

JUNE-JULY 2006 MEXICO REPORT

A significant concern of my trip to Mexico in June was carrying out steps to implement a program to back some Huichol University students we knew about, who qualified because of their previous records and needs. It took several gatherings and much advice from different Huichol and an outsider with inside experience to find Huichol candidates, who are now receiving some help to defray some of their material expenses. Both students are from the community of *Tuapurie*, but one had left his native land at a young age to study in small urban areas, near Guadalajara, while the second only left his land to pursue studies recently. The first is at the Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Occidente, or ITESO, and the second at the Universidad Tecnológica de Guadalajara.

José Benítez Sánchez is someone who kept surging in my mind, after presenting some of his masterpieces to the public, as we did in the *Artes de México* publication, so I set out to see how he was doing in person. With the help of a close colleague and friend, Patricia Díaz Romo, I sought him out initially at his family ranch, which his wife told me he had left early that morning, because he was feeling ill. The next day, I reached him in the semi-urban Huichol community of Zitaküa. José Benítez told us he had symptoms of diabetes and was going to get treatment by resting three to four days at the Casa de Salud that is managed in Guadalajara by A.I.C.A.W. In any case, it was an important time to renew contact with him and listen to his comments, as a direct witness of some of his current development.

Yauxali is another 'compadre' (co-father) whose development I try to follow, and I did by stopping by his ranch near the coast of Nayarit a couple of times, until we coincided. He talked about the looting of sacred spots by a few treacherous native people, who had specialized in selling these artifacts to outsiders. I was surprised to hear him tell me his native roots were from the extended ranch of *Taimarita*, in the community of *Tuapurie*, since I had associated him with *Wautüa* and its annex of *Tutxipa*, where he lived much of his life as a renowned shaman. We felt it was necessary to renew our contact concerning the stone sculptures that the Museum of Zacatecas is interested in putting on permanent display. He and his brother Matsuwa (who passed away in 2005) carved these pieces several decades ago, as a legacy for future Huichol, which is more relevant now that many of their original models have disappeared.

Martha Turok, the Art's Director of The National Institute for the Education of Adults, invited me to review a major collection of Huichol, Cora and Tepehuano woven and embroidered crafts in Mexico City. These were gathered in storage, since the earliest acquisitions or donations to the National Indian Institute (INI) and included the recent acquisitions of the National Center for the Development of Indigenous People (CEDEI), as it is now called. It was important to see a very large amount of some early sashes and embroidered garments a few of which were dyed with natural

blue pigments on wool. It is interesting to note stylistic differences between Huichol and Cora woven bags, as well as embroidered Tepehuano and Huichol bags that are apparently similar. A large ancient calabash gourd with the carved figures of a deer on one side, which probably served as a recipient for corn beer or peyote, was a remarkable artifact, as was a sample of embroidery patterns that I photographed to get feedback.

Towards the end of my stay in Mexico, I went to the Huichol Sierra in July, where it was already raining much better than last year, which had given them generally miserable crops of maize and other agricultural resources. The hopes of the people were higher, although their political moral was low in the *Tuapurie* community. They did not agree with some of the government's recent land decrees, apparently in favor of their San Andrés, *Tateikitari* siblings over land that was previously recognized as theirs. Like their brethren in *Wautüa*, they felt the best way to prevent problems from occurring with outsiders coming to the mountains and mistreating, or being mistreated by, the natives was to prevent their influx, instead of creating programs to encourage it. Cirilo Carillo Montoya, whom we trained under ADESMO, as the main master weaver, showed me the current state of the weaving workshop, which we put together as a pilot program in 1986. The building's structure has held together well, with details that have been attended by him and a partner, who might produce some muslin cotton cloth in the future, without outside financial support. I left on July 16, on the last bus to leave the community for several weeks, since part of the road collapsed because of the rains the following day, beyond *Muxipa*.

As a side note: It became difficult translating my old English website postings into Spanish essays that also make sense, when I realized in the process that some of their original content had to be made more meaningful, or brought up to date. Currently these English postings are being revamped to correspond better to my Spanish versions that have their own accent and variant meaning.

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