

Interview With Mark Brazaitis

Why did you write “‘Magic’ Pablo”?

I wrote “‘Magic’ Pablo” as a tribute to the best friend I made in Guatemala. I also wrote it as a way of showing how easily and wonderfully friendships can be formed across cultures.

Are you still in contact with Pablo?

Pablo and I keep in touch regularly to this day. After I served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Guatemala, I returned two years later as a Peace Corps trainer. During this time, I spent Christmas with Pablo and his family. Two years after this, I dragged my wife to Guatemala on our honeymoon and we stayed with Pablo and his family. (Pablo’s brother Augusto lent us his room to sleep in.)

I sent Pablo a copy of the book *The Great Adventure*, where “‘Magic’ Pablo” first appeared. Although he doesn’t speak English, he had an English speaker translate it for him. In his typical, optimistic way, he’d decided that *The Great Adventure* must be a best-seller in the States. Why? Because he was in it, of course.

How has your Peace Corps service influenced your life? Your writing?

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, I learned to see people in Guatemala—and, by extension, people around the world—as potential friends, people I cared about. Living in the United States, one can find it very easy, I think, to ignore what is going on elsewhere in the world. We shouldn’t. We are on this planet together. We should look out for each other.

Without having served in the Peace Corps, I wouldn’t be the writer I am today. Living in a foreign country and having to use another language besides English in order to communicate made me understand the crucial importance of words. The better I learned Spanish, the better able I was to communicate what I wanted, what I felt, what I saw. The same lesson, I found, applied to my use of English. The more careful and precise I was about the words I used, the better I was able to communicate exactly what I meant. There is, for example, a difference between “happy” and “joyful,” don’t you think?

What advice would you give to aspiring young writers?

For young people interested in writing, I have two suggestions: read and write. By reading, we learn what kind of writing we enjoy, what kind of writing moves us and teaches us about ourselves. By writing regularly, we hone our ability to communicate. Writing seems easy; it isn’t. It takes practice.