

Dec. 25 2006

To Mexico City

The City is at 7000' ft elevation.
City huge & sprawling from air
Airport is clean & nice.

Beautiful crêche, almost
life size - wouldn't see that
in US airport

Customs quick & easy.

Easy to find bus

Bus is very nice, clean.

Thank Charley for front row
seat

City: little ^{kids} crossing busy streets
vendors selling cotton candy

Car says "mecanico gasolina"

Followed sign to auth. taxis

Taxi driver was a real jerk. Very angry. No seatbelts in back - scary. He drove very fast & honked. He yelled at me because I didn't know which house it was. Smell of sewage. Sound of fireworks.

The family welcomed me with open arms.

Mario, the father, must be in his 70's. He is very warm & kind. He reminds me of Mr. Maya.

Gabriela showed me to my room on the 4th floor at the top of the house. She lives here

with her daughter Mariana, who is 10.

Brenda is married to Roberto. He is Canadian & she met him when he came to Experiencia language school. Now they live in Canada with their son Mathias, who is 3. Mario said the school is like a "marriage center"!

Isahnia is married to Ivan & they have Nicolas ("Nico") who is 4 mos. old & Ivana, who is 4. ^{They've been living in CA but have just moved back here.}

While I was upstairs unpacking I could hear them downstairs laughing happily. Then they called me

down for food - salad of pineapple & raisins, sandwich of white bread & lunch meat. I was too full to eat the sandwich so Ivana ate it.

We all talked for a while & I was surprised how much I am able to say and understand.

Everyone got tired & went to bed at about 9:00 - they've had many busy days.

The room I am staying in has a single bed, tile floor, windows that don't

really shut (it never gets very cold here) & lots of pictures of Gabriela & Mariana & trinkets of a Mexican girl's bedroom. It also has a cable modem connection that Roberto will use for internet access to his job, during the day when I am gone.

The house is 4 stories tall & skinny. It is open to the street & a courtyard, with just screens. Downstairs is a kitchen & dining table, 2nd floor is a nice living room, & the 3rd & 4th floors are bedrooms & bathrooms.

New words:

mosquito = mosquito

ratito = ~~rat~~? little white

I must leave my room
light off to discourage
mosquitoes, & the hall
light off to discourage ratitos.

I'm very tired!

Sounds: baby crying, dogs barking,
cat yawling, fireworks, wind,
roosters crowing

I awoke at 7 am. I was
chilly last night! The bed
was a bit lumpy (springs)
but I slept OK.

Tues. Dec. 26, 2006

Somewhere - en alguna parte
everywhere - por/en todas partes

It's chilly this morning! The
house is open to a balcony,
with only a cloth curtain for
a "door". Clothes are kept
outside on a covered porch.
Clothes are hung to dry outside.
The shower was hot, but tricky.
It's hard to remember to use
bottled water to brush teeth!

The sky is blue. There are
many palm trees. The neighborhood
has narrow, cobbled streets &
colorful adobe houses. It reminds
me of Portugal. The houses
are cobbled and patched together,

with piles of cinder blocks & other debris left lying about.

9pm I am so tired! But I still have homework! And my journal.

Breakfast was a fried egg with cantaloupe & white bread toast - not very good. Dinner here is at 3pm, and it wasn't very good either. Rice in chicken broth, then corn tortillas with chicken, red sauce, white cheese, & sour cream. Served cold. I'm really glad I brought trail mix & protein bars!

Gabby walked me to school at 9. She showed me the shortcut, across a very smelly stream in a ravine. I was nervous finding my way back but I only got lost for a minute.

After "dinner" I walked back to the school, taking the longer way because the short way isn't as safe at night. Avenida Morelos is a busy main street with lots of cars & busses, but many prosperous looking businesses.

The neighborhood I live in (Colonia Quintana Roo) is

very nice with many expensive looking homes and nice cars.

It felt funny walking alone at night, but the family says it is very safe. No one has bothered me at all on the street.

The family considers themselves Christian, with no religious affiliation. They say their relationship with God is very personal.

Back at the school I did email (they have several computers) - the Spanish keyboard isn't too different. Then at 6:00 six Mexicans showed up for the

bicultural exchange. There were only 2 Spanish students, me & Roberta. We all spoke Spanish for one hour, then English. I only understood half of the Spanish. One guy was ~~a~~ super religious & only talked about Jesus.

One guy does voice overs for movies & TV. A cute young couple. A frightful looking old woman who seemed very sweet. A young woman with hideous teeth who says her job is to hand out real estate flyers 2 days a week for 8 hours with no breaks. Sounds awful.

The dormitory at the school is very nice. Roberta showed me her room & it's like a motel room with a bath & balcony w/ table & chairs.

The family has someone to help with cooking & cleaning.

There is good & abundant water here from the many springs on the mountain, but there are so many visitors during the holidays that the water pressure is low in some places, including at the house of Krissal, the 4th daughter, who lives in the north part of the city, 1/2 hour away by car (depending on traffic).

I have heard no accordion music here, or mariachi, only pleasant poppy stuff. The family usually has the radio on in the kitchen.

Notes for future visits:

bathing suit

if winter, no shorts, skirt, or short sleeves

calamine (in summer)

map of Mexico

more tylenol

12/27/06

The family bought me yogurt for breakfast, plus cornflakes & milk.

Nice walk to school.

Another chilly, breezy morning, then warm & blue sky.

Taxi to market with teacher. Huge market like the one in Barcelona.

Bus to Tepoztlan at 1:45.

Another clean, nice bus \$15 pesos.

Only 2 beggars - both old women.

morning glory
bougainvillea
speed bumps
funeral procession
haze in air

Tepoztlan

many foreigners, many with locals

Public affection

Arts & crafts - many not local

Lots of street food - can't eat most

Restaurant prices same as US \$8-10
Have a headache from not eating

Found a nice little restaurant playing decent pop/rock. Two quesadillas with white cheese & sour cream in folded ~~the~~ thick corn tortillas - delicious. \$2

Dogs loose everywhere - strange mix of big heads on small bodies

Few smokers,

Tepoztlan is hippie heaven
lots of new age shops, veg.*
Pyramid was too far, only
went halfway

* restaurants, massage, &
longtime travelers lost in the
k'd's.

Horses, stone, hills

Pancho - little boy asked
my name & talked to me,
his grandma too.

wedding in church -
procession w/ flowers &
live band

Funeral procession blocked
one lane of road to Tepoztlan.

Got back to the school at
7. Tonight the intercambio did
English first, then Spanish, so
I got to do Spanish. Most of
the same people tonight, some
new ones.

everyone loves
photo of Grant
with moto

DATE

After, 5 of us went to a restaurant called Nachos. Mario (the actor) drove us in his very nice car & was playing Ramstein! Daniel, a Swiss guy, was with us & he & Mario were singing along with gusto. Roberta came & also Lili, a Mexican girl who is 18 & sweet & cute as can be. Nachos was really loud & I was so glad I had ear plugs (my noise filter ones). It was too loud to talk, so Lili wrote the words to songs & we sang along to Spanish MTV. They sell 1 litre beers for \$8 & bring you all you can eat tacos. The tacos

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were delicious! I was getting a terrible headache, and a loud band was setting up, so I left about 9:30.

I wasn't sure which direction to walk so I asked some people & they gave me a ride! They live in the same neighborhood & the woman used to live in Denver. They were super nice.

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12/28/06

2 young girls arrived from Wisconsin to stay with the family. They're going to a different school for a month.

Roberta & I had lunch today at a restaurant. Chicken in cream sauce with rice & homemade tortillas - it was pretty good. She knows her way around pretty well.

After lunch I went back to the school, did email, & talked with Maggie (from Portland) in Spanish until 6, when the lecture started. Arturo, the school director, spoke for almost two

hours about an overview of Mexican history. The seat was hard & uncomfortable & I was sleepy, but still it was very interesting. I got home about 8:30, read for a while, then crashed.

My bed is not very comfortable, & I tossed & turned a lot & had bad dreams. I'm not sure I'd say I'm having fun here. Part of me can't wait to get home. But I'm learning a lot & it's very interesting, & I can tell it will grow on me. I'm sure I'd be happier in a less city-like place.

Friday 12/29/06

Had a nice talk with Mario at breakfast this morning.

Most of the students left for the beach at 1:00. Juanita (Joan) & I are the only students left at the school. In the afternoon we were supposed to do a local outing, but we didn't. Instead I had a 1 hour conversation class with Pedro, one of the teachers. I asked him a lot of questions about life in Mexico. He says that social security pays 100% of your salary & medical, & pays 100% of medical for your parents & kids if they

are in school.

Then I went to the bank to get money for the spa trip tomorrow. The line was fairly long & when the computer was very slow, so I barely got home by 3 for "dinner". It was a nice meal with the whole family & the other students. Chicken w/ bacon & peppers (not spicy) & tortillas - delicious.

I laid down for a short rest & slept for almost 1.5 hours til 5:30. Then I walked to the school to do email. Juanita never showed up so there was no movie. I got back home about 7 & most everyone was gone, so I'm in my room

doing this & that until I'm tired. I feel a little bored & lonely. The baby is back & squalling.

In the afternoon Mariana, Mathias, & Edgar (the 7 year old son of the woman who comes to cook every day) were playing on the upstairs porch & it was very cute.

This family doesn't watch much TV, or listen to radio, which is nice. Some of the kids go out at night, but even if I were invited I wouldn't go because it would be too noisy & hard to talk, & I'm sure I'd get too tired! I'm fighting a fairly

constant low level headache.

There are a few mosquitoes here, but they haven't bothered or bitten me at all.

(Ramstein)

When Metallica Ruled The World
w/ Spanish subtitles

I ended up turning on the TV to see if I could find any music, & ended up finding the above show.

Saturday Dec. 30

What a great day! Got up at 7 and went for a long walk around the neighborhood. Helped Mario make a delicious breakfast of quesadillas (quesitas): tortilla w/ cream cheese, oaxacan white cheese (like string cheese) & ham, folded over & grilled.

At noon I met Juanita (Joan) at the school. By prearrangement a taxi* picked us up & drove us to the traditional steam bath (Temazcal), in the north part of the city. We put our things on mats in "rooms" partitioned by curtains, with mats on the floor. Then we went
* a very nice driver, it was fun talking to him.

to the temazcal, which is a clay steam house shaped like an igloo, maybe 4 feet high & 8ft in diameter. Before going in, the spa worker cleansed us with incense smoke & chanted a prayer. Inside we had fresh water, & chunks of aloe plant, & some kind of herb that you whack yourself with to improve circulation.

Then we laid down on our mats & after a while we got a facial mask of green clay. Then back into the temazcal to wash off the clay & sweat some more. Then more rest. Then a nice massage (here they're not as worried about covering you up, which was nice, but also there's no face hole).

Then another temazcal, this time with a woman singing, & we sang along. Songs about the earth. She (Minella) was a total earth mother, like Maryann or Christian, with a full body & a cloud of dark hair.

Then we showered & dressed & walked to a nearby restaurant that Ramón had recommended. It's called Restaurant Govinda & is owned by an Italian Hare Krishna ~~family~~ couple w/ 3 little boys. The food was fantastic. For \$5, first a wonderful salad, then lentil soup, then a platter with potatoes, rice, eggplant, & broccoli "tempura".

It was vegan, and incredibly flavorful & delicious. Then rice pudding for desert. I was stuffed but didn't want to stop eating. Oh, and a big pitcher of water with something plus orange juice - delicious!

After, we walked around the neighborhood a bit - it's a really cute part of town.

I really enjoyed talking to Joan. She's probably ~~is~~ in her 60's & travels extensively. She says she's probably lived 10 of the last 20 years in Greece with her Greek boyfriend. Her house is in Vancouver WA

Joan showed me how to catch a bus to the zocolo, which I hadn't seen yet. It was beautiful at night with the cathedral lit up!

Once home I talked quite a bit with Brenda, who is really struggling with life in cold, far away Canada. Then with Mario, & told him all about my day. I feel like I'm really getting to know the family & it's sad to have to leave so soon.

As of today I feel like

I'm finally having fun.

There are lots of people in the house now:

Mario, Marianna, Gabriela (Gally), Brenda, Roberto, Mathias, Tuahnia, Ivan, Ivana, Nicola, me, the 2 girls from Wisconsin, & Ivan's 2 cousins from Fresno - 15 people!

Dec. 31 Sunday

Bus to el centro. Lots of vendors, a few beggars, mostly Mexicans. This is a very well to do city. Prices are similar to states, which is surprising, since most people don't earn a lot.

The center is lovely, clean & cared for.

Cathedral for mariachi mass. Most people casual, many (incl. women) in jeans. The mariachi music was great but I couldn't see the musicians. Lots of great admonitions to be kind to your kids etc.

Mexican people are very affectionate & warm. Whenever I talk to someone, on the street or in a bus, they light up with big smiles & are so nice to me.

Jardin Borda free today because it's a national holiday. Nice garden with fountains, shade, lagoon with ducks, amphitheatre. Bride & groom being photographed.

More Mexicans with video cameras than tourists.

Palacio de Cortes, with Diego Rivera mural, closed today :-

Sadam Hussein was hanged yesterday. The newspapers have photos. It's pretty horrible & gruesome. The priest mentioned it at church this morning.

Turistic train - double decker - I'm on top ~~but~~ and it's hot, but hopefully there will be a breeze, and the view is better.

I can understand maybe 30% of what the guide is saying. I am the only non-Spanish speaker aboard.

Walked down Barranca de Amonalca - cool & forested w/

Aqueduct section from time of Cortez.

On the way back a local singer sang a song he wrote about Morelos.

Joan had recommended an Italian restaurant overlooking the cathedral, but too pricey for me. \$15-20 for lunch. Instead I'm having a lovely lunch at a restaurant one block away, on the sidewalk in the shade. Menu completo for \$35 pesos (\$3.50).

Two raggedy Indian street kids came over to ask for money. I chatted with them for a while & then gave them some bread

and turned around to wave to me - cute!

They ran off happy. It felt weird to be eating luscious food in front of them. A puff pastry with tuna, then potato "leek" soup, then rice, then chicken with mole & tortillas (DARK & spicy)*

On the bus tour I bought a "sherbet" (passes for ice cream here) of "mamay" (not in my dictionary. It's orange & tastes OK - a little chalky.

* but I like it. Marmelade for dessert.

Most tourists here are Mexican.

Then went to artisanal market where I bought some "amate" paper paintings from the

painter who made them. I picked him because he seemed nice & not pushy. I didn't even bargain because I was happy to give him the money.

Then I walked over to the big municipal or principal market (not very far) to take pictures of mole mountains & wrestling masks. And I bought a net bag.

I still had quite a bit of money to spend so I bought some silver earrings. (I felt bad the other day because Gabby showed me some jewelry she is selling but it was really expensive so I didn't buy anything.)

Went to an internet cafe (60¢/hour). Had michoacan ice cream (recommended by Amy) and it was good. Then ~~went~~ watched salsa dancers on the plaza - great music & dancing.

Caught a bus home.

Dinner isn't until 8:30. I hung out downstairs for a while but now I'm up in my room.

They're playing loud music & it's hard to hear what anyone's saying.

I have hardly heard any xmas music this week, and xmas decorations are mostly minimal & fairly tasteful. Trees & lights are similar to US.

Dinner was awful: spaghetti with canned sauce, hot dogs, potato chips, ^{ritz} crackers & cream cheese! After, we danced for a while, which was fun, and Mathias & Marianna did ~~the~~ sparklers. About 10 the Am. girls left for their party, and Mario & I went off to bed. I felt kind of left out of the fun somehow.

Firecrackers (huge ones) are going off all over. I put in ear plugs. When I woke up to pee at 3 I took my earplugs out suddenly there was the noise of a huge party with ^{loud} music. It was still going in the morning.

After breakfast Gabby Brenda took me to buy my bus ticket. Spent fireworks everywhere.

Then I went for a walk around the neighborhood. Now I'm hanging out in the sun on the porch, until it's time to leave. Someone is sobbing in the next room and I suspect it's Gabby, though it could be Marianna. ~~It~~ Gabby seems unhappy.

I cried when I said goodbye to Mario - it seems unlikely that I will ever see him again, & he is one of the kindest people I've ever met.

Brenda, Robert & Matthias drove me to the bus station. There were a lot of people, but it was very organized & easy to understand what was going on. The airport is very clean & modern & easy to use. No good food beyond the security gate though. I am craving a good meal. One store has yogurt - but it's warm!