

Fernando Pérez

Oaxaca, Mexico is a magical place. I knew this ahead of time from all the rumors that I had heard from family and friends. I was lucky to have met a great older woman named Doña Luz before the trip who was from the city. We met at the airport in Los Angeles on our way to Oaxaca and I helped ease her nerves and helped with her heavy luggage. She was full Zapotec Indian, but a Mexican National who worked as a maid for a rich family in Los Angeles, and was traveling home for the holiday. I picked her brain about her hometown and her culture and when we arrived at the Oaxaca airport, she introduced me to her daughter and grandson who generously offered me a ride to the Casa Brava, where I was to stay. They embodied the same great and gentle spirit that she had shown me, something familiar of family. I was comfortable communicating with them in both Spanish and English, and I learned a few words in Zapotec as well. This first hand experience was a great introduction to the city. When they dropped me off at my destination, they made sure that I took down their phone number, address, and insisted that I come to dinner over their house sometime during my stay; an experience that I later took and will never regret.

When I walked through the door of Casa Brava, I was greeted by my friends from the Creative Writing Program. A few of us walked down to the main plaza and had dinner, taking in the sights and sounds of the evening. Most people in Mexico enjoy their dinners in the late evening and fill the plazas late into the night. The town was very much influenced by Spanish culture and architecture, but its people and present culture beautifully embody the blend of Native America with Europe.

My stay in Oaxaca was full of personal experience, reading, and writing. One of the books that I was glad to have with me was *Labyrinth of Solitude* by Octavio Paz because it dealt with an inside perspective of the Mexican psyche and cultural practices. I spent time in museums, in libraries, archaeological sites, cafes, and my room soaking in and processing all that I could from the senses. My time in Oaxaca was absolutely rewarding. It was beneficial for me to be able to relax and be a part of the great city of Oaxaca. I was able to put my project into perspective, read the necessary books for research, and journal toward its completion. I brought home with me the memories, gifts, and photographs of an amazing trip that will influence my writing for years to come.