



Liza Alvarez Valdez

Undergraduate, Latin American Studies

Liza Álvarez Valdez graduates this spring from Cal State Fullerton with a B.A. in Anthropology and Latin American Studies. In 2007, through grants and scholarships she spent a year of at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile in Santiago. As an advocate of fieldwork and life experiences in conjunction with classroom work she has traveled extensively throughout the Americas and the Caribbean. Upon graduation she hopes to continue her education with a Masters in Geography at Cal State Fullerton to study the ethnobotany of Cuba and the country's Afro-Cuban syncretism through fieldwork and under the guidance of resident ethnobotanist, Dr. Robert Voeks.

In my high school yearbook, under plans after graduation it says to obtain a second job or overtime at work. I looked forward to my future as a full-time food-runner and part-time barista with high hopes of one day earning that twenty cent raise as assistant manager trainee. In other words, I never expected to find myself here before you. Ironically I was on the right track. All I needed was to fine-tune things a bit. Once I stopped preparing coffee and started preparing cocktails that was what got me here to this stage, to a BA in Anthropology and Latin American Studies, to a future in a masters program and to over a dozen different countries in the Americas. Life always surprises you.

I serendipitously stumbled upon a treasure chest here at Cal State Fullerton. I only applied to Cal State Fullerton so that I would not have to move and lose my job as bar manager; what was at the time my first priority. Since then my occupation has changed from your local bartender/informal town psychologist to student/world traveler/critical thinker/future

educator/future grad student and ethnobotanist. Without the guidance and influence of those of you here at Cal State Fullerton my occupation would never have changed. Latin American Studies is a small program yet it has the most dedicated and passionate faculty, staff and student-body I have ever come across; from my samba dancing Portuguese professor Dr. Ishikawa, to our resident expert on the ethnobotany of Afro-Latin religions and world cuisine Dr. Voeks, to my very own informal town psychologist Assistant Dean McKenzie, to my partner in crime and fellow hula-hooping, hot comb toting rap artist Sam “Jamon” Serrano, to my fountain of strength and husband Juan Carlos Valdez, and lastly but most certainly not least, my academic fairy godmother and LASSA’s very own oracle Dra. Sandra Pérez-Linggi. Thank you to all of you for contributing to the splendor of Cal State Fullerton’s treasures and helping me tackle the hurdles that once kept me from dreaming. Gracias, o se, obrigada, thank you!