

Weaving – a shared love among various cultures

By Virginia Matus-Glenn

CUZCO, Peru – I first learned how to weave way back in the early-70s when I was living in the Los Angeles area. I took several classes and began a lifelong involvement with the world of textiles.

When I moved up to Lake Tahoe in 1982 to take a position as a school principal in Lake Tahoe Unified School District, I soon realized that I wouldn't have much time for weaving. In spite of that reality, when we bought our home here I carefully set up my floor loom and discovered that it was a great place to hang clothes that I didn't have time to put away.

I wasn't weaving, but we did make time for traveling whenever we could, and I collected textiles and weaving related books from all over the world. I had traveled to Peru with an anthropologist friend in 1980 so I was particularly taken with Latin American weaving and read everything I could about it. I have taught a cultural break out session on Latin American Textiles at the Intensive Summer Spanish Institute at Lake Tahoe Community College for several summers.



Peruvians
share their
culture and
love for

textiles.

Photos/Virgini

a Matus-Glenn

Once I retired in 2002, I was able to begin weaving again and I have taken lots of classes and done lots of weaving in the last nine years.

But I have always longed to return to Peru to learn firsthand more about their textile traditions. So last June, when I saw the ad for the Tinkuy de Tejedores (Gathering of Weavers) that was going to be held in Cuzco, Peru, in November, I really wanted to go. Luckily I'm blessed with a wonderful husband who encouraged me to go. He read the info on the tour and decided he didn't want to go with me – especially after he read the part that said that “most of the tour would be at altitudes over 11,000 feet in remote villages far from medical care”. I didn't care – I was willing to risk it in order to see all the places and things that the tour had to offer.

So on Oct. 31, I flew off to Lima, Peru – almost tingling with excitement and expectation. I spent three days on my own having a wonderful time exploring Lima. Lima is a bit dreary. It is notorious for being cloudy and gray most of the day and it definitely was while I was there. They call it a garúa. The Lonely Planet book says “... a mist that turns the sky an alabaster white and leaves the city draped in a melancholy pall.” Herman Melville, who visited there in the 1800s called it the “strangest, saddest city thou can't see. For Lima has taken the white veil; and there is a higher horror in this whiteness of her woe.”

I didn't really experience melancholy or sadness, but it was indeed gray – all day long. Maybe they get used to it like people in LA get used to the smog.

When we finally boarded the plane for the flight from Lima to Cuzco at the official start of the tour, I was quite ready to

leave the garúa behind.

The Tinkuy de Tejedores was in the Urubamba valley – about an hour from Cusco and slightly lower – only 9,000 feet as opposed to Cusco's 11,000 feet. The first two days were an amazing conference – really a gathering – of weavers from all over the world. There were about 400 in attendance – two thirds were indigenous weavers, mostly from Peruvian communities, which are affiliated with the Center for Traditional Textiles in Cuzco, the hosts of the Tinkuy. But there were also indigenous weavers from Bolivia, Mexico and Guatemala along with our group of a North American weavers and aficionados from Canada and the U.S.



Weaving
transcends
languages.

For two days we listened to an array of interesting presentations from internationally renowned experts on many aspects of weaving. In addition to these experts, we also heard from representatives from each of the communities affiliated with the CTTC. They told us of their experiences working with the Center to revive the weaving traditions in their communities. They spoke of the classes they'd taken, the changes brought about in their lives because of the Center and their plans for the future. One of the amazing aspects of the Tinkuy was that every presentation was done in 3 languages – English, Spanish and Quechua. The presenter would speak his or her native language and have a PowerPoint in a second language and a translator would give the third. Remember that most of

the Peruvian weavers lived in remote areas with few modern conveniences – like electricity or computers on which to learn PowerPoint. Nor have they ever been asked to speak from a stage before 400 people. The center made a tremendous effort to make everything accessible to everyone and they definitely succeeded.

We learned and experienced way too many things during those two days than I could ever cover in this article. It would take a book. However, I'd like to share one particularly touching ceremony that took place on the second day. The center encourages young weavers and they brought in young student weavers along with their mentors or elders from many of the communities and after telling us of their accomplishments, they gave each one of them the pieces necessary for their very own back strap looms. There wasn't a dry eye in the place.

The next two days the center offered us a choice of four possible classes – Back strap weaving, knitting with 5 needles, natural dyeing, and Peruvian tubular edging. I had already taken a class in back strap weaving and I didn't want to learn to knit with 5 itchy bitsy needles so I chose the dyeing for the first day and tubular edging for the second and loved them both.

The classes were at the center's main location in the town of Chinchero, which is at 12,500 feet. In order to dye the wool they had to start boiling the huge pots of water very, very early in the morning.

We learned about all the various twigs, leaves, berries and bugs that are used to get the wonderful colors of wool that are used in their textiles. We helped with the dyeing and each got to take home skeins of each of the seven different colors that we dyed.

After dyeing the yarn we rinsed and hung it up to dry – and

almost immediately it began to rain. So it stayed up there for two days and then hung in our hotel rooms for several days. Some skeins are just lying on the lawn. They are quite casual about handling the yarn and when I got mine home it took three washes and three rinses to clean out the flora (and maybe some fauna) that came home with it.

I'll be making a presentation to the Reno Fiber Guild on Sept. 8 at 6:30pm at the community room at the Wolf Run Golf Club, at 1400 Wolf Run Road, Reno. The room has limited seating so if you would like to attend, notify the guild president, Suzanne Woodhead, at woodcats@sbcglobal.net.