her willingness to verbalize to whomever visits her home/workshop the strength she sees in the women of Oaxaca, and how she is invariably able to capture her perspective in her art. The master ceramicist has distinguished herself from other clay sculptors not only in her hometown of Atzompa, the closest craft village to the city of Oaxaca, but throughout all of Mexico. Since age seven Angélica has been innovating and adapting her art form, and for the past quarter century she has been using different clays sourced from the farthest reaches of the country to produce variations in texture and color for her unique and highly thought-provoking pieces.

Atzompa is one of a number of small artisan villages which can be visited by travelers to Oaxaca. It's mostly known for the workshops of potters who make green glazed and pastel colored ceramics, though many villagers now specialize in production of fanciful figures and a plethora of kitchenware, vases, lamps, and more. However, as is the case in other towns and villages peppering the region, on the rarest of occasions the odd master with something truly unique and special to offer emerges. Angélica is that angel in Atzompa.

Angélica's work has been heavily influenced by her own family and its early difficult years, as well as by Mexican history and legend. Her belief in the importance and strength of the matriarch in Oaxacan cultures shines through in her work. Aside from the inner fortitude of women, what immediately strikes the eye upon entering the showrooms that form part of her home, are two important features of her skillset: the complexity of detail and the flowing natural movement so rarely captured by her colleagues. Of peers she has very few. Those of us who have had the honor and pleasure of speaking with Angélica at length understand how her personal struggles have impacted the feminist themes in much of her work. The father of her four children left the family when the kids were still young, and so she had to raise them on her own, thankfully at times with the assistance of her parents and in-laws. She fought to maintain respect from her fellow villagers, and to provide food and shelter for herself and her children. Now, Angélica is the titular head of a proud matrifocal extended family.

Angélica's work is featured in numerous volumes about Mexican folk art and ceramics, including *Mexican Pottery of the 20th Century* (2001), *Mexican Folk Art from Oaxacan Artist Families* (2002 & 2007), and *Grandes Maestros del Arte Popular de Oaxaca* (2011). She has travelled throughout Mexico and the US exhibiting her artform and promoting Oaxacan crafts. A number of years ago the federal government of Mexico bestowed a great honor upon Angélica by presenting her with a large, modern, propane-fueled kiln. But to this day she still often employs a traditional brick and clay oven for firing her pieces. For Angélica, maintaining ancestral means of production and tools of the trade is crucial.



Atzompa is a 15-minute drive from Oaxaca, easily accessed by taxi. Angélica's home, on Avenida Independencia, is several blocks up from the main downtown artisans' market, and about a quarter-mile down from the Atzompa archaeological site, itself boasting one of the earliest pottery workshop ovens in the region. She or one of her adult children always warmly welcome tourists into their charming and quaint world, a well-kept homestead lushly filled with an abundance of colorful plants, shrubs and fruit trees.

Angélica has mentored artisans both from other villages in the state of Oaxaca, and from the US. She continues to unselfishly offer her tutelage.

In 1991 I began visiting Oaxaca frequently, and for the past 13 years I have been a full-time resident of the city. Over those 25+ years I have made many friends and have numerous compadres and god-children. For my 65th, at an intimate gathering in our home, Angélica and family were among the honored attendees.

Alvin Starkman operates Mezcal Educational Excursions of Oaxaca (<http://www.mezcaleducationaltours.com>).



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Women Writers of The World: Thank You!

By Carole Reedy

Over the past 200 years, women worldwide have offered fresh perspectives despite the prominence of men in most fields. In the 21st century, we're seeing an emergence of women in politics, as heads of states, in science, and in the arts. Here are a few women writers who have enriched our lives, not only with their writing, humor, and intelligence, but with their ability to reflect on and express in words what it means to be a woman and, importantly, human.

JOYCE CAROL OATES

Oates must be one of the most prolific woman writers of all time. She's published more than 50 novels as well as essays and short stories, and she's still writing at age 80. Some of her finest works are introspections of young women, teenagers, and the dispossessed. Personal favorites include her early works, such as *Wonderland*, *Expensive People*, and *A Garden of Earthly Delights*. Oates's novels often bring different perspectives to current events, such as *Black Water* (Chappaquiddick), *The Sacrifice* (manipulative preachers, police, and parents), and, my favorite, the brilliant *My Sister, My Love* (a retelling of the JonBenét Ramsey murder that to this day, exactly 20 years later, remains unresolved). Oates has won numerous prizes in her 50 authorial years, and there is talk of a Nobel Prize in her future.



GEORGE ELIOT

As most of us know, George Eliot is the pen name of the famous 19th century writer, Mary Anne Evans. Although she claims the switch to a man's name was made to ensure her novels were taken seriously, it's speculated that she also may have wanted to keep her identity secret due to the scandals in her life, the main one being her 20-year cohabitation with the married George Henry Lewes. Later she married John Cross, who was 20 years younger than she.



Compiling this list of writers put me in a quandary. Which of the 19th century woman should I include: Jane Austen, Emily Brontë, Charlotte Brontë, Kate Chopin, Christina Rossetti? Finally, for several reasons, I chose Eliot, the decisive factor being that in 2017 I see many young people here in Mexico City reading the author's famous *Middlemarch* on the bus, which both pleases and surprises me. In addition, many older friends have picked up a copy or are reading or re-reading it on their Kindles. To this day, nearly a century and a half after its publication, it is still considered by many (including Julian Barnes and Martin Amis) as the greatest novel ever written. It is long and tedious at times, so if you want a taste of Eliot in a shorter version, try *The Mill on the Floss*, *Adam Bede*, or *Silas Marner*.

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CLARICE LISPECTOR

The recently published *The Complete Stories of Clarice Lispector* has pulled this fascinating woman back into the spotlight. Her life story is as compelling as her writing. Born Chaya Pinkhasovna Lispector in 1920 in what is today's Ukraine, the family, after suffering through the pogroms during the Russian Civil War, fled to Brazil when Clarice was an infant. They all changed names, and Chaya became Clarice. Her mother, who was paralyzed and also had been raped during the pogroms, died when Clarice was nine. With her father and sisters, she moved around Brazil and eventually to Rio.



Near to the Wild Heart, her first novel, was praised from the beginning, and to this day it is a highly lauded novel of world literature. One critic said the book "had shifted the center of gravity around which the Brazilian novel had been revolving for about 20 years." Her introspective style permeates that novel as well as her subsequent works. In addition to nine novels, Lispector has written children's literature, nonfiction journalistic pieces, and short stories. The new edition of the short stories is well worth a read for their raw emotion.

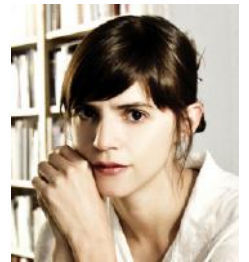
SVETLANA ALEXIEVICH

Born in Ukraine in 1948, Alexievich is the first writer from Belarus to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, which she was awarded in 2015 for "her polyphonic writings, a monument to suffering and courage in our time." She's also the first person to win the award for her journalistic style. Most of Alexievich's books center around the memories of witnesses in dire situations, such as war. *War's Unwomanly Face* (women's memories of WW2), *Zinky Boys: Soviet Voices from the Afghanistan War*, and *The Last Witnesses: The Book of Unchildlike Lullaby* (children's memories during wartime) are just a few of her popular titles, the content being evident. *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster* also is among her work that's been translated into both Spanish and English, among other languages.



VALERIA LUISELLI

Unlike others on this list, you may not be familiar with Luiselli. She's a young Mexican writer (just over 30) who has taken the world of literature by storm, receiving kudos worldwide. Luiselli was born in DF, but has lived in Costa Rica, South Korea, South Africa, and India, and now lives in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City. She has been published in *The New York Times* and *Letras Libres* and writes a weekly column in *El País*, the justifiably lauded daily newspaper of Spain. Her novels include the recently applauded *The Story of My Teeth*, and her debut novel *Faces in the Crowd*. Both have been translated into English, as has her debut book of essays, *Sidewalks*. Luiselli, in a tweet to *The Guardian* reviewer Mina Holland, reacting to Holland's observation that the author had omitted a concrete conclusion, tweeted back "I don't believe in the 'grand finale.' I hate Wagner."



ELENA FERRANTE

The last four years found many women and men eagerly awaiting each English translation of her Neapolitan Novels. Apart from her compelling story and style, Ferrante has kept her true identity a secret from everyone except her publisher. Ferrante is a woman who believes that a work should stand on its intrinsic merits and not be boosted by clever advertising or promotion. Simply said: The four books in the Neapolitan Novels (*My Brilliant Friend*, *The Story of a New Name*, *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay*, and *The Story of the Lost Child*) delve deeply into the lives of two women and their families and friends in Naples. Ferrante weaves the stories from different points of view in a style that compels the reader's opinion and emotion to change and evolve, just as her characters do.



WISLAWA SZYMBORSKA

This poet, essayist, and translator is one of just 14 women to have won the Nobel Prize for Literature in the past 115 years. In 1996 Szymborska won the coveted prize for "poetry that with ironic precision allows the historical and biological context to come to light in fragments of human reality." Her work has been translated into many different languages. Despite her commercial success, she deduces in her poem "Some Like Poetry" that really no more than two out of a thousand people care for the art. Her final poems were published after her death in 2012 at age 88.



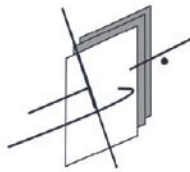
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Project TEN:

An Israeli-Mexican Partnership in Oaxaca – Part 2

By Marcia Chaiken and Jan Chaiken

We recently traveled to the hills around Pluma Hidalgo to spend a couple of days with the Project TEN's professional staff and young Jewish volunteers, primarily Israelis. In the February issue of *The Eye*, we reported on the important educational, medical, and public health services TEN was providing at the request of the village community members. In this issue we describe the work and life at the isolated TEN center.

To reach the Center from the main Huatulco-Pluma road, we drove our car part way up a rutted road that was encompassed on both sides by a wall of dense tropical vegetation. After parking our car, we were transported by Sivan, the Center Director, in the 4x4 TEN truck along a bone-rattling road that was barely visible through denser and denser jungle. As we reached the end, the vista suddenly opened to a long two-story building with an upper floor open to the air. The building overlooked a steep drop to tanks used in a three-step process to purify the water used at the center, terraced TEN gardens, and below them a privately-owned coffee plantation. "Welcome home," Sivan said.

Since we were there on a Friday, the volunteers were not working in the surrounding villages. Their program that day consisted of a morning working in the experimental farm, an afternoon of preparing for Shabbat (the Jewish sabbath that starts at sundown on Friday), and an evening of celebrating Shabbat. We were invited to participate in all these activities or just observe.

The experimental farm is integral to the TEN project's emphasis on public health and informal education. Given the typical diet of rice, beans and sugary drinks around Pluma (as well as in many impoverished areas of Mexico), the rate of diabetes and related diseases is extremely high in the nearby villages. The purpose of the experimental farm is to determine which crops can be easily and organically grown in the area in small individual gardens that can provide tasty and nutritious additions to meals. The ultimate goal is to train and assist villagers to have their own gardens and reap the health benefits. Only organic crops that turn out to thrive in the local environment are encouraged.

Just as the villagers would, the TEN volunteers cultivated the crops using only machetes or bare hands. The sight of young Israelis laughing and swinging machetes to prune, aerate the soil, and cut back invasive plants was a striking cultural anomaly, as most of the volunteers grew up in desert areas. Emulating the primary method of irrigation available to the local villagers, they water plants by capturing water from the river running down in the valley. And to fertilize the crops, two types of compost were being produced; one from scraps of leftover cooked food and the second from other unprocessed organic waste. TEN had previously tried to introduce worms into the compost to speed the decomposition process, but chickens, ubiquitous in rural Mexico, thought TEN was extending an invitation to a feast and rapidly devoured the annelids.

Some of the experiments turned out to be failures; strawberries did not thrive without colder weather than the cool nights of Pluma provide. Other vegetables just seemed to need more gardening time than busy mothers would likely have available. But many were thriving. The TEN director and volunteers proudly pointed out their flourishing fruit trees: lemon, orange, mango and passion fruit. Raised beds contained watermelons, tomatoes, nopales (edible cactus), chiles and other vegetables. Separate raised beds were replete with aromatic herbs and spices, including mint, lemongrass, two types of oregano, and ginger. It was amusing and educational to see the signs the volunteers had made to label the plants in English, Spanish and Hebrew.



Friday late morning and early afternoon were set aside for cleaning for Shabbat – very much a challenge in the first floor living quarters since all of the volunteers share one of two rooms (one for men and one for women). The halls are stacked with cartons of books and other materials to be brought out to the villages, and the storage room space is taken up primarily with computers to be distributed to schools. The bathroom consists of a central area with sinks and a constantly refilling multi-gallon bottle of filtered drinking water, and curtained off areas for men and women's toilets and showers – just cold water we were told again and again by the residents. Although the professional staff have individual bedrooms in a separate wing, they are not much larger than a modern walk-in closet. Hardly luxury.

The upstairs communal open-air area is by contrast a delight. Couches and comfortable chairs provide a place to gather. Hammocks hang around the periphery and are sought-after places for quiet reading. Bookshelves are stacked with novels and other reading in Spanish, English, French, and Hebrew. The Educational Coordinator has set aside an area for materials to use in preparing for teaching in the villages, and – important for the TEN philosophy – nightly study of topics such as Jewish values, Jewish service, and Mexican culture. Dominating the room is a table large enough to seat the staff, volunteers, and guests.

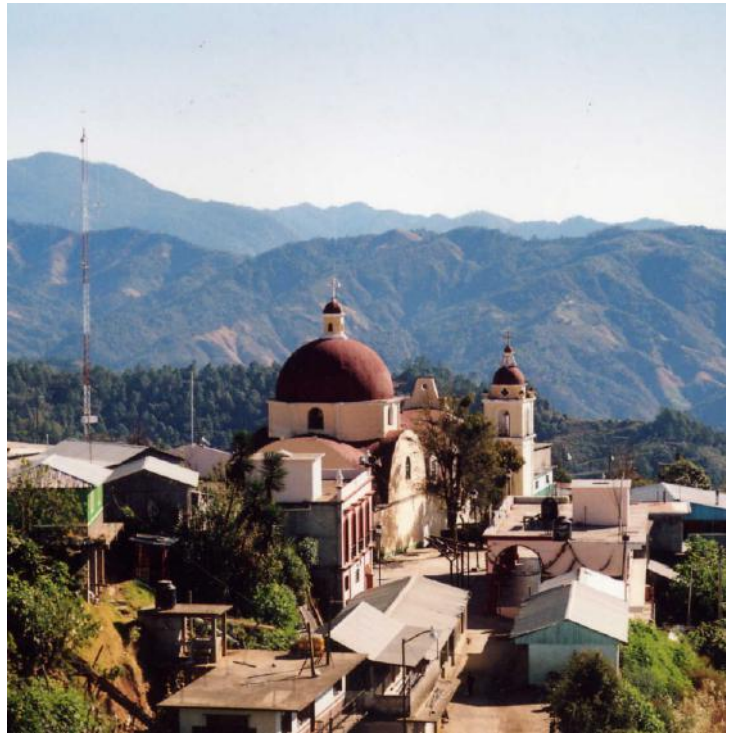
The remainder of the day was spent preparing an elaborate Shabbat dinner. All other meals are cooked by Juana, who not only nourishes the staff and volunteers' bodies with delicious vegetarian food but, as the only person with parenting experience, provides emotional support and hugs as needed. On Friday, Juana leaves early and the volunteers take over the kitchen. Small groups signed up to prepare specific dishes.



Cooking together is meant to be a community-building exercise, and for the most part it appeared to be functioning just that way. While soaking, peeling, chopping, slicing, and mixing, there were amusing conversations and intense conversations in three languages, singing, and good-natured teasing. However, given the diverse backgrounds of the volunteers – with parents from many different countries – there was naturally some disagreement about the best way to prepare specific dishes. The resolution – prepare the same dish several different ways: large challahs, small challahs, challahs with three strands braided, and “monkey-bread” challah. So the already elaborate menu became even more complex.

Participating in the cooking provided an opportunity to learn why the volunteers pay for their own transportation and \$1000 (US) for three months of hard work, cramped quarters, and cold showers. While some of the reasons were idiosyncratic, most agreed that after serving in the Israeli Army it is almost expected that they would travel to the far reaches of the earth. Too, after growing up in cities or deserts, the description of the jungle of Pluma sounded like paradise. But most of all, the chance to learn first-hand about another culture and to learn another language appeared to be a primary motivation.

As sunset approached and the meal was cooking, everyone disappeared and returned freshly showered and wearing their best clothes. We gathered together on the sofas and chairs for a sing-a-long punctuated by favorite quotes and an explanation of why it was a favorite. Although definitely not ready for Broadway, the singing was obviously heartfelt and spiritual. The sing-along was followed by a traditional religious kabbalat shabbat (greeting the sabbath) service attended by about one-third of the staff and volunteers – understandable as many Israelis define themselves as secular rather than religious.



We, who have attended kabbalat shabbat services on virtually every continent, were very moved to be in the hills of Pluma with these exceptional young people who are providing their time and energy to making the world a better place. And, as we sat around the table having the delicious shabbat dinner, listening to them discuss what they had learned during the past week, we felt great pride in being part of a people for whom success is measured by whether or not the value of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) has been passed on to the next generation.



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The Power of Women

By Leigh Morrow

The Dalai Lama has declared, “The world will be saved by the western woman.” I think he is right, especially if midlife women are enlisted.

A new wave is forming on the horizon, and the population of midlife women is about to crest. More women are in their middle years than ever before in history. In the next fifteen years, and that's not a long period of time, our demographic will hit historical peaks—midlife women will comprise over half the female population. This growing demographic will allow midlife women a new opportunity, if they act, to be radical game-changers in the second half of their lives. To do our best work now, we need to use this upsurge to our advantage. Our real power is in our new numbers.

These large and formidable numbers of midlife women are voting for how we want the world to be every time we push a shopping cart down the grocery-store aisle, or go online to shop. This is profound economic power. As the chief consumer of our households, we are the ones buying, using and being mavens on everything from books to balsamic vinegar, and our endorsements can be invaluable for every business's bottom line. We can cause corporations to sink or swim depending on whether their practices and products align with our values.

Just look at the success of the "Grab Your Wallet" boycott campaign. Shannon Coulter had never been a political activist until now, and she came upon it late night shopping online. She is the woman behind "Grab Your Wallet", which encourages shoppers, mostly women by the way, to stay away from Trump-branded goods—Ivanka's fashions and jewelry, Donald's golf courses and wineries. The campaign hit a high note this month with major chains, including Neiman Marcus, Belk and big Nordstrom, dropping Trump merchandise, citing falling sales not politics, but the effect was the same.

Coulter exemplifies the new possibilities that social media present for ordinary consumers to catapult an idea for activism. Coulter admits being a consumer activist is a new role for her.

"Like many University students, I was more politically active then, but that part of my life has been really dormant my entire adult years", she admits. Coulter, like most of us, has been a very straight-ahead career girl for the last several decades, but now she says it feels as if that has changed.



Our sudden surge of activism over suggested reforms on woman's issues, like reproductive rights, has woken us up from a deep sleep. It is time to take action. Midlife women of the western world have had enormous privileges. We have been educated, allowed religious and sexual freedom, enjoyed equality in the workforce and multiple career options. Our current midlife workforce includes CEOs of public and private corporations, politicians and leaders of state, and a high percentage of entrepreneurs.

We know how to “make it happen” and who to call when a door won't budge. Collectively we can accomplish much. Tackling social issues such as poverty or illiteracy, or simply organizing a community garden, we know that as a unified group we can make a definite difference for the next generation and help to heal the planet.

Imagine if all midlife women only bought sustainable, socially conscious products that improved our lives without polluting, demanding brands that are affordable. We would refuse to purchase overpriced products and fraudulently “green washed” ideas and services. Combine this opportunity with our innate ability to nurture and care for others, and we are poised as the natural stewards of the Earth, its inhabitants and its ecology. Who, but women, are best to mother this troubled Earth? We western midlife women, with our skills, resources, and new numbers, are being offered a rare chance to nurse this planet, and its people, back to health. We have an obligation to use this watershed moment wisely.

We are finally here in numbers in the ways that seventies pop icon Helen Reddy was predicting. So let's not waste this opportunity. It is time to act. This statistical bump will end by 2031, and our daughters and their daughters will not have the same numerical advantage ever again. Our decisions, from what we buy to whom we vote for, and the causes we stand behind, have the power to radically shift society's image of us. The wise women of midlife will awake and passionately play out their remaining years in highly valued roles as stewards of our Earth, sage scouts to the future. They will be the heroines for their daughters and their daughters' daughters. Those who are brave enough to reject the idea that their later chapters are in some way diminished in value will create a new powerful midlife. It can be a sacred time that will change the very concept of midlife for others who follow, like the effect the liberating sixties had on our own lives.

Retreating is not on the list of possibilities.

“I feel a seriousness of purpose that I've never felt before in my life,” Coulter said. I feel that too.

Leigh Morrow, co-author of “Just Push Play” (www.jppmidlife.com) is a Vancouver writer who operates Casa Mihale, a vacation rental in the quaint ocean-front community of San Agustinillo, Mexico. Her house can be viewed and rented at

www.gosanagustinillo.com

Counting Taxis in Huatulco

By Julie Etra

8:45 – 9:30 AM, February 9, 2017

Rene and I positioned ourselves on the curb in front of Elektra, at the intersection of Boulevards Benito Juárez and Chahue, notebooks in hand. We counted all vehicles, coming from all four directions, passing through the traffic light. We divided them in two categories: (1) non-commercial passenger vehicles—sedans, SUVs, pickups, vans, etc., excluding commercial vans (e.g., airport, hotel, tours), and (2) taxis.



Why did we do this? NOT out of boredom, but simple curiosity. There are taxis, taxis, and more taxis, everywhere in Huatulco. For a couple of years or so, I have wondered about the ratio of taxis to passenger vehicles in this busy burg. So after I recruited Rene, we agreed on a date, time, and a busy intersection, and set off, unconcerned about statistical validity.

Bets? Guess? I guessed 20% taxis, friends guessed 25%. Not even close.

We counted 346 passenger vehicles and 352 taxis, about a 50:50 ratio.

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Violence against Women in Mexico

By Kary Vannice

In July 2015, major news outlets around the world reported that the Mexican government had issued the first ever “gender alert” for violence against women. The alert was issued in response to “systematic violence against women” and “an atmosphere of impunity and permissiveness” toward femicide (the killing of women), extreme gender violence and hate crimes. This alert lifted the veil off Mexico’s dirty, back-room secret of horrifying women’s rights abuse and domestic violence in a culture that, all too often, lays blame on the victim and not the victimizer.



The staggering statistics of female killings, sexual violence, and physical abuse made the world news, with news outlets like Aljazeera, NBC News and USA Today reporting on the state of women’s rights in Mexico.

Over the next year, The United Nations, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch all turned a critical eye toward Mexico’s treatment of women. The results of these investigations were sobering.

The UN described it as a “pandemic that affects two out of three women in Mexico.”

Human Rights Watch said, “Mexican laws do not adequately protect women and girls against domestic and sexual violence. Some provisions, including those that make the severity of punishments for some sexual offenses contingent upon the “chastity” of the victim, contradict international standards.”

Amnesty International focused one investigation on 100 women from “marginalized backgrounds” that had been drawn into the drug trade as small time dealers. The interesting twist in this report was that it focused its investigation on the authorities who were responsible for the care and well being of these women.

The report states...

“All of the 100 women held in federal prisons who reported torture or other ill-treatment to Amnesty International said they had experienced some form of sexual harassment or psychological abuse during their arrest and interrogation by municipal, state or federal police officers or members of the Army and Navy. Seventy-two said they were sexually abused during their arrest or in the hours that followed. Thirty-three reported being raped.”

The report goes on to state that 62 of the women had reported the abuse to a judge or other authority, but at the time the report was published, not one legal action had been taken against the abusers.

Erika Guevara-Rosas, the Americas Director at Amnesty International, made this statement at the time the report was released,

The Eye 14

“These women’s stories paint an utterly shocking snapshot of the level of torture against women in Mexico, even by local standards. Sexual violence used as a form of torture seems to have become a routine part of interrogations.”

From a purely political standpoint, gender alerts represent a “call to action” to local and national authorities to be more deliberate and persistent when conducting investigations into violent crimes against women, to both take these crimes more seriously and provide more protective measures for

women’s security, personal and legal.

However, when the victim often becomes the accused and when her protectors become her perpetrators, is it any wonder that more than a year later, headlines still read, “Despite ‘Gender Alert’ in Mexico, Violence Against Women Climbs.”

Awareness of this pandemic has finally reached the world political stage, with organizations like UNICEF speaking out about the sexual violence against teens in Mexico, stating that “more than 23,000, ages 12 to 17 suffered (violent sexual) aggression in 2014. Four of each 10 happened at home, school or work, abounded.”

And while women and men alike now frequently take to the streets outside the halls of government to raise awareness for women’s rights, the reality is, for lasting change to occur, this type of awareness needs to begin at home. All too often in Mexico, the home is a “safe haven” for abusers. It was only six months ago, on November 16, 2016, that the Supreme Court of Mexico finally declared marital rape illegal.

A recent survey conducted by the Mexican National Institute for Women reported that 45% of all women suffer some kind of violence in their lives-almost half of all women in the country. The rising number of victims and rising global awareness of this issue are bringing about some encouraging gains for women’s groups as women band together, forming support organizations, and raising funds to help victims.

More and more brave Mexican women continue to join the cause. They organize, protest, and find ingenious and artistic ways to “speak out” for the victims who are no longer able speak for themselves. Every November 25th, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, artist Elina Chauvet creates her well-known art installation called Zapatos Rojos (Red Shoes). Hundreds of red shoes in all shapes, sizes, and styles line the streets of major Mexican cities to represent the “silent” march of women who have fallen victims to femicide. So impactful is this representation that women artists and activists around the world now recreate this scene to represent their own country’s fallen victims.

Unless more progress can be made by holding authorities responsible for equal treatment of women victims, and stronger legislation can be passed to improve the security of women in Mexico, more red shoes will be needed to “stand in silent protest” against continued violence against women and girls in 2017.

Oh Papaya!

By Julie Etra

Papaya (*Carica papaya*) is native to southern Mexico and Central America and has become naturalized throughout the Caribbean Islands, Florida and several countries in Africa. It is also cultivated in India, Australia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, and the U.S. state of Hawaii. The Maradol variety of papaya was developed in Cuba between 1938 and 1956 by self-taught breeder Adolfo Rodríguez Rivera and his wife María Luisa Nodal Ochoa. The name of the cultivar resulted from joining parts of the names of its creators—"Mar," from María, and "adol," from Adolfo. The Maradol is grown in many states in Mexico, including Baja California, Campeche, Chiapas, Colima, Guerrero, Jalisco, Nayarit, Michoacán, Puebla, San Luis Potosí, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, Veracruz, and throughout the Yucatán.



Papayas are male, female, and hermaphroditic (both sexes), so until the plants flower it is impossible to tell whether it will yield fruit. The hermaphrodite has both male and female flowers and therefore can self-pollinate. They start producing fruit after about six to eight months and quit producing fruit at a commercial level between two and four years.

Nutritional characteristics of papaya are well known. It is particularly high in Vitamin A and C, as well as being a source of antioxidants such as carotenes, vitamin C and

flavonoids. Papayas contain the B vitamins folate and pantothenic acid; the minerals potassium, copper, and magnesium, and fiber. It contains the enzyme, papain recommended as a therapeutic for gastric problems, and as meat tenderizer, beer clarifier and cosmetic disinfectant.

Widespread cultivation and consumption in Mexico reflect a myriad of common names in various languages. In the Yucatán, papaya can be called *chi'ch'put*, *chich-put*, or *put* (Maya language) or *papaya de pájaro*; in Chiapas it can be called *otzo* (Zoque language) or *papaya de monte*; in Veracruz it could be *tutun-chichi* (Totonaca language) or *papayito cimarrón*. In Nayarit, the name would be *tzipi* (Cora language), and here in Oaxaca it would be *dungué* (Cuicatleca language).

Costeños will confirm that papaya's origins are southern Mexico. If anyone has read Leonard da Jandra's books about the coast (with a lot of history revolving around the establishment of the Parque Nacional papayeros (those who cultivate papaya) are part of his cast of characters. The wild papaya on the coast, which occurs in the coastal forests, is called *papaya silvestre* or *papaya raton* by the locals.

Depending on what reference you read, Oaxaca ranks either first or third in the national production of Maradol papaya. The Non-Governmental organization, the Papaya Oaxaca Product System Committee, maintains it is #1. Regardless, the coast of Oaxaca has been both a major producer and exporter of papaya for many years. Production is around 180,000 tons and is essential to the local economy, including not just production but transport and commercialization.

The main production areas in the state are the Coast (80%), followed by the Isthmus and the Cañada de Cuicatlán, a hot low canyon that links the Valley of Oaxaca to the southeast with the Valley of Tehuacán in Puebla state to the northwest. All papaya production is irrigated. Large in-country destination markets are the Central de Abastos in Mexico City, Puebla, Monterrey, Toluca and Baja California. Country-wide, five million tons are exported through various middlemen.

My research indicates that organic papaya is produced in only two places in Mexico: Colima, and just recently here in Bajos de Coyula. Colima exports to New York City. Organic production methodologies of course vary greatly from region to region, as a function of type of crop, soil, weather, availability of nutrients and their processing, and local and non-local markets, etc. Possessing a very soft skin, papaya is prone to numerous diseases, such as viruses and fungi, and insect damage, particularly from white flies and spider mites, which both suck the juice from the fruit. So organic production is difficult, labor intensive, and takes constant scrutiny. My husband and I had the pleasure of visiting the farm in Coyula a few weeks back: impressive! Their methods are not that unusual, given how composting is done here on the coast with local materials (take a workshop with Norma Pérez). I won't go into details here but almost all the materials used in composting are locally collected, including cow bones, cow dung, shrimp exoskeletons, and coffee shells (source of silicon).

So what is the difference between organic and organic certification in Mexico? The certification process! Anyone can grow and sell crops without chemical fertilizers or pesticides for self consumption or sell at the organic market, but they are not certified and don't necessarily need to be. There are a number of private certifying organizations such as Mayacert, Certimex, and PrimusLabs (pesticide residue analysis). The final word, though, comes through the federal government agency SAGARPA (Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca, y Alimentación, or Secretariat of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Rural Development, Fisheries, and Food).

Rising above Their Role: Women and the War of Independence

By Deborah Van Hoewyk

Mexico is macho, right? *Machismo* is matched with *Marianismo* (courtesy of the Catholic Church, every woman represents the pure and nurturing Mary), right? Except for the Tehuanas of the Isthmus, women take a back seat in Mexico, right?

Actually, not so much. The seeds of Mexican feminism were sown by women who fought—literally—in the country's revolutions: The War of Independence (1810-21) and, a century later, the Mexican Revolution (1910-20).

Fighting for Independence

The War for Independence happened at a time when records of what women were doing were in short supply, but they were there. They were there in secret societies that read and discussed Enlightenment texts—which had already contributed to the American (1775-83) and French (1789-99) Revolutions. They were there withdrawing money from their banks, dying on the battlefield, serving as spies and nurses. The tendency towards revolution and freedom was engendered by the oppressive systems of colonial racism, and took advantage of confusion in Spain brought on by Napoleon's rather misbegotten "Peninsula War" (1807-14), in which France tried unsuccessfully to take over the Iberian Peninsula.

As Mexico moved towards war, women from all levels of society used the circumstances of political and social unrest to emerge from their traditional role of household managers and actively join the fray. Here's a look at some of these "heroines of independence."

Perhaps the best known is **Josepha Ortiz de Domínguez**. Born in 1768 in what is now Morelia, Michoacán, Josefa Ortiz was orphaned very young and brought up by her older sister, María Sotero. María saw to it that Josefa was well educated, sending her to the Real Colegio de San Ignacio de Loyola Vizcaínas, opened in 1767 to provide secondary education to orphaned girls and widows (it is now Mexico's only continuously operating colonial institution, and has gone co-ed). Josefa started there in 1789, and two years later was introduced to José Miguel Domínguez Alemán, a lawyer and widower who often visited the school. Twelve years Josefa's senior, he married her later that year. In 1802, José Miguel was appointed magistrate (*corregidor*) of Queretaro, where they moved and settled down; eventually, they had 14 children. Josefa and José Miguel moved in high circles in Queretaro, and she, apparently no shrinking violet, became known as "*La corregidora*."

Social and professional life in New Spain was organized in a *sistema de castas*, a hierarchical system designed to rank people by purity of race. At the top were the European Spaniards, at the bottom were the indigenous people native to Mexico, and the intervening levels were characterized by degree of *mestizaje*, or mixed-race identity that resulted from intermarriage between Europeans and native peoples. After the European Spaniards (*Peninsulares*) came those born in Mexico but of European parentage—*criollos*—Josefa and José Miguel fell in this group. A Spanish priest assigned your *casta* at birth, which pre-determined your social and economic future, right down to the amount of taxes you paid.

Doña Josefa was known for her opposition to the *casta* system, with strong sympathies for those on the lower rungs of the ladder. She identified herself as "Mexican," not Spanish, and fought for indigenous rights.

Josefa had been drawn into the local movement that had been secretly discussing Enlightenment ideas of revolution (such discussions were prohibited by the Catholic church); she convinced her husband of the importance of these ideas, and started holding meetings at their home—Father Miguel Hidalgo was among the revolutionaries, and they planned to start the rebellion on December 8, 1810. However, the colonial government received news of the revolution on September 13th, and asked the Corregidor—José Miguel—to conduct a house-to-house search to find the leaders. He locked Josefa in her room to prevent her exposure and apprehension, but she was one step ahead of him and had arranged a signal to the co-conspirators to let them know they were in danger of arrest. Hidalgo and the other leaders escaped to the town of Dolores, about 50 miles as the crow flies to the northwest. At midnight between September 15th and 16th, Hidalgo issued the "*grito de Dolores*" (the cry of Dolores) that announced the fight for independence.

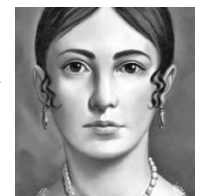


Eventually, both Josefa and her husband spent time in prison for their roles in the revolution, Josefa in a couple of monasteries. She was released in 1817, after being required to swear she would not work to support the revolution. After the war, Mexico adopted an imperial form of government rather than a Republic, an outcome Josefa did not approve of; she turned down an offer to serve as a lady-in-waiting to the Empress, as well as a "woman of honor" award bestowed by the Empress. In her later life, she was involved with other radical movements to reshape Mexico into a more egalitarian state. She died in Mexico City in 1829 at the age of 55.

Another "heroine of independence", was **Gertrudis Bocanegra Mendoza**, also from Michoacán and a reader of Enlightenment authors, served as a courier among rebel forces. Her husband and oldest son died in battle. Gertrudis Bocanegra was captured, tortured, and executed in 1817 in Pátzcuaro; apparently she harangued her executioners before they shot her to death. She was 52.



Leona Vicario Fernández de San Salvador, known as Leona Vicario (1789-1842), supported the war both tactically and financially. Living in Mexico City, she belonged to a secret society called Las Guadeloupes, which devoted itself to espionage—she and others managed to steal documents straight from the colonial viceroy's office, and pass them to the insurgents. Leona was also one of Mexico's first female journalists and an outspoken feminist.



Another native of Michoacán, **María Luisa Martínez de García Rojas** (1780-1817), served as a spy. Her messages were discovered by authorities and she was arrested and fined several times. The last time she went to jail, Martínez could not pay the fine, which had been raised, and she was executed. Facing the marksmen, she is reported to have said, "I have the right to do what I can for my country, because I am a Mexican woman. I do not think I have committed any crime, I have only done my duty."

Manuela Medina (1780-1822), a full-blooded *indigena* from Texcoco, served as a soldier for independence, fighting with the activist priest José María Morelos with the rank of Captain. She led her troops through seven battles against Spanish forces; her last battle was just before the end of the war, in 1821, where she was seriously wounded. Her injuries eventually killed her the next year. A second soldier-heroine, **María Fermína Rivera**, followed her husband into combat with Vicente Guerrero. She was killed at Chichihualco, Guerrero, in 1821.

Fighting for Rights

A century later, women also supported, fought, and died in the Mexican Revolution (1910-20), a war waged to rid the country of a thirty-year-old dictatorship and establish a constitutional republic that recognized the rights of Mexico's indigenous populations. While it was truly a national revolution, with significant historic sites across the country, the first shot was fired by a woman. Should you be in Puebla, be sure to visit the house of Carmen Serdán, which is now the Regional Museum of the Mexican Revolution. The guides will be happy to point out the bullet holes, not to mention a shattered mirror, as they tell the tale of how Carmen fired the shot heard round the hemisphere.

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By Liluzza and Jeza

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Perfect your Spanish! Word of the Month: Andar

By Julie Etra

Andar: to walk, to go out with or date, to be (estar) to come out, run (operate), to run around, go ahead, go around doing something, to be from (ser).

Synonym: caminar

Examples

1. Andamos juntos al cine. We walk together to the movies.
2. Mi coche anda bien. My car runs fine.
3. Todo anda bien/mal. Everything is okay.
4. Maria anda con Juan. Maria is dating Juan/going out with Juan.
5. Andale (pues). Move it!
6. Tomas siempre anda tomado. Tomas always is/ goes around drunk.
7. El andaba boracho cuando se cayo. He was drunk when he fell.
8. Ella siempre anda preocupada. She is always worried.
9. Andas por aquí? Are you from around here?
10. Andar pedo. To be drunk, (moderately vulgar).

Mexican Citizenship... What's in a Name?

By Brooke Gazer

Having had Permanent Resident status in Mexico for several years, my husband and I decided to become citizens. This involves a lot of paperwork and the Secretariat of External Relations, which is responsible for issuing Mexican citizenship, is particular about the format. In order to simplify the process, we asked Perla, the local immigration lawyer, to help us. Ours was the first citizenship application she had done, but she offered to research the requirements and was confident that she could guide us through the system. Rick's application was received and processed without any fanfare. Mine was an entirely different story.

Although I once had strong feminist tendencies and it was in vogue for women to keep their maiden name, for once in my life, I chose the "traditional" route. Adopting Rick's surname after we were married turned out to be a big mistake!

In Mexico, a birth certificate is the most important document a person can have. Mexicans are issued a personal identification code, known as a CURP, which follows them for life. The code incorporates the date of birth and the first two letters of the surname as it appears on the birth certificate. Mexican women do not change their maiden name upon marriage, they simply add "de" and their husband's name. Foreign residents are issued a CURP based on the surname and date of birth as it appears on their passport.

Shortly before I made my application, some federal regulations had changed and this complicated my submission. The Secretariat of External Relations insisted that my CURP must agree with the name on my birth certificate. Immigration, which had already issued my CURP, maintained it could not be altered unless I changed the name on my Canadian passport. It was a vicious circle that became a bureaucratic nightmare. After making several trips to each office, I was on the verge of giving up.

Perla however, is a pit bull. The battle took over a year, but she dug her teeth into the problem and wouldn't let go. She continued to pester, badger, and harass this department until someone gave in and reassigned my CURP to match my birth certificate.

Within about a month of submitting my application, I received Mexican citizenship in my maiden name. So, like the character in Oscar Wilde's play, I am "X" in Mexico and "Y" in Canada. Since we haven't left the country, I have yet to apply for a Mexican passport. Of course, I will need one to reenter Mexico if I do travel abroad. It is far easier for Canadians to travel, so with dual citizenship I can retain my Canadian passport. I imagine however, that traveling with two passports, bearing different names, may make air travel a bit more interesting!

Brooke Gazer runs *Agua Azul la Villa*, an ocean view Bed & Breakfast. www.bbaguaazul.com

Lic. Pera Penélope Vasquez Moctezuma

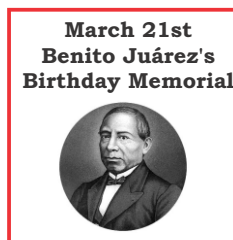
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www.consultorialegalvm.com

despachohuatulco@hotmail.com

Her office is in Marina Park Plaza.

Calendar



On the Coast Recurring Events:

AA Meetings:

English AA 6pm, Puerto Escondido Cafecito Rinconada, Every Thursday
English Al-Anon 4:30pm, Puerto Escondido Cafecito Rinconada, Every Saturday

Weekly Markets

Pochutla Market- Every Monday

March

Saturday, March 4th

Huatulco's Organic Market Santa Cruz 8am-2pm
Huatulco Being Art Exhibition, Mansiones Cruz del Mar, 10am-3pm

Friday, March 10th

Blues on the Beach
Latitude 15 Beach Club 8pm

Saturday, March 18th

Huatulco's Organic Market Santa Cruz 8am-2pm

Sunday, March 26th

Encuentro de Cocineros - Local cooks gather with sample dishes to raise money for local charities.
2pm Santa Cruz 100 pesos



Oaxaca City Recurring Events:

AA Meetings (English)

Daily - Monday and Thursday - 7 pm
Also Saturday at 1 pm - All 12 step groups welcome.
518 Colon

Religious Services

Holy Trinity Anglican Episcopal Church Sundays 11 am
Crespo 211 (between Morelos and Matamoros)
Liturgy followed by coffee hour. Information 951-514-3799

Religious Society of Quaker Friends Meeting, Saturdays 10 am Free
All are welcome. For more information and location, contact
janynelyons@hotmail.com

Weekly Markets

Etla Market, Every Wednesday
Tlacolula Market, Every Sunday

Biking

Oaxaca is More Beautiful on a Bicycle, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday & Sunday - 9 to 10:30 pm Free, Meet in front of Santo Domingo Church
Rental bicycles available at Mundo Ceiba, Quintana Roo 2011
You must bring a passport or Oaxacan credentials. They have tandems, too!

Ethnobotanical Garden Tours in English

Weekly - Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday - 11 am \$100 pesos
Entrance Reforma and Constitución.

Bridge

Tuesday Bridge Game at Oaxaca Lending Library, Pino Suarez 519, \$20 pesos, no partner necessary, starting at 1:00PM

Garden Club

Monthly - 1st Wednesday Free
The Oaxaca Garden Club is dedicated to: learning, sharing and education about gardening, agriculture and nature, primarily in Oaxaca. To receive the monthly notices of activities, send an email to oaxaca.garden.club@gmail.com

Hiking

Weekly - Tuesday & Friday 9 am - November thru March Minimal cost for transportation. Hoofing It In Oaxaca (<http://www.hoofingitinoaxaca.com/>) is a program of weekly hikes for adventurous gringos who hanker to explore this part of Mexico on foot. Reservations required.

Tour to Teotitlán del Valle

Weekly - Thursday and Saturday - 9 to 5 pm \$750 pesos
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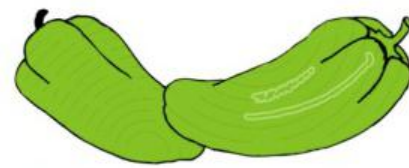
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