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Renting Freedom

I'm driving again

By Kat Avila | Web Published 3.26.2007

It's nice to have a car. Still, as I drove around in my rented Sentra, I thought about what a waste of money and resources cars were. People go into debt to buy a car, then there is gas, maintenance, and insurance. Elsewhere in the world I would have jumped onto a train to get where I needed to go.

For every Southern Californian who owns a car, I wonder how many of us are crippled or have our lives on hold because we cannot get around as easily.

But last weekend I had wheels. They took me to San Diego for the final weekend of the 14th Annual San Diego Latino Film Festival 2007 (March 8-18). SDLFF 2007 included an animation showcase, as well as a spotlight on Chilean cinema. My main reason for being there Saturday night was for the sold-out premiere of the independent, live-action film featuring Javier Hernandez's comic book superhero EL MUERTO: THE AZTEC ZOMBIE.

In my 2004 LatinoLA interview with Javier - who had a cameo role in the film - he mentioned selling the film rights in 2003.

Javier, actor Tony Plana and his wife, and the producers were in attendance for a Q&A after the film. Wilmer Valderrama who played El Muerto was not present. Director and screenwriter Brian Cox was out of the country working on another production. Brian had created the caretaker character that Tony played in the film. Tony liked the exploration of two cultures, of Catholic and indigenous religious beliefs.

On Sunday I was turned back by the traffic on the 405 Freeway and missed Jose Cabrera's booksigning party for PRIME CUT: THE PREMIERE CRYING MACHO MAN COLLECTION. He e-mailed, "The booksigning was a smash! I had a great turnout with a few members of VARIETY.com covering the event. I'll definitely have more events coming soon!" He included a photo of him smiling in front of a wall of his cartoons.

In place of the booksigning, I zoomed over to Fullerton Arboretum at California State University, Fullerton, for the museum exhibit, "Sowing Dreams, Cultivating Lives: Nikkei Farmers in Pre-World War II Orange County," showing through July 29, 2007. The exhibit covers the arrival of Japanese farmworkers into Orange County, the crops they grew and the communities they created, up through the incarceration of this ethnic group in President Roosevelt's internment camps during World War II.

Among the exhibit items, I was puzzled to see a recipe for "Juanito's Tamales Verdes." When I turned over the free flyer, the words of Dr. Ernest Nagamatsu explained: "It was a crisp, cold December morning when I last watched Juanito and his wife leave walking down our long dirt driveway out to the main highway to return to his home in the "La Colonia." I wondered if I would see him again the next season to select workers and I did not see him again. I marveled at his dignity and love ... and I made a wish that Juanito live on in our Christmas traditions. In our home, 'Christmas is Tamales' and I take great pride in having learned to make some that taste like that, ones presented to us each Christmas by Juanito and his wife. Juanito taught us in his way,



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the true meaning of the giving of 'Christmas Tamales.'"

It made me think about the Mexicano family who had shared their dinner table with my father and his buddy when they were teenagers picking crops around Oceanside. My dad said he had been trying to make some money to buy track shoes, and that he and his friend ate through the cans of food they had brought a lot sooner than they expected. He used to tell the story so vividly that I could almost see and smell the meal made more delicious by strong hunger pangs.

The museum is surrounded by 26 acres of greenery. As I sat on the lawn watching the ducks on the lake, it was hard to leave this oasis from urban concrete and asphalt.

When Monday came, I regretfully returned my temporary wheels, grounded again.

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