

Letter from Irapuato by Emily Sandall

I am finding myself where I always find myself this time of the year, on the streets of Mexico. Just finished my 3rd day working at a youth shelter in Irapuato, Mexico...it's not the most beautiful city, but it does have a program I am drawn too. I was here two and a half years ago, and have returned to extend a photo project with street children that I have been working on. I will be here for awhile, then Mexico City again, maybe visit some intentional communities in between, and off to Oaxaca to finish up the journey.

I spent the first week in Mexico City with a friend from Outward Bound, Josh, who was too, randomly headed down to Mexico, so we decided to brave the bus ride down and go together. The bus ride wasn't bad, actually pretty posh, but if you are one to never be around movies, and don't have the skills to resist them when they are on, you will be seeing quite a few awful movies on your ride down.

Josh and I spent our time in Mexico City, where he gets to know an area by location, I by people. It was a nice mix of wandering the streets between metros in Mexico City, and visiting with street children organizations, indigenous folks who were begging on the streets, and food vendors. We went up to a tower to see the view of Mexico City, it was quite overwhelming looking at the vastness of the city, of human creation and development, of the rate of growth of our species. I found myself feeling less and less significant in the grand scheme of things as I stared out the windows, and grateful for the community of friends who I have been lucky to meet along the way, who have taken the time to hear a bit of my story. I appreciate you all very much.

An interesting tidbit when traveling with a male, is the amount of interactions I had with Mexican men were greatly diminished. It is an aspect of Mexico I wasn't used to, going a day without having to cut a conversation short or be asked on a date. No need to worry, though, that trend had returned...Mexico is back in its truest form.

I arrived in Irapuato at 3 in the morning, too cheap to buy a hotel, and spent the next four hours writing, and dozing off with my belongings woven between my extremities. It was a tiring first day...I realized how wiped I was after an hour passed in the Zocalo watching pigeons. Not my usual favorite activity, but with the lack of sleep they were quite the fascinating show.

The boys continue to inspire me, challenge me, keep me on my toes. They are a mixture of warmth and a solid shell. There are quite a few of the same kids at the shelter, many new faces, still the same presence. Still fighting back tears during fights, still easily provoked, still curious....

I was tested by Vicente yesterday, I assume more tomorrow. He is a boy I challenged the last time I was here. I had released a lizard he had just caught, behind a wall that he couldn't get too. I knew the fate of the lizard, right next to it where they played was another...blood lined it's ears, no life in it anymore, a game of 3 days before. A cycle they have in them, for they have all been abused, hit by someone older, stronger than them; to then continue the cycle on something smaller than them. A cycle I feel, though, that can change. And is....slowly. They are surrounded by adults that don't hit. Surrounded by adults that may get mad at them, but are still there in the morning. I did catch Vicente, during my English class when i was putting actions to the words I was teaching, participating when I wasn't looking. Glad to see that, for there is a part of him i greatly admire. Where he doesn't just always do; he thinks about it, twiques it to his liking, and then does it...if it fits his style. He seems beyond his years in some ways, perhaps because of the time he had to be independent, alone, use survival instincts, the moment to moment lifestyle before he came to the shelter.

I pass the rest of my days writing, teaching the youth how to use cameras, breaking up fights, playing soccer, giving them guitar concerts, and continuing to try to understand the patterns of the youth. It is an odd world we live in, I realize more and more. Such a mixture of intense beauty, deep pain, longing, celebrating, exploring, surviving. And then just foolishness.

Like the other day. I left the shelter hungry, and decided to go get something to eat. My mind was full and busy, which I will have to use as my excuse. I sat in the first resturanut I saw and briefly glanced at the menu, saw the word tostada and decided to order the cheapest one. A half order of it luckily. So I was sitting there excited to eat, when I was brought out this heaping plate of lettuce, tomatoes, avocado, and....and.....pigs feet. 3 of them, cold. I assumed they were cooked, but it wasn't so convincing with them cold. Not sure what to do and knew I wasn't in the place to stomach it, I stripped off what I thought was the edible meat on the feet, and hid it in my napkin. Quickly, but not too quickly, eating the tostadas plain with the veggies. I decided to feed the meat to the first stray dog I saw, and make sure to look at the menu more clearly next time. I guess a fault of mine trying to be so frugal....4 hours passing in a cold bus station and an order of pig's feet. Not that I will change,though, just becoming more aware of what my lifestyle may continue to entail being cheap.

Anyway on that note, I miss you all and hope to cross paths soon. Perhaps over a meal of Pig's feets.

much love,

Emil

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