

El Señor Del Rescate

As I awake one morning my mom perturbs my sleep with a minty toothbrush and some nice clean socks. It's time to get up she states. We're going to be late. As we pass my cousins big houses my smirk turns upside down. I think I know where we're headed. I drag my tiny corpse out of a small red converse shoe while my grandma helps my brother out. Great, church. And as always there's no room left inside. We're the last ones to arrive. We push through eventually and find a warm cozy wall to push against. My mom could barely hear me rant about how tired I am. There's live music coming in from somewhere. And all of a sudden my neck snaps back into place. As I poke my head out the left side of my mom's leg I see a million Satan's with capes of his face embedded on. Dancing all around us in a ring. All making screeching noises and pushing in between us. Attempting to separate us from our parents. They're all carrying big knives. I just tighten my eyes, this is it. When all of a sudden they come in too. A group of kings with little angels guiding them come in and take the center floor. They too have red capes with his face on and bead shakers. They're all wearing a face that's been watching me grow. A face that sees my dreams and fears. He is my family's home.

That home is called El Señor Del Rescate. By home I don't mean just a house. But a whole community that has been gathering to commemorate him every second of February for the last 2 centuries. Whether it be in its origin home place, Tzintzuntzan Michoacán Mexico. Or a catholic church in Tacoma. There's no denying that these roots of faith run deep. For the past 18 years of my life he's always just been 'El Señor Del Rescate'. A saint I must admire as he's painted on a black stiff plaque. His face sadly frowning as a crown of thorns hug his head. Much like the images of Jesus being crucified. He sits with, 'Los Judios' and what appears to be some followers and his mother. So, what was so intriguing about this saint? What was different about him from all the others? That's something I hadn't realized was impacting the Tzintzuntzan community for many more years to come.

As I walk through the frosted parking lot a hot wave of irritation swallows me. It's easy to sway from left to right in a straight line. I don't see why I have to come every Tuesday. I have homework to do. "Alright everybody" the instructor says. "Get in a straight line, we're going to practice this another time". Can the hour go by any faster? Wearing bear paws was clearly a huge mistake. I'm glad I don't have any aunts or uncles here, time would've been cruller.

Fast-forward a month later...

"Your dress for la dansas ready" says amá. Freshly ironed, I'm finally excited. This is something I had learned to admire. The performance. To be a part of putting on a show for others younger than me. I remember the first times I had seen la dansa. It was all scary with the Halloween masks but the center gave hope. I learned not to be frightened. After all it was just a mask. And I'd be a part of the center now, with a crown and all. Time to shine. One step at a time.

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Digital Essay: Found Object

In those innocent naïve moments, I don't think I knew what I was really doing. I just wanted to perform in front of the crowd and be a part of something that involved dancing. I love to dance and wouldn't waste a second without it. If only I knew I was contributing to my job as a daughter of Tzintzuntzan parents to continue the legacy. A tradition I had no idea had even existed beyond my years. This dance was in honor of El Señor Del Rescate. A saint whose apparition was found during an outbreak of smallpox in Michoacán. Hence the name "Del Rescate". There isn't much when I attempted to find more about him. However, about him appearing himself to locals surrounding the outbreak of smallpox coincided with what my grandmother had also said. This in regards to how he came to be such an impactful figure in our heritage. My grandmother had also mentioned that we do this dance in order to give thanks to him for saving our town from the smallpox.

No longer now is he just another "saint" to me. I've learned to realize that as silly as smallpox causalities may seem to people. And how dancing in order to convey his battle with smallpox can be seen now as 'irrelevant'. We have taken it seriously every year. It has become our fingerprint. Some people who are really devoted to him now even volunteer as "cargeros". These cargeros need to do it with a seriously hearted devotion to him. cargeros must fulfil the duties of El Señor by showing up to houses that are willing to receive him for days or weeks. Depending on how long they would like to keep him for and pray with a Rosario. They receive a blessing upon their homes in return.

To really dive into the research of his upbringings I think it's necessary to travel back to this origins real home. Tzintzuntzan is still a developing little town and I think more could be found by actually going there and visiting the historic museums. Places which proclaim his first appearances and such. If there's one thing that's still very mind blowing is how we as a Tzintzuntzan community still gather around him to commemorate him even in the state of Washington. I know this isn't the only community who does it. Each pueblo has their own devoted saint they make a thanks towards. But yet, El Señor Del Rescate is not just a saint who provides hope but rather a crucial identity to the people of Tzintzuntzan.