



Over several days, I drew at home, in our neighborhood, San Felipe del Agua and downtown to slowly form this collage of images.

## El lugar adecuado en el momento equivocado

Diario de Oaxaca

# Peter Kuper

► Images Courtesy of the Author.

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Peter Kuper © Foto: Luigi Novi

## Peter Kuper ▶ A GIFT

*Diario de Oaxaca* is the result of being in the right place at the “wrong” time.

When I moved to Oaxaca with my wife and daughter, I wasn’t looking for trouble; on the contrary, I was hoping for some escape. Escape from the United States under Bush’s administration, escape from my workaholic schedule, escape from consumer culture and a ceaseless barrage of depressing news stories. A breather. A break from routine. *Escape*. Not that we left in a panic or this was the sole reason we moved to Oaxaca.

In a way this trip had been percolating for nearly forty years. My father, a university professor, had his first sabbatical in 1969 and transplanted our family to Israel when I was ten- years- old. That year shook my limited world view –not that I got much better at geography, but the existence of life beyond the borders of the United States came into focus. Since the birth of our daughter in 1996, my wife and I had spent years discussing giving her a similar experience.

The day we landed in Mexico, July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006, the news was all about suspicion of fraud in the throes of a major teachers’ strike with encampments and protests throughout town and just getting from the airport to our new neighborhood required circumventing strikers’ barricades.

Nonetheless, for the first few months I enjoyed escape. We had moved into a beautiful house in San Felipe del Agua; though only a short drive from the downtown troubles, it felt like a world away.

When I wasn’t busy finishing my graphic novel, *Stop Forgetting to Remember*, I enjoyed taking long walks around the picturesque neighborhood and occasionally making drawings of the insects and cactus in our front yard. It wasn’t until September, that I made the time and headed into town with my sketchbook in hand. After a day of drawing the scene around the Zócalo of strikers and barricades, I felt like I’d genuinely arrived in Oaxaca.

Over the next few months, as the teachers’ strike reached a boiling point, family and friends in the United

Peter Kuper ▶

## UN REGALO

*Diario de Oaxaca* es el resultado de estar en el lugar adecuado en el momento “equivocado”.

Cuando me mudé a Oaxaca con mi esposa e hija, no buscaba problemas; todo lo contrario, anhelaba un escape. Escape de los Estados Unidos bajo el gobierno de Bush, escape de mi horario de adicto al trabajo, escape de la cultura consumista y del incesante torrente de deprimentes historias noticiosas. Un respiro. Un descanso de la rutina. *Escape*. Tampoco es que nos fuéramos en pánico o que ésta fuera la única razón por la que nos mudamos a Oaxaca.

De alguna manera, este viaje se estuvo gestando durante casi cuarenta años. Mi padre, un profesor universitario, tuvo su primer sabático en 1969 y mudó a nuestra familia a Israel cuando yo tenía diez años. Ese año sacudió mi limitada cosmovisión –aunque no mejoré gran cosa en geografía–, pero la existencia de la vida más allá de las fronteras de Estados Unidos adquirió perspectiva. Desde el nacimiento de nuestra hija en 1996, mi esposa y yo pasamos años discutiendo la posibilidad de darle una experiencia similar.

El día que llegamos a México, el 3 de julio de 2006, las noticias estaban volcadas sobre la sospecha de fraude en las elecciones nacionales del día anterior. La ciudad de Oaxaca estaba en agonía por una gran huelga de maestros con campamentos y protestas a lo largo de la ciudad y tan sólo trasladarnos del aeropuerto a nuestro nuevo barrio requirió sortear las barricadas de los huelguistas.

Aún así, durante los primeros meses disfruté el escape. Nos mudamos a una hermosa casa en San Felipe del Agua, que aunque estaba tan sólo a una corta distancia en coche de los problemas del centro, se sentía como a un mundo de distancia.

Cuando no estaba ocupado en terminar mi novela gráfica, *No te olvides de recordar*, disfrutaba las largas caminatas alrededor del pintoresco barrio, y en ocasiones hacia dibujos de los insectos y cactus de nuestro patio delantero. No fue hasta septiembre que encontré el tiempo y me dirigí a la ciudad con mi libreta de dibujos en la mano. Tras un día de dibujar el escenario de huelguistas y barricadas alrededor del Zócalo, sentí que en verdad había llegado a Oaxaca.

Durante los meses siguientes, conforme la huelga de maestros avanzaba hacia el estallido, mis familiares y amigos en Estados Unidos escribían con urgencia, preguntando cómo estábamos y preguntándose si debíamos quedarnos, dados los amenazantes reportes noticiosos que leían. Me parecía que los reportes eran tan poco fidedignos que empecé a ir de manera regular a la ciudad y a enviar correos electrónicos ilustrados



On November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006 my wife and I attended a march in downtown Oaxaca. I did most of this drawing on the spot. Moments after we headed home the federal troops attacked. This was the day the strike ended and by pure luck we weren't rounded up in the melee. I finished the piece looking in horror at photos on the internet that night.

States corresponded urgently, asking how we were faring and questioning whether we should stay, given the threatening news reports they were reading. I found the reports so inaccurate, I began taking regular trips into town then sending illustrated e-mails detailing the reality as I experienced it. Beyond wanting to reassure people it wasn't as bad as advertised, I felt anxious to counter the misinformation I found disseminated in so many international newspapers. Hearing stories contrary to my direct experience activated my desire to telegraph what I'd seen. I didn't look to take on the job of Oaxaca reporter, but I had firsthand information about this subject and rediscovered that applying my art this way was part of my DNA as a political cartoonist. Those e-mails found their way onto websites and into various publications worldwide and telling Oaxaca's story transformed from an art exercise into a responsibility. Those dispatches evolved into the "diary" entries in a book.

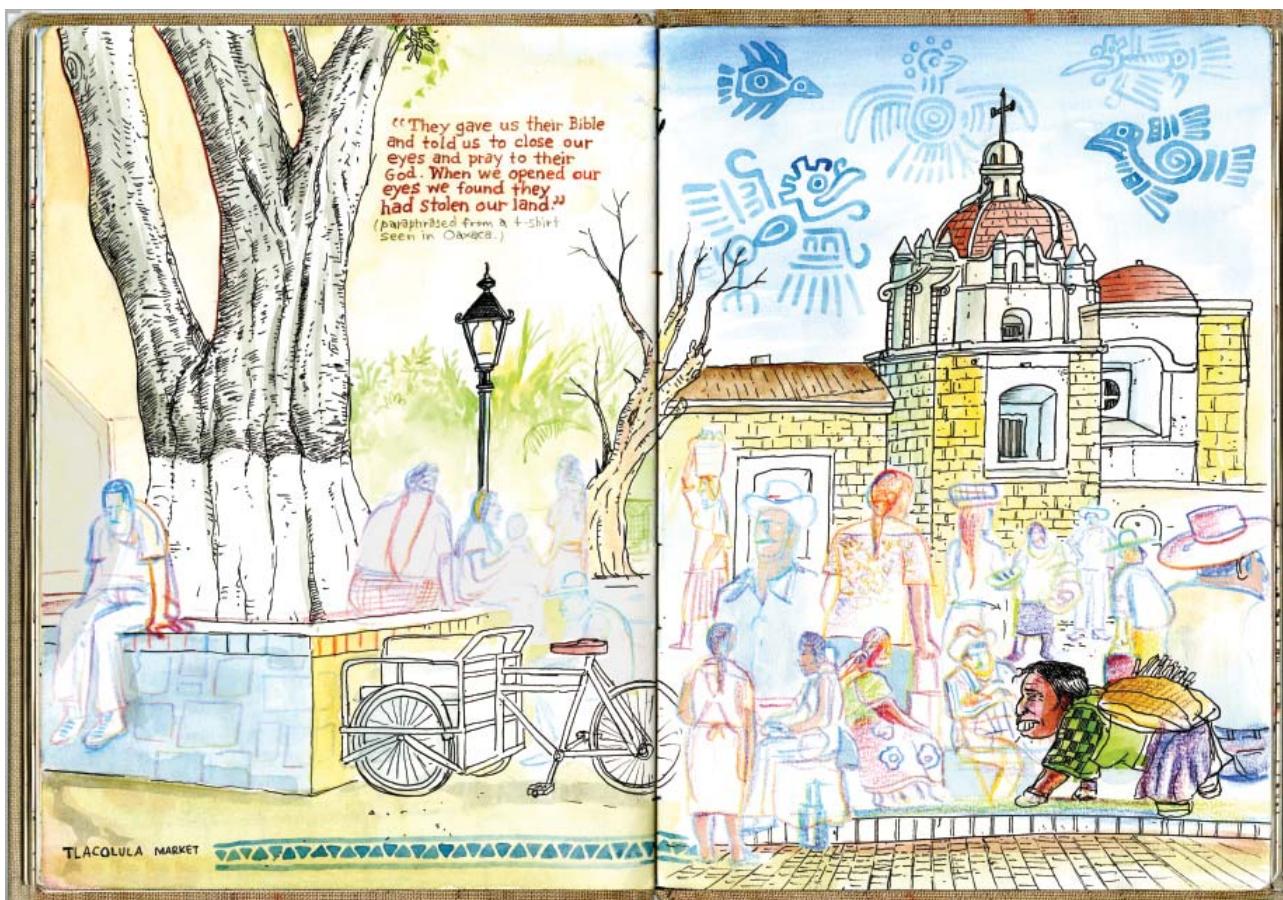
Gradually, my desire for escape from life's troubles, segued into embracing my experiences. After answering the call to draw Oaxaca's dark times, I found myself compelled (by another part of my DNA, no doubt) to capture its light. I hope this collection will illuminate both the storms that Oaxaca weathered as well as the rich details of daily life that made our two years in Mexico a gift.

que detallaban la realidad como yo la experimentaba. Además de querer darle seguridad a la gente de que la situación no estaba tan mal como se retrataba, sentía una ansiedad por contrarrestar la información falsa que encontraba diseminada en varios periódicos internacionales. Leer historias que narran lo contrario a mi experiencia personal activó mi deseo de telegrafiar lo que había visto. No buscaba trabajar como corresponsal oaxaqueño, pero tenía información de primera mano sobre este tema y redescubrí que poner en práctica mi arte de esta forma era parte de mi ADN como caricaturista político. Aquellos correos electrónicos se abrieron paso hacia páginas de internet y diversas publicaciones a lo largo del mundo, de manera que contar la historia de Oaxaca pasó de ser un ejercicio artístico para convertirse en una responsabilidad. Estos relatos se convirtieron en las entradas de este diario.

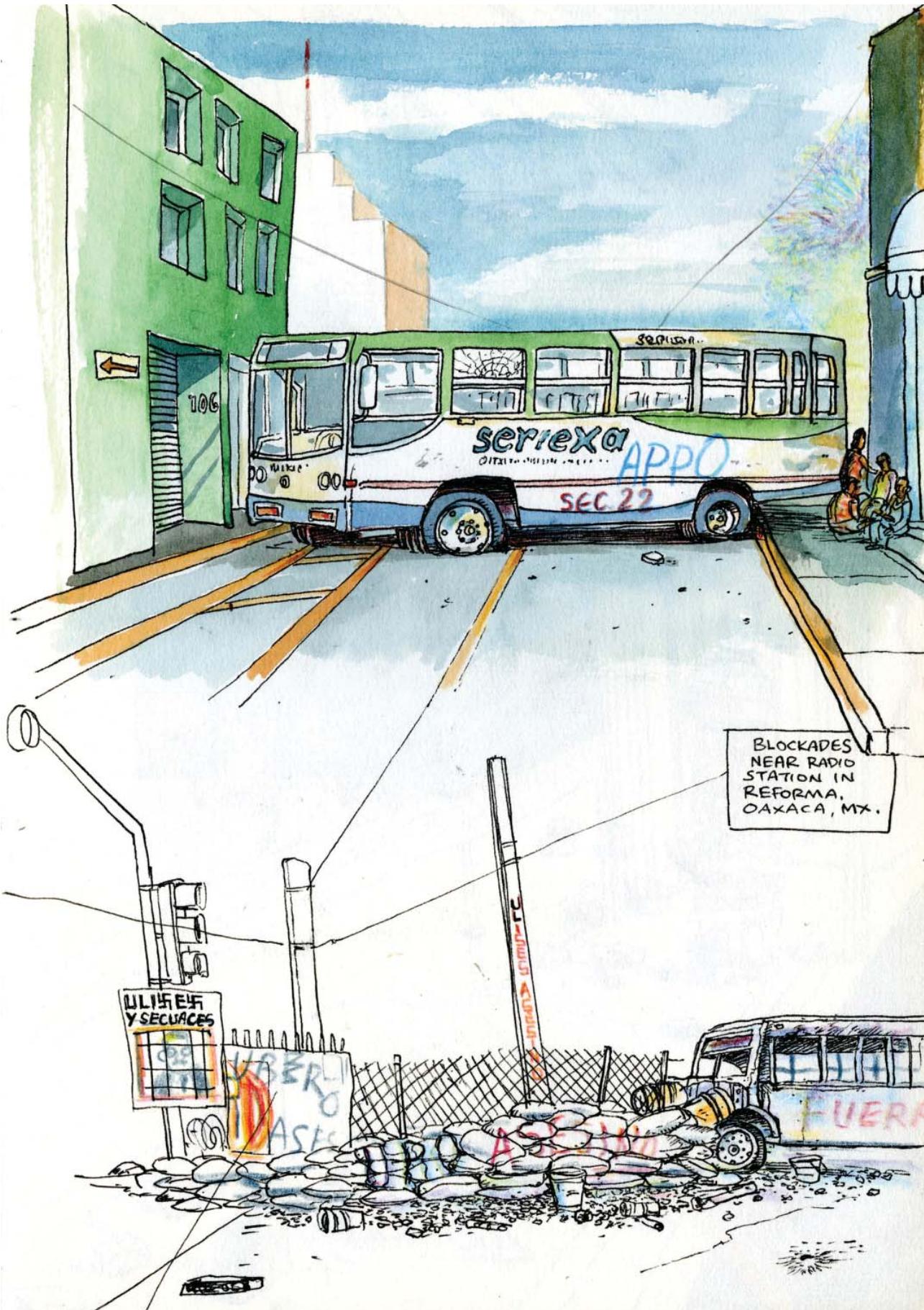
De manera gradual, mi deseo de escapar de los problemas de la vida, dio paso a cobijar mis experiencias. Tras responder el llamado de ilustrar los momentos oscuros de Oaxaca, me vi inclinado (sin duda por otra parte de mi ADN) a capturar su luminosidad. Espero que esta recopilación ilumine tanto las tormentas que Oaxaca sorteó como los ricos detalles de la vida cotidiana que hicieron de nuestros dos años en México un regalo.



Throughout the strike Oaxaca's walls were covered with amazing art commenting on the governor, Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, announcing marches or supporting strikers. It was inspiring to see art applied as part of the struggle. Unfortunately when the strike ended, other graffiti continued to proliferate, often with less artistry.



Drawn at my favorite market an hour from Oaxaca City. Tlacolula is like stepping through a time portal with many of the people speaking pre-conquest languages.



During the strike (May –November, 2006) Oaxaca had barricades throughout town set up by strikers to protect their encampments from surprise attacks by the governor. On any given day you would never know what street would be suddenly be closed by new barricades. After a day of drawing other encampments I snapped a photo of this barricade and found myself surrounded by angry, suspicious strikers who wanted my film. Fortunately they realized I was just a stupid gringo, not an undercover agent and let me go!

# Fragment of “The Gardener Prayers” **Front and Back of the Garden**

# Adolfo Castañón

*Translated to English by Rowena Hill*

L.

Behind the silence the garden  
Are the trees catching fire?  
No: the wind  
is shaking from

The sparrow sings grey dove cries  
the quiet jubilation of the birds  
drips its colors in silence  
in the distance it's not the sea  
the clamor of the city

Tree fine wood for molding  
I don't know if I'm the best carpenter for it

The garden wakes in silence  
the cloud sleeps  
Who is sailing adrift  
mute from this raft?  
(His name is I but he's called You)

I know:  
“I’m a tree I’ve always been here  
I’m not really aware of my size”

It's not a secret  
it blends with the house  
(In the distance the city's clamor)  
I hold it in my grey hair  
(...it's not the sea)  
I'm invisible behind the silence another garden  
The sun nourishes my jubilation  
and the earth: I  
My name? I don't know it  
Tree?  
Face in the clamor?  
Fine wood for molding?  
Who are you? The reader? The carpenter?

II

Behind the silence garden  
Trees catching fire?  
The wind kindles fronds  
Sing sparrow  
Dove jubilation