

Chalking the Street

Fun with Chalk Street Festival

By **Kat Avila, Contributing Writer** | Published on LatinoLA: July 21, 2012



When you don't have health insurance, you do what you can to maintain your health. If you're sick, you can't work. If you don't work, you can't eat or keep a roof over your head.

It's easy to fall fast in a society where everything has a price, except perhaps the air you breathe. They haven't started rationing that yet.

So I walk to maintain my health. It's No. 1 at the top of my list of goals. No. 2 is to meet extraordinary people, which surprisingly happens quite often.

Recently I took a walk and ended up at a [Fun With Chalk](#) street painting festival. A giant kachina-like figure caught my eye, and I forgot for a moment that it was a chalk drawing instead of a sandpainting. A tan, grizzled elderly man told me it had been inspired by a visit to the Grand Canyon and the Navajo Nation areas in Arizona.

Then I spoke to a young girl who said she'd been doing chalk drawing since she was five years old. The budding entrepreneur was also selling her homemade necklaces for \$10 each. Across the way, her father was working on another drawing.

Nearby a man was sweeping yellow jacaranda flowers that were falling everywhere from the trees, including on top of the public art.

The following day because I needed the exercise, I went back to view the finished drawings. I met [Lori-Antoinette](#). She started chalk drawing 20 years ago at the Pasadena Chalk Festival after hearing about it from friends.

Then I spoke with Javier, originally from Michoacán, who came to California over 40 years ago. His business card read "[Maestro Javier Alvarez](#)". He was scheduled to do a painting demonstration to music. "I give you not just the painting, but the experience," he said. However, there was an overly long delay, and I didn't get to see it.

"For the Artist-Fisherman The Clock Is Time Less" were the words below Oscar de Salcajá's surreal drawing that combined a Mayan profile with ocean life forms. His actual family name is different. He had wanted to publicize his hometown of Salcajá in Guatemala.

His thinking was quite refreshing, so I sat down on the asphalt parking lot to hear more. He took exception to how the art products of the people of Salcajá were labeled "crafts" or "folkloric." He said those terms downgraded and minimized the talents of the indigenous weavers.

Somewhat later he said, whether he created his chalk drawing for just one person or for a thousand, that was irrelevant. He was still going to do his best. As we looked over at an artist who was hard at work on a drawing she wouldn't be able to finish, Oscar said it didn't matter if she finished or not, it was good enough the way it was.

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Probably the person who was having the most fun at the festival was a teen girl in a red-and-white striped midriff shirt and jean cutoffs. Paige was covered in chalk. I took a tissue and wiped black chalk off her pretty forehead.

She said it was the first time she had ever done a chalk drawing. Her chalk drawing of a broadly smiling red-gowned girl on a white horse could easily have been her.

That's the way art should be created with passion and merriment and forgetting how messy it can get.

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