

Escuela Nacional de Antropología E Historia - National School of Anthropology and History: 1980-1986

Eric Romero, Ph.D.
New Mexico Highlands University

Abstract: The narrative is an account of the processes, experiences and insights gained from my participation in the Becas Para Aztlán Program 1980- 1986. Written in a memoir format, it identifies some of the preliminary obstacles encountered with the coordination of the Becas Para Aztlán program. It stipulates the particular process of my matriculation into the Master's Degree Program in Social Anthropology at the National School of Anthropology and History, in Mexico City. A sub-narrative of the testimony elaborates on areas of cultural exploration, academic advancement and personal identity formation.

KEY WORDS: Becas Para Aztlán, Casa Aztlán, International Education, Chicano Studies

Introduction

The following narrative shares insight and experience from my participation in the Becas Para Aztlán Program. I participated in the program from 1980 through 1986 during which I finished my program of study at the Escuela Nacional de Antropología E Historia. I also taught at that same school and was involved with a variety of extracurricular, institutional and athletic activities. This narrative is segmented into ten categories relative to the different aspects of my experience. I begin with biographic information that describes my cultural and educational preparation. I then detail the process and events that determined the specific program of study that I accomplished. I include accounts of cultural, political and collegial relationships that I benefited from, and my participation in the Casa Aztlán household. I conclude with a self-reflexion on the impact these circumstances and events had upon my personal and professional identity.

Cultural and Educational Foundations for Participation in Becas Para Aztlán

Coming from a small rural community, I had assumed that big city life would be alienating and contaminated. I was raised in the small town of Walsenburg, located in southern Colorado. I was privileged to have a river, an acequia, foothills and mountains as a backyard and a playground. My siblings, the neighborhood kids, and I were always outdoors with recreation and sport. Every year, my father grew a significant vegetable garden, and we ate the produce and an occasional butchered animal. We were acquainted with all families in the neighborhood and a sense of community was well in place. I was raised with a stipulated cultural identity as Spanish/Hispanic. Community rhetoric suggested a non-confrontational Spanish heritage. Mexican identity was not well accepted by community and family elders. In the small community of Walsenburg, there was not a significant migrant stream of Mexican labor. My eventual college experiences, in Colorado and Mexico, would detail further this complicated journey of ethnicity and cultural identity formation. I would also embrace the dynamic opportunities of big city life.

I left the community of Walsenburg to go to the University of Colorado, Boulder. I completed my BA in four years and received a strong education both in breadth and depth. I finished with an undergraduate degree in anthropology with a minor in Chicano Studies. During my junior year in college, I went on a study abroad semester to Jalapa, Veracruz, México. I was intrigued with “Jarocha” culture and the program excursions to other parts of the country. The combination of the two interrelated disciplines and the study-abroad experience influenced my eventual decision to submit for the Becas Para Aztlán Scholarship.

I struggled with the Becas Para Aztlán (BPA) application, submitting a hand-written contestation of the questions. This initial submission would go to the Comité de Democracia Rural (Committee for Rural Democracy) in Crystal City, Texas. When I read my copy of the submitted application and reflect upon the simplicity of my presentation and answers, I recognize that my acceptance was probably based on my participation in several Chican@ student movement activities. I had participated with the United Mexican/American Student (UMAS) organization at CU-Boulder and served as a board member. Additionally, I participated in strategic planning and articulation with other student organizations representative of multicultural activities. I was very familiar with civil rights concerns, student issues, and the Chican@ movement. I considered myself cosmopolitan in thought and analysis and had my heart set on a civic engagement career. By means of my participation in UMAS activities I was introduced to multiculturalism and eventually internationalism. These political ideas were

parallel to my academic training in Anthropology and Chican@ Studies. Although I had not had discussion of Marxist thought in any of my undergraduate classes, I became acquainted with Marxist literature and analysis of contemporary issues because of my participation in student organizations. These experiences provided me with an academic foundation to better understand the intellectual journey that would become my “*Becario*” experience.

I received notification of the BPA award in the summer of 1980. At the time I was working as a Community Center Director in Lafayette, Colorado. This position was sponsored by the County Extension Office, out of Colorado State University in Fort Collins. I had several community development projects including cultural activities, community gardens and developing a local boxing team. I had played around with boxing while I was in school in Boulder and I was a coach/ boxer at the Community Center. I left the job to study in Mexico and left the position in good hands. With the blessings of my parents and the support of my friends, I left to Mexico, not sure of what I would encounter.

Orientation and Institutional Placement

On the flight to Mexico D.F., I met Dolores Pitman, whom had also accepted the BPA scholarship. It was nice to have someone to share anticipation with during the flight and with the ground transportation in Mexico City. The flight coming into D.F. was remarkable. I had never flown over a city of that size and it was daunting to see the tremendous expanse of the city. The initial orientation was held in the offices of El Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACYT). For several days we were acquainted with the parameters and protocols of the BPA program and the other Chican@s were excited to participate. The BPA program was initially designed mostly as a program for medical students. Regardless, several of us had been accepted to pursue postgraduate work in the Arts and Humanities. I was determined to continue with anthropology as my primary area of study. However, complications arose within the first week concerning CONACYT’s protocol for placing students.

In my circumstance, I was told to “identify” my own postgraduate program. CONACYT held a preliminary list of potential programs. However, matriculation was dependent on the individual efforts of the *Becario*. I was provided with a travel stipend to explore different graduate programs. First, I, with other *Becarios*, visited the Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (UAP). We arranged the travel and made the trip to Puebla, Puebla to clarify the degree programs. The UAP did not have an anthropology program. We had returned to speak with CONACYT for more counsel. Next, I visited La Universidad Veracruzana in Jalapa (UV-Jalapa). I had been to Jalapa years before, as part of my CU Study Abroad program, and I had hoped to be placed there. Unfortunately, La Universidad Veracruzana did not have a graduate program in Anthropology.

I returned to the D.F. and visited the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). They had an Institute for Archeology but did not offer a master’s program in Social Anthropology. I then visited La Universidad Iberoamericana, A.C. The “Ibero” is a private Jesuit university system in Mexico City. I had spoken with their recruitment office and several faculty members. The Ibero was attentive to the needs of international students and they were willing to accept me into their program of study. The areas of specialization were interesting and there were many international students at the main campus. Speaking with some of the Ibero students, mention had been made of the Escuela Nacional de Antropología E Historia (ENAH) as the anthropology school “para los grillos y los rebeldes” (for the political and the rebellious).

Because of my experiences with social justice issues, I was enticed by this reference to the direction of the ENAH.

The (ENAH) had not been identified to me by the CONACYT counselors nor had they been identified by the other universities that I had visited. Fellow BPA Becario (scholarship recipient) Miguel Guerrero and I made the trip to Periférico Sur y Calle Zapote to visit the school. Immediate to our arrival I was attracted to the campus activities. There was a diversity of students and a “planton” (political demonstration), in support of the national teacher’s union, was taking place. There were vendors with wares, spread upon the ground, displaying indigenous textiles, crafts and books. Miguel spoke with the linguistics department and I spoke with the personnel in the social anthropology department. Dr. Augusto Arteaga was the department head and he was gracious with his time. He had explained the program of study and patiently took time to hear me. I struggled with my Spanish, but I did describe where my previous studies had been focused. He was candid and honest to tell me that the program of study would be difficult due to my lack of academic Spanish as well as my limited familiarity with progressive social theory. The undergraduate program for anthropology, at the ENAH, did not allow for many elective credits, or a liberal arts curriculum, since in the first semester they delved directly into anthropological theory and methods. I became very aware of the differences between the education systems in the United States in comparison to the Mexican system. More disheartening was the disclosure that the academic year had already started that previous spring. I would have to wait for the next cycle to matriculate into the master’s program. The stipulated policy, at CONACYT, was that the Becario had to be matriculated in a master’s program to receive the “mensual” (monthly stipend). I was in a difficult position to decide upon programs and universities. The Ibero would accept me into their current program, however, I decided on the “progresista” school, the ENAH.

Scholarship Postponement & Return to Mexico

I had petitioned CONACYT for a postponement of my scholarship and was awarded a 5 month suspension. I then decided to return to the United States to pursue employment and generate more savings. Having become acquainted with the amount that the “mensual” provided, I realized that other resources were necessary.

My first significant employment followed a path that many other “Walsenburgers” had pursued. I went to work “doodle bugging” (seismic petroleum exploration). My work entailed placing lengths of seismic receivers (cones) into lengthy swaths of land, sometimes miles in length. I was sent to a crew, which was stationed in Scooby, Montana in the winter of 1980. In spite of extreme sub-zero working conditions and intermittent bouts of failing equipment, I was able to save money to return to Mexico and to warmer weather.

Upon my return to Mexico City, in February of 1981, I was greeted with the admission from many of my fellow Becarios, as well as the attentive personnel at CONACYT with surprise of my return. My first stop was Casa Aztlán; Joaquín Romo #42: Colonia: La Joya: Delegación; Tlalpan. This domicile was to become the unofficial site of the BPA program in Mexico City.

Matriculation and Academic Program

Many students, who had started the BPA program, became discouraged with the inefficiency of the CONACYT administration. The stipend amount was limited and the admission processes were onerous. I had to pay a Mexican attorney for a legal translation of all my educational transcripts. The translation included my k-12 transcripts, as well as my B.A. These official translated documents had to be submitted to the Secretaría de Educación Pública

(SEP: Secretary of Public Education) for a “revalidación de estudios” (evaluation of international transcripts). I was quite proud to have graduated from the University of Colorado, a Class 1 research university. Evidently, the SEP was not excited that I had received college credit for riflery, archery, bowling, weight-lifting and other non-academic courses. The rigor and intensity of Mexican undergraduate college degree programs did not favor broad curricular electives. Nonetheless, my transcripts were accepted and I applied to the ENAH. I had a two month period before the propedéutico (introductory) semester would begin. This introductory program was rigorous and stipulated discourses and academic capacities that would be requirement for the Master’s program. At my avail, I had both the Cassell’s and Velasquez’ Spanish/English dictionaries and immediately focused on vocabulary development and reading comprehension.

“Progresista” as a school category, spoke to the mission of the school for social reform, civic engagement and attention to subaltern communities. Marxist social, historical and political analysis is a *de rigueur* fundamental. My limited understanding of Marxism was not only made immediately evident but it became my academic challenge to qualify myself in preparation of the Master’s program.

I familiarized myself with the public transportation systems, which are some of the most effective systems in the world. This was both an exploration and a necessity. During my waiting period for the propedéutico and the first semester I would randomly ride the busses, trolley and subway both to explore the city and to learn the systems. This would eventually become recreation and repose for me, to purposely get lost in the city and navigate the route home. Direct route taxis “peseros” and the public busses were the most effective transportation forms for my needs. I did fine on the subway, being able to navigate due to my tall, thin stature. Courtesies and protocols, for street travel, were evident and I was able to fine tune these strategies for efficient transport.

When I returned to México D.F. I found a space allocation with some Becaria sisters in Casa Miramontes, also an unofficial seat of the BPA program. There was not a room available, so my sleeping quarter was a sizable walk-in closet. Casa Miramontes was about a 45 minute commute to the ENAH and this was short, in comparison to some of the distances Becarios would have to travel. After this four-month period, a room became available at Casa Aztlán and I moved over to that residence. Becario Manuel Romero had returned to the US and I occupied the vacancy.

Casa Aztlán was a large 5 bedroom, 4 bathroom house, 6 habitation rooms including the servant’s quarters. BPA becarios had occupied the house for a couple of years so it already had history and identity. A block from the major street Insurgentes Sur, Casa Aztlán would be important to me and to many levels of community. I was also lucky, that the ENAH was a walking distance from Casa Aztlán. In less than ten minutes I could cross the San Fernando community and be at school.

The BPA program had sent medical student to all regions of the republic, the majority allocated to universities in the D.F., such as the UNAM, UAM Aztecapolzalco, Colegio de México, Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Instituto Politécnico and Bellas Artes received BPA placements. Communication with becarios, in the “provincia”, was dependent on periodic visitations to the D.F. for administrative and personal needs. Casa Aztlán served as host for many of these visitations. Within the D.F. an elaborate network existed between different becarios matriculated in different universities and living in many different “delegaciones” (municipal districts).

My first semester in the Maestría de Antropología Social was exciting and eventful. I came to recognize the quality of education that is provided in Mexican universities. The intensity of study and level of discussion in the classroom was impressive, but also demanding. Becaria Carmen Atilano, from Colorado, was also in the maestria program. We supported one another and she helped me on so many different levels of the program. I came to appreciate how the ENAH is considered as one of the most prestigious anthropology schools, not only in Mexico, but in Latin America as well. The student body was very cosmopolitan with students from Europe, Africa and Latin American countries. This would be appropriate for a discipline and a school that appreciates and invests in cultural diversity. Other students in the maestria program were also from different regions of México and the world. ENAH faculty continues to be recognized on a global level, and I was privileged to have studied under their direction.

The first semester reading assignments overwhelmed me, not only because of my Spanish language inadequacy but also because of the theoretical depth of the readings. My BA, in anthropology, did not equip me well enough with insight and discourse to function confidently at the level required by the maestria de la ENAH. I dedicated myself wholeheartedly to study, spending much time in the school library and at Casa Aztlán. I would sometimes chain myself to my makeshift desk to accomplish continuous hours of study. I have always been physically active and to sit for lengthy hours, at a time, would make me anxious. I developed a discipline for desk time and found many spaces to study. The ENAH was constructed next to the pyramid of Cuicuilco the oldest pyramid in the Valley of Mexico. As an ENAH student, I had access to the pyramid and would often go there to read while sitting on an important historic structure. Many of my books were elaborately marked up, not limited to fluorescent highlighters. I would write definitions and word translations, in the margins, and would often have to repeatedly read passages and chapters to fully comprehend meaning.

At the start of my second year of the maestria, the new Director of the ENAH was identified as Dr. Gilberto Lopez y Rivas. He had previously received his Ph.D. at the University of Utah. He had defended a dissertation concerning Chicanos in the United States. He had published *"The Chicanos: Life and Struggles of the Mexican Minority in the United States"* in 1972. Dr. Lopez y Rivas offered a special seminar in 1983 for master's degree students that were interested in the Chicano problematic. Jorge Gonzalez, Becaria Carmen Atilano and myself participated in the weekly meetings discussing a variety of topics and perspectives.

Extracurricular & Praxis Activities

A very significant aspect of my learning curve was all the extracurricular activities in the ENAH. On a continual basis lectures, workshops, symposia, demonstrations, documentary films, creative expression, and exhibitions all elaborated on a diversity of social issues throughout the nation and world. The "progresista" nature of the ENAH invited solidarity movements, collaborations with labor unions, social movements, presentations and progressive discussions. I got into the habit of collecting graphic posters of the variety of events at the school and eventually increased the poster collection to include academic and political events in the city. At one time most of the walls in Casa Aztlán were "wallpapered" with this collection of posters. I presently have these posters in my possession and have had them on display or available for research in various venues.

The maestria program included field research excursions at the end of the second and third semesters. My developed thesis focused on undocumented immigration to the city of Denver, Colorado and so, on two occasions, I traveled to Denver to conduct research. During

my third semester of the maestría, I and other becarios were invited to develop an inter-institutional program that is still in existence today. The Seminario Permanente de Estudios Chicanos y de Fronteras (SPEChF) was established as collaboration between researchers, professors, students and agencies.

El Seminario Permanente de Estudios Chicanos y de Fronteras (SPEChF) del Área sobre la Cuestión Nacional, Chicanos y Fronteras de la Dirección de Etnología y Antropología Social (DEAS) del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), fue creado en septiembre de 1982 por parte de un grupo de investigadores de este instituto (DEAS y otros centros de trabajo), así como de estudiantes mexicanos y chicanos de diversas partes del suroeste estadounidense que se encontraban en México en ese entonces.

(www.seminario-permanente.com)

I had participated with the Seminario since its inception, and continued to participate until I left the D.F. in 1986. I had assisted with several publications and media presentations in collaboration with other members. Much of the work focused on Mexico/US relations, border issues, immigration and Chican@ studies.

One of the publications was an analysis of the, then proposed, Simpson-Mazzoli Immigration Bill of 1984. Becarios participating in the Seminario were able to contribute insight and perspective that enhanced much of the presentations and publications. On another occasion, along with Becario Roberto de Anda, we were invited to discuss the pending IRCA legislation during a nationally televised discussion program. Prior to the airing of the program Seminario member Carlos Melecio emphasized that I use my Nuevomexicano vocabulary and mannerisms to lend authenticity to the Chican@ perspective of the legislation.

On another occasion, I had been sent to La Escuela Normal del Estado de Nuevo Leon, Monterrey to present a similar address concerning current USA legislation.



Several Becarios had also collaborated with UCLA graduate students Marcos Vargas and Luis Herrera in the planning and implementation of the “Binational Labor Organizing Conference” in 1985. These colleagues, as part of their graduate work with the UCLA School of Urban Planning, under the direction of Dr. Leo Estrada, spent the better part of the year organizing the conference, with the intention of facilitating communication between labor unions from Mexico and the United States. Myself and other Seminario members and becarios facilitated the discussions between sister unions on both sides of the border. Marcos and Luis stayed at Casa Aztlán during the planning period. The eventual conference was successful in establishing binational communication ties and collaborations.

Institutional Advocacy and Field Research

As a continuation of my thesis research and work with the Seminario, I created an area of investigation at the ENAH. The undergraduate programs of Social Anthropology and Ethnology required undergraduate thesis development for students to complete their degrees. I was charged with creating the first version of the “Taller Investigativo de Frontera Norte y de Chicanos” (Investigative Workshop for the Northern Border and Chicanos). This “Investigative Workshop” would be, and still is, a four semester research methods course that provides BA students with theoretical and methodological strategies to carry out research for thesis development. I was honored to be the first faculty member to direct this research component. Initially, approximately

20 ENAH undergraduates participated in the workshop and field investigations. During the same timeframe I also taught several English courses in the Department of Languages, also at the ENAH. As of the writing of this memoir, I am still in contact with several of the undergrad students that were members of the first generation of this workshop. ENAH graduate Sigfrido Embarcadero Martinez, who presently resides in El Paso provided me with a copy of his “Tesis de Licenciatura” which he defended in 1993; (Migración de un Pueblo de Guerrero a Los Angeles, California). I use his thesis in my current instructional practices to demonstrate the degree of integrity and depth of Mexican higher education research and thesis development.

With the ENAH workshop, we made several visitations to the northern Mexico border. On one field research visits we spent four weeks in the El Paso/Juarez border area. The ENAH provided us with bus transportation and a stipend to accomplish the field research and data collection. We collaborated on some group projects and allowed students to investigate issues of their own particular interest. Group projects included internal migration, border crossing, maquiladora industries, street gangs, tourist economies, and indigenous communities. We had group visits to a couple of the maquiladoras, Philips and Magnavox. We gained access to these industries by explaining, to the administration, that we were studying labor management practices. The truthful reason for the visits was to research labor force conditions and labor organizing. Some individual research projects included: language acculturation, sexual tourism, contraband, political affinities and other border issues. One of our group visitations was to the Escuela Superior de Agricultura Hermanos Escobar (ESAHE). This historic school has a history of progressive pedagogy and student empowerment. Consequently, it was a college similar to the ideological underpinnings of the ENAH. We had some very significant discussions with faculty and students and future collaboration were arranged.

In 1986, the National Association for Chican@ Studies (NACCS) held their annual conference in El Paso, Texas, during the same period that we were in Ciudad Juarez doing our field research. An underlying theme of the conference was to identify border issues. NACCS was originally established at New Mexico Highlands University in 1973 as the National Association of Chicano Social Scientists. ENAH students were familiar with much of the research and content shared by NACCS researchers. They were excited about their attendance in the conference. Not all of the ENAH students had visitation privileges to come into the United States. Several crossed without authorization to participate in the conference.

I had a paper accepted for the conference and I also participated in a panel discussion with other members of the Seminario. I chaired a conference session titled “Perspectiva Mexicana Sobre Estudios De Migraciones y Chicanos.” Rosy Zuniga (Seminario) and myself presented a “plactica” titled “Las Instituciones Educativas Mexicanas que Comprenden los Problemas de Chicanos”. We elaborated on the work of the Seminario and identified other Mexican colleges and universities that had offered research or course work on Chican@ Studies. During the same session I presented advancements on my thesis and titled it “Relaciones Cotidianas entre Comunidades Chicanas y Trabajadores Mexicanos Indocumentados”.

The ENAH students participated, as audience, in a variety of conference presentations and workshops. For that particular conference the NACCS site organizing committee had made articulation and visitation agreements with the Universidad Autónoma de Cd. Juárez (UACJ). We had just finished our visitation to the Escuela Superior de Agricultura Hermanos Escobar. The ENAH students had posted their comments of the NACCS conference on a bulletin board (pre twitter, Facebook, etc.). Within their comments they criticized the conference organizers for the lack of Spanish language presentations, limited presentations that truly addressed border

phenomena and they questioned the selection of the UACJ as a collaborating university rather than the ESAHE. Needless to say I was quite proud that my students were critical and confident, to the degree that they could voice their concerns to the conference organizers.

Upon returning to the ENAH to begin the subsequent semester, the students had shared much of their field experiences and many were invited to present in their other classrooms and activities. By means of the investigative workshop we had sponsored several other theme discussions relevant to Chican@ Studies and border issues. Southern Colorado land grants activist Ron Sandoval had been visiting Mexico for some personal reasons and we had scheduled him into the ENAH for a guest lecture regarding the land grants movement of New Mexico and Colorado. By means of classroom instruction, border field investigations and guest lectures, we were able to divulge Chican@ issues into several colleges in Mexico D.F., including the prestigious Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico (UNAM).

Athletic Activities

Besides political, and academic, activities, I personally was invested in several levels of athletic activity. Following a pathway established by becario Manuel Romero, I got involved with the UNAM boxing team. Although I was not registered as a UNAM student, I was able to borrow becario Estevan Navarro's student I.D. to create my own access to the system. I fought in my own name, using his student number. I had previously had some boxing experience having participated in several boxing "smokers", while I was a student at CU-Boulder. I fought at middle weight, which required that I would lose weight for bouts. We had fought in many gyms throughout Mexico D.F. and some of the gyms had been homes to national and international champions including José Pipino Cuevas, Joaquin Rocha and Ruben Olivares. Coach "El Profe" Anguldo would have us meet at these obscure gyms in the D.F., and we would weight in to see if there was an availability of fighters at our own respective weights. If not, he would try to match us with "un peso cercano" or approximate weight classes. On more than one occasion I fought boxers heavier than myself. I boxed out of that gym for a couple of years having placed second in the UNAM inter-university meet and eventually winning the Tlalpan Delegational Championship in 1985.

Becario Miguel Guerrero and I also played baseball in Mexico D.F. We played in the ISSSTE leagues, sponsored by the Institute for Social Security and Services for State Workers. Being limited on transportation, we would sometimes struggle to make practices and games. We both played several seasons and also got to play in many fields through the city, some more well-kept than others. Miguel was an accomplished pitcher and he saved many games for us. I was quick on my feet so I did well in the outfield and with base-running.

There were several community basketball courts and the becarios Chicanos were often at play. Pick-up games could be found in late afternoons and weekends. Eventually, we had formed a traveling team and played a few tournaments at the ENAH and in other schools and gymnasiums. Soccer games were also prevalent in the neighborhood and I would join in occasionally. Not having had a substantive "futbol" background, I made little contribution to the game.

Casa Aztlán

Casa Aztlán was an institution in the community. Most neighbors were well familiar with "Los Chicanos". In particular, La Familia Cabrera, our next door neighbors, became extended family members. I would often have my morning coffee talking with Sra. Tere and the family of four girls and two boys. They owned the polleria (poultry shop) next door, so much street traffic

would come by. I helped the Sra. Tere with some household repairs given that the father was a bus driver, in Sonora, and could only visit every four or five months. Many other neighbors were frequent visitors to Casa Aztlán. The owner of the local tiendita would include a *pilón* (gratuity) occasionally showing appreciation for our patronage.

Perhaps one of my favorite activities was to make the *compras* (shopping) for weekly groceries in the *tianguis* (street market). Both Saturday and Sunday a large market would set up early in the morning and be torn down and gone by the afternoon. It was set up two blocks from Casa Aztlán and the market itself was four blocks long. The vibrancy of sound, movement and transaction was astonishing, and every week, new wares and food stuffs were available. I learned of cuisine, market items and linguistic competence while spending time in the markets. Most often, the weekly supplies required two individuals to purchase and carry the groceries. Many street market *puestos* provided foodstuffs for immediate consumption. Eating *barbacoa*, *cecinas*, *carnitas*, *pescado frito*, *quesos*, *ensaladas* and *frutas* were all part of the chore. At Casa Aztlán cooking and cleaning responsibilities were shared. Each *becario* was assigned a night of the week to prepare a supper. Different ability levels were demonstrated with different levels of preparation. Sometimes a sandwich was enough.

Another local institution that was frequented by Casa Aztlán *becarios* was La Jalicense, a bar in the central plaza of Tlalpan. They provided “*botanas*,” foods accompanying each ordered round of drinks, in the afternoon, and we could stay there for quite a while without overdrinking. The specialty drink of the Jalicense was a “Bull,” a strong, mixed concoction that was quite enjoyable. We were always welcome and tolerated at this esteemed establishment. On a lesser scale we would visit “La Pulquería San Fernando.”

Casa Aztlán served as an informal community clinic. *Becario* medical students often were consulted for medical advice or first aids. Grateful “patients” often compensated with foodstuffs and bottles. I personally cared for and stitched together a friend’s neighborhood friend’s dog that had been hurt in an altercation.

Casa Aztlán Chicanos had been invited to several quinceaneras and weddings and one Christmas we were the host household for Las Posadas. Casa Aztlán served as a site for many cosmopolitan parties. Casa Aztlán *Becarios* attended different schools, in the D.F., so consequently our network of friends was extensive. On a couple of occasions friends, outside of Casa Aztlán roommates would borrow the house for an event, party or “*batucada*.” Perhaps one of the more significant articulations of los Chican@s was our ability to network with different nationalities and cultures.

Casa Aztlán was also an informal embassy in Mexico. I can hardly remember a time when we were not host to friends visiting from the US or other countries. Many study abroad or research programs had a stop off at Casa Aztlán for a visit. Most individuals living at Casa Aztlán were males. Occasionally a *Becaria* would stay for a short period of time, particularly in a time of transition. On one occasion *Becarias* expressed their concern regarding the patriarchal demeanor of Casa Aztlán *Becarios*. They had painted a protest message on the front street wall of Casa Aztlán. A variety of discussions ensued clarifying the intentions and suggestions of the *Becarias*.

Students participating in the Colegio de Mexico Summer program would become familiar with the house and the neighborhood. Student matriculated in the UNAM Escuela de Extranjeros would also visit Casa Aztlán. Visiting scholars and researchers would also make visits during their activities. Casa Aztlán had hosted some important meetings with several Mexican political parties and organizations including the PSUM, PRT and solidarity organizations. *Becarios* de

Aztlán also participated in events, and activities throughout the city. After a few years we were all comfortable with city transportation and navigating all parts of the city. Becario Rueben Estrada had taken his Pontiac Bonneville from El Paso, Texas and this “ranfla” became the semi-official transport for Casa Aztlán. Dubbed the “batmobile” it was often the largest vehicle on the street.

International Solidarity Activities

Becarios de Aztlán participated in many political and solidarity activities throughout the city and nation. My stay in Mexico was during the Reagan years and much anti-US sentiment was warranted. I, and others, participated in many “US anti-intervention” activities. The ENAH hosted an Anti-Intervention Conference and representatives from many nations participated. I was allowed to make a brief statement at one of these plenary sessions declaring Chicano solidarity with Central American communities. Becarios marched in protest marches and were vocal in front of the US. Embassy on Avenida Reforma. On one particular demonstration march we were a few blocks from some severe antiriot violence perpetrated by the Mexican police force (anti-motines). The Chican@ presence was very important at these myriad events, we being United States citizens. At Casa Aztlán we had constructed a “mestizo” flag and we would carry it to many manifestations.

Some of my most educational and adventuresome activities were outside of school and home. I was able to visit many states of the country, and the trips back and forth to the US were also adventures. On several occasions the trip was made by vehicle. On one occasion several becarios collaborated on a trip from the D.F. to El Paso in the “batmobile.” On another occasion becario Manuel Hernandez took several colleagues, with him, on a road trip from the D.F. to San Antonio, Texas. He drove a full-sized, propane-powered Cadillac, so the trip was comfortable. I had also traveled a large segment of the Pacific coast with becario Jaime Chavez. We had spent some beach time in Nayarit and Mazatlán. Perhaps my longest road trip was with fellow ENAH grad-student Jorge Gonzalez. We drove his Volkswagen bug from Mexico City to Denver, Colorado within a three day period. We had transported folklorico outfits to a dance group in Walsenburg, Colorado (my hometown). That delivery helped pay for the trip. At the request of Becario Virgilio Licon, Becario Armando Trujillo and I drove Virgilio’s Gran Torino from Mexico City to Pueblo, Colorado, a 40-hour drive.

My schooling and cultural integration sponsored by the Becas Para Aztlán Program impacted my life in many different manners. As a practicing anthropologist I grew tremendously. Experiences revolving around the ENAH, the Seminario, and Casa Aztlán would be evident in my continued professionalism and cultural identity.

1985 Earthquake

My departure from Mexico was somewhat determined outside of my control. I was living and working in the D.F. when the devastating earthquake of 1985 occurred. The 8.0 level earthquake occurred on Sept. 19th and killed more than 5,000 people. Destiny had me outside of Mexico City the day the earthquake occurred. I was at becario Manuel Romero’s wedding in Peñasco, New Mexico on that date. Nonetheless, I returned to D.F. within two weeks to determine what was to become of my professorship at the ENAH and to ascertain if Casa Aztlán was devastated. I was not immediately impacted except for the fact that my migratory papers were lost in the collapse of the Immigration and Naturalization building downtown. I had previously had a lengthy period of difficulty dealing with immigration and I would have to resubmit my paperwork to petition for a renewed F.M.3 work clearance.

The most impacted areas of the quake were downtown and I witnessed the collapsed buildings and reconstruction efforts. I knew some families that had lost relatives but my colleagues and students were all fine. I was still employed when the aftershock occurred in April of 1986. Again, I was fortunate that I was outside of the city when it occurred. When I decided to leave Mexico I was the last of the Chicanos at Casa Aztlán. Other students continued to live at Casa Aztlán. Most of them were students from the ENAH.

I returned to the U.S. in June of that year. Becario Manuel Hernandez delivered me to the train station in D.F. in his propane-powered Cadillac. I left with many, books, posters and lifelong memories. Upon my return to the U.S. it was a difficult adjustment period. I left a teaching position, which was important to me, to start over. I moved to Denver, Colorado where my older brother lived. The first nine months I found employment working construction. My older brother accommodated me with housing and the avenue to find immediate employment. I later found work into the Denver Public Schools system and was eventually placed working in Mexican immigrant communities as a community liaison and coordinator of adult education and amnesty programs.

I left Denver 28 years ago to pursue a Ph.D. program at the University of Arizona. At the U of A I collaborated with different disciplines and programs. Several of these projects brought me again to the U.S. Mexico border. For the last 24 years I have been in Las Vegas, New Mexico employed at New Mexico Highlands University (NMHU). I continue to work in areas of borders, migration and US/Mexico Relations. The MEChA student organization, that I advise, is the vanguard in the promotion of immigrant-rights work. We have worked, tirelessly, to ensure “safe-space” amendments and opportunity for DREAMER and DACA students at NMHU. At this institution I have instituted a border research activity, and have taken students on field research activities, again to the El Paso/Cd. Juarez border.

Conclusion

The Becas Para Aztlán experience has provided me with a wealth of experience and insight into academic, political and cultural issues. It broadened my appreciation of internationalism and further defined my professional acumen. My ongoing cultural identity formation reflects much of the BPA experience. I have continued to build upon the concepts and disciplines that were part of my BPA learning trajectory. I feel that I have accomplished and contributed to the initial objectives that were the essence of the BPA contract. I truly believe that the opportunities provided and the networks established continue to be significant relationships between Mexican schools and institutions and with Chican@ scholars, practitioners and institutions. For me, the program was impactful and life-changing.