



A WORKING VACATION

Sameera Hanif talks with Lisa Calhoun, participant in Experiment in International Living's Mexico project

Sameera Hanif

Last summer UNB student Lisa Calhoun had the opportunity to participate in the Experiment in International Living program and saw the real Mexico by breaking through popular stereotypes such as Sombreros and Speedy Gonzales.

She and four others - Paula Farrell, Kerry Flynn, Sylvia Stanz and group leader Sandi Moore spent July 31 to August 29 living in Mexico. Each of them spent two weeks living with a poor villager in the village of San Mateo and another two weeks living with a rich family in the city of Puebla. While living with the poor family they helped various families paint and repair their homes. The group also stayed in Mexico City for three days.

The Experiment in International Living has been in existence since 1932 and was founded by Dr. Donald B. Watt. It was incorporated into Canada in 1967, and is presently in over 50 countries. The purpose of EIL is to provide, through immersion in the language and culture of a different country, a meaningful learning experience for both the experimenters and the host family. This understanding can only be reached on a one-to-one basis and is to enhance and encourage understanding among peoples of the world.

The EIL is a private non-profit organization, and

incredibly different from your average tourist travel agency program. The difference is that a tourist goes to a foreign country and sees the impersonal and superficial parts of the country, but the Experimenter knows the country better by living in it and partaking in its different activities of day to day living. In other words tourists see a country - Experimenters live it.

Lisa said the reason that the Experimenters live two weeks with a poor family and another two weeks with a rich family is to be able to compare and contrast the two classes by experiencing them.

When I asked about the role of religion in Mexican life, Lisa stated they are mostly Catholic and admitted they take religion more seriously than we do in North America.

The main difference between the city and the village lay in the areas of the population and material wealth. The village was self-sufficient while the city was quite Americanized. The village was not completely cut off from the rest of the world as it was only 30 minutes to Toluca - the nearest city - and because of

this the villagers were quite aware of current events in the news.

The difference between material wealth in the city and the village was incredible. First of all, Lisa reassured me that though she had headed down to Mexico with the vague notion she would be literally camping out in some completely unknown and forboding part of South America and destroying every muscle in her body by partaking in hard labor, thank God her assumptions had proven to be the very opposite.

The village did have electricity, running water, plumbing, and real beds. But the community shared on telephone and in her home", the floor was cement and the walls were cement painted upon which for aesthetic delight were posters.

In the houses in the city, there were paintings instead of posters, two cars, three telephones, a separate bathroom attached to each of the four bedrooms, and a maid with her own quarters. Quite a difference!

When asked about the role of education, Lisa commented that in both village and city it was considered very important. During her stay the mothers were telling her to teach the children any English she could... In addition to teaching important English words and phrases, the EIL group taught the children songs and morality/allegory stories.

The basis of the entire Mexican society and life is the family structure. Family and tradition are very important to the Mexicans. Another thing I learned from Lisa that was amazingly shocking was the incredible concept of love, respect, openness and cooperation. The differences within these concepts between the Mexicans and us is so great it makes one wonder.

There is never any talking back to one's elders, and there is no discipline problem...the children actually do as they're told (ie. the theory of child obeying parent is put into practice and is successfully carried out). The children are always helping out with the chores and the older ones often agree to take care of and entertain their younger siblings. The basic attitude is to look out for everyone else.

Lisa sighed that the openness and friendliness was fantastic. Everywhere one walked there was always a friendly greeting, those other universal house chores. The children would usually be in a

A typical day for Lisa involved waking up...up between 7:00 and 8:00 am then everyone would meet in the community centre of the village from which they would travel to the homes where they would work until 2:00 p.m. The work consisted of carrying bags of sand and cement,

painting and whitewashing.

Then, after 2:00 pm there was a break in which one either relaxed or partook in the family activity. Supper was usually at 4:00 pm after which two hours were spent in the community centre teaching the children songs and games. After, there was usually socializing, singing and guitar music. Most people were in bed by 11:00.

When asked what she got out of her stay in Mexico, Lisa told me several things. One was that not only did it improve her Spanish, but she gained a new experience and learned about another culture and way of thinking. She said it made her more humble and appreciative of what we have here in Canada and of such basic things we take for granted like clean water, money, education, and employment. She felt she learned how different the attitudes towards other people (strangers and friends) was compared to here where people are not as open. And most importantly Lisa felt that the experiences made her think of what she values not only as a Canadian, but also as an individual.

When I asked what advice she'd give to someone planning to partake in the EIL program she replied that it is not a vacation and that you will be living and learning there so you should go with an open mind and expect the

unexpected.

This year's trip to Mexico will fall between July 23 and August 28. The first three days will be spent in Mexico City seeing the major points of interest such as the Aztec pyramids and a performance by the world renowned Mexican Folklore Ballet. Then there will be a one day homestay with a family in a village in the State of Mexico where the participants will perform various duties such as whitewashing and painting.

The participants must be serious about the trip and willing to face up to the challenge. They can be senior high school students up to the age limit of early 30's. The minimum number required for a group to go is six and the maximum is 12. It is necessary to have basic conversational skills in Spanish and orientation sessions are being scheduled at the convenience of the majority of the participants.

This year's group will have a two week homestay in Corduba in the state of Vera Cruz followed by 4 weeks in Mexico City and two and a half weeks in a village doing a community service program in the state of Mexico.

If interested in participating please call Marion Cumming at 472-2915. Nela Rio at 452-7700 or Sandi Moore in the evenings at 472-2634.



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