

It's mid-July, 2013, and I'm sitting in a one-room evangelical church in the village of San Miguel Albarradas. Sister Roselia stands up and gives thanks to God for her life and salvation. She delivers her short discourse in Spanish. I'm surprised, since I had been under the impression that she didn't speak any Spanish, only Zapotec. At breakfast, I had been unable to communicate to her that I was full and didn't want any more *memelas*. But as I ponder, I realise that these must be the same three or four memorised Spanish phrases that sister Roselia speaks in church every Sunday. She doesn't speak Spanish, but she feels that Spanish is the language she needs to speak when in church. Maybe she's even embarrassed to speak in Zapotec, wondering whether God is offended at hearing her speak to him in her native language. After this, sister Lucía stands up to lead the singing. Fully expecting to hear singing in Zapotec for the first time, I'm dismayed, confused, and saddened to hear the small Zapotec-speaking congregation are singing to God in Spanish.

Hello! Isaac Quezada speaking (also on behalf of my wife, the charming Fernanda, a.k.a MariFer, Fer, or María Fernanda). This is our very first newsletter! Or prayer letter. Call it what you want... it's our first. I've always been deeply impressed by the narrative writing style of Beth Ramírez's newsletters (if you like I'll send some excerpts), but she has had 30 years of experience doing this and I've had about a half hour. Stick with me now, and in 30 years we'll see if I get any better at it, *¿ca va?* ***Ahem***

Some of you already know me and that I'm originally from the little orchard town of Parkdale, Oregon. My parents are Eleazar and Lila Quezada, who have served in full-time ministry and overseas missions for something like 150 years. For almost 18 years our family lived in Mitla, Oaxaca, Mexico, which is where I grew up. After high school I studied music (and a little theology) at Whitworth University in Spokane, WA. before returning to continue working as a musician (mostly in education) here in the Oaxaca Valley. Last time I counted I think I had 24 private students. As for my wife, Fer's hometown is Pachuca, Hidalgo, Mexico. She grew up in a musical home and learned both from private teachers and her parents. Fer and her two siblings, Pablo and Marijo (yes, it's actually Maria Jose), were among the first generation of homeschooled kids in Mexico. She says that homeschooling was one of the best things that ever happened to her family, although it sometimes made things difficult when others didn't understand what they were doing or even made fun of it. Fer spent several post-highschool years doing a wide variety of missions-related activities, including tutoring missionary kids in Spanish and living full-time in a children's home in Chiapas. In the last three years she has received extensive doula (and some monitriz) training at Casa Compasiva birth centre, where she currently works.

Highlights of the last few years:

- Summer 2014. Fer and I met for the first time. The stars had not yet aligned, so we ended up having only one real conversation that year.
- 2015. Summer: We re-met and began spending lots of time talking together. I invited her to have dinner with me (at a fancy banquet). During the 2015-2016 school year I was back in Spokane, but we stayed in touch through the internet. Often. December: I graduated from college (B.A. in music).
- Summer 2016. I moved back to Mexico and started a formal relationship with Fer.
- Summer 2017. I asked Fer to marry me. She said yes!
- January 6th, 2018. Our wedding. Colour scheme: burgundy. Dinner: barbacoa de Hidalgo. Bride: mine!

We are happily married and live in beautiful Mitla, Oaxaca.

“We're very happy for you. So what now?”

Some of you have doubtless had life-defining experiences in which the Lord revealed to you in writing upon the wall that you would be the amazing plumber, air traffic controller, volunteer firefighter, or member of parliament that you now are. For our part, God has given us many opportunities to serve his people and reach out to those who don't yet know him. One of these is through [Valsecamp](#), the music camp where Fer and I first met. We love this ministry and have been on staff multiples times, including this summer.

Another ministry where we serve is that of [Casa Compasiva](#), where Fer currently works as a doula, giving loving care and pre-natal education to the pregnant women of Oaxaca (and beyond). Recently my mum's health forced her to resign from her role as director of Casa Compasiva. As the only Quezada currently still residing in Oaxaca, I have been asked by our mission agency to serve as the official liaison between the mission and Casa Compasiva. This involves a lot of communication between the mission agency and the new local director of Casa, as well as financial management for some aspects of the project, including communication with donors. I am also serving on the Mexican board of directors for Casa Compasiva.

Beyond that, Fernanda and I lead our Mexican Church worship team and our Church youth group. We also take an active role in mentoring and discipling many of the local missionary kids.

So although life is already busy, we feel strongly that we can be of particular use to God's kingdom in a pretty cool way: **ethnomusicology**. Wow! Doesn't just the sound of it make you want to go back to university and get your master's in... well, whatever that is? I know how you feel. We too can barely contain our excitement whenever someone says “ethnomusicology.”

“I know what that is... but just so we’re clear could you explain it to everyone else?”

Ethnomusicology is the study of music (and usually dance and art) as it is found in a given people group. An analytic study of, say, Mongolian throat singing would be an example of ethnomusicology. Musical styles and sounds found in indigenous people groups throughout the world can often sound quite abrasive, without structure, and even offensive to us Westerners. Nevertheless, these styles and sounds can be employed just like ours to sing praises to God and to worship him.

“Cool. So you’re studying the native music of Oaxaca?”

That’s just it. There is no ancient indigenous music here. Whatever music existed in pre-contact Oaxacan cultures has been extinguished. No lullabies in Mixteco. No “Happy Birthday” song in Amuzgo. Many New Testament translations have already been completed in the languages of Oaxaca. That means that people in those language areas now have access to God’s written word in their mother tongue, praise the Lord! But when it’s time to sing, it’s all done in Spanish. The problem is that many of those people do not *speak* Spanish! They listen to sermons in a language they do not understand, and they sing to their God using words they do not understand.

“OK, but why does it matter whether Christian music exists or not in Zapotec or Mixtec or Whatchamatec?”

Imagine if you, who live in Langley, BC or Tacoma, WA had only ever heard Christian music in, say, Hungarian. You would have little to no desire to worship God through music. You might even think that God doesn’t *want* you to sing to him in your native language. What are you supposed to do with Biblical mandates like, “Sing joyfully to the Lord?”

There are some villages where the local Christians have successfully written or translated a few songs into their native tongue, but they are few and far between. **Most of indigenous Oaxaca remains in musical poverty, which I hope you can see is a form of spiritual poverty. It’s poverty of expression and of culture. It’s a form of poverty that bereaves Oaxacan Christians of their God-given ability to raise their voices in artistic, emotive ways to express gratitude, praise, lamentation, and prayer to our Lord.** In Oaxaca there is no Mazatec choir triumphantly singing “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” There are no Hillsong-style worship concerts hosted in Triqui. There is no community gathering at Christmastime to sing Handel’s “Messiah” in Chinantec. Many of us who grew up singing in our native tongue can point to one or two (or more!) significant experiences in which the Lord spoke to us or moved in us through music. Personally, those instances have sometimes been life-changing. Our brothers and sisters in Christ here in rural Oaxacan villages have been missing out for a long time on one of the greatest blessings of the Christian life: worshipping God through music.

“That’s so tragic! What ever is to be done?”

We’re on it. On Saturday evening last week we approached brother Jaime from our church with an idea, and he was all for it. On Wednesday of this week we three met at his house with an old guitar and a notepad. At the end of an hour and half (and some coffee and sweat bread for good measure) we had (1) translated one verse of a worship song from Spanish into Zapotec: “Dios incomparable” (Incomparable God), (2) translated all three verses of an old Christian chorus: “Yo tengo un amigo que me ama” (I have a friend who loves me), and (3) composed a few notes to the *very first original Christian song in Zapotec*: “Na’ré na’cä sic yaguub” (I am the vine). Praise the Lord! We’re very excited and nervous to present one of our translations in church this Sunday, with brother Jaime singing, of course (Fer and I aren’t yet confident in our ability to pronounce the Zapotec words correctly).

We’re praying, and we’d love it if you’d pray with us about exactly on what to focus our efforts. The plan is to start testing different musical endeavours in the Zapotec language in our town of Mitla. Our desire is to help local Christians develop authentic worship music in their own language, releasing a greater expression of praise to God that cannot help but draw others to him! Later on we hope to take what we learn here and disseminate that knowledge among indigenous musicians in other villages and language groups. But we’re not there yet! Poco a poco... Little by little.

We’re feeling like there’s an open door of both need and opportunity before us, and we’re ready to go through it with the Lord’s help. And that, dear friend, is where you can come in. **We invite you to partner with us in prayer and financial support for ALL of the ministries that we are undertaking...ethnomusicology, mentoring youth, church/camp music ministry, Casa Compasiva, etc..** We cannot do it alone. In order to allow us time and energy to minister in these areas, we have officially joined Missionary Ventures Canada. Your gift to MVC will support our efforts as we serve Jesus here in Oaxaca.

To donate online, you can go to <https://missionaryventures.kindful.com/> and scroll down to Isaac & Fer on the “Select a Campaign” drop-down menu. So that’s it for now. Congratulations...You read our very first newsletter and lived to tell the tale! Thanks for your interest and your prayers. We’d love to count you as part of our team in serving the people of Oaxaca.

Many blessings,
Isaac & Fer

P.S. Don’t miss the picture attachments in the e-mail!

To donate *not* online, checks, cash, and precious stones can be mailed to
Missionary Ventures Canada
201B – 727 Woolwich St.
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