

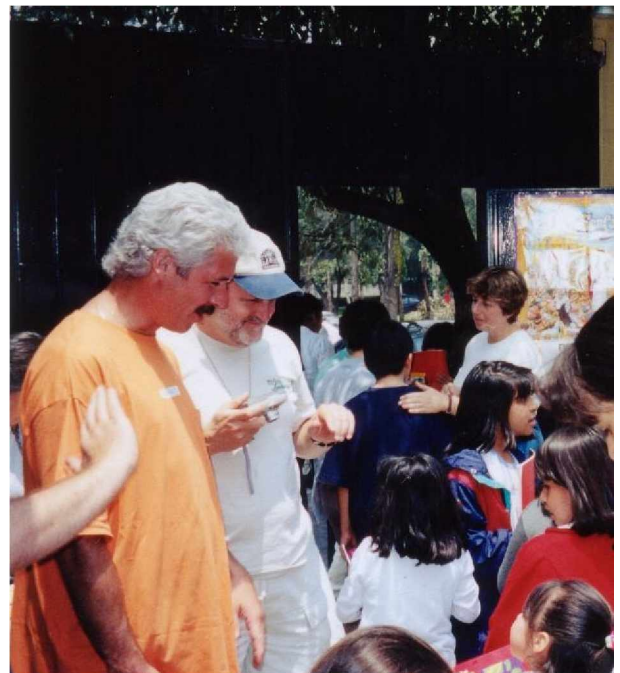
TENNESSEE TRASH # 42

The Missionary Imposition

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Tennessee Trash #42 was produced as usual by Gary R. Robe at P. O. Box 3221, Kingsport, TN 37664 The phone is (423) 239-3106, and my new e-mail address is grrobe@charterthnnet. The captions for the front cover are:

1. The Eastman Pan-American Coatings Expo team, l-r: Oscar Lagos, Pascal Convers, Eduard Tora, Jimena Galvan, Carlos Gamboa, Marta Aguilar, me.
2. Preparing food for the homeless at *Iglecia Cristiana del Norte*, l-r Mildred Bush (facing away), Sarah Bush, Cherish Beandon, Stephanie Rutsrtom, Gary Bush, Amanda Ryan, Joy, Jennifer Miller, Glenda Ball
3. Glenda Ball carefully ignores a waterborne Huxter in the Floating Gardens of Xochimilco.
4. Larry Wilson and Gary Buch distribute crayons and coloring books to the children leaving Bible School

TENNESSEE TRASH # 42

A Zine by Gary R. Robe for Mailing Number 222 of the
Southern Fandom Press Alliance

June - July 2001

Mission to Mexico...

This will not be a complete mailing because I just returned from Mexico only a few days before the deadline and so I am starting late even for a dedicated last-minute writer like me.

Then the idea of a short-term mission trip to Mexico City was first mentioned at a church board meeting in January, I was quite interested because I know Mexico City quite well, I have wanted to get to know people better, and /I felt I could add quite a bit to the mission. My involvement got stronger in March when I made an advance trip to the mission church to help scout out the area and lay the groundwork for the trip. Even if I didn't go on the full trip in July, I had already contributed to the mission by helping with the preparations and saving the cost of sending a representative to Mexico.

Once I met the Carpenter family in Mexico City who run the mission, the pastor of the church, Hector Romo, and some of the people who attend church there, I committed myself to making the trip. The two things I was not crazy about were the timing of the trip and its mission. The trip was to occur from July 11-23, and I had no choice but to attend the Pan-American Paint Show on July 17-19. That had plusses and minuses. On the plus side, I could get the company to pay for my plane ticket since I would be there on company business. I could also cut a couple days off the trip since I could leave fort Mexico a day later and then work through the following week. On the minus side, I would have ot leave the group right in the middle of the mission right when they would need me the most.

The other thing that bothered me about the trip was that the main mission of the group would be to put on a Vacation Bible School for the children of the neighborhood of the church. This seemed to me like a frivolous reason to send a bunch of people from East Tennessee to Mexico. What could we contribute that the locals couldn't do better? This was especially true since I would almost be the only Spanish speaker in the group.

AS the planning progressed, I rationalized these doubts be3cause I would be there for the critical days of July 12-16 as the group would be settling in, planning and coordinating with the locals, and the kickoff day of the VBS. I would also be able to participate in a planned side-trip to minister to street people. In all, I could contribute quite a bit to the total effort, and since I could get the company to pay part of the bill, I would not be a financial burden on the rest of the group.

When you add in the fact that we would be living in rather Spartan conditions in the church building, barely better than some of the poor children we would be working with, the trip became more attractive. I was it as a penance for all the times I've stayed in a four-star hotel while driving right past the needy people on the streets of the city.

I officially included myself in the mission group when I presented a video and photos of the church there in Mexico City to the mission team in Kingsport in early April. I began to make monthly payments to the church to pay may part of the \$800 per person cost of the trip.

About three weeks before we were supposed to leave, conflicts began to crop up. I had told my boss, the sales reps in Mexico City and the Regional Sales Manager, Eduard Tora, what I planned to do in July when I'd been there in March. I did not, however, continually remind them of my plans between March and June. As I started planning the company part of the trip, I couldn't get the people in Mexico to respond to my requests to plan the trip. Based on a conversation I had with one of the Mexican sales reps about when they would expect me to be there, I had already bought a supersaver ticket to leaving on July 12th and then staying on in Mexico through July 28th.

The excrement hit the rapidly rotating metallic air circulating device near the end of June when Eduard announced that there would be an all-day meeting at the Eastman office on Monday the 16th, and I wrote him back that I would be on vacation that day but would be available and already in Mexico any day of the following week. At that point Eduard grilled me on what my plans were and found out that I was participating in a church-sponsored trip. I could feel the resistance building as I talked to him over the phone. Sure enough, the next day I got called into the boss' office with the news that I would have to pay for the whole trip out of my own pocket.

There is apparently an IRS rule (according to Eastman management – I would like independent verification on this!) that an employee cannot be reimbursed for combined vacation/business travel if they work for pay fewer days than they take in vacation. I had all along planned to take five days in vacation and then work seven, but I suspect that Eduard told the local reps to conveniently be unable to schedule any customer calls for the week of the 23rd. That changed the balance to three working days and five vacation days.

I know for a fact that the Mexican reps didn't try very hard to make appointments for the last week of July because during the paint show I had several customers ask if I could come and visit them the next week. The bottom line was that one week before we were supposed to leave, I was faced with either paying for the whole trip myself or cancelling the mission trip and cutting back to three days only in Mexico! The fact that

the company wasn't having to pay for my meals and lodging made no difference.

In the face of this resistance to my making the mission trip, any ambivalence I had toward going with the church group vanished. It is funny because I am not normally a very spiritual person, but then I felt like actual diabolic forces were working against me. I dug in and looked for ways to resolve the problem.

The Mexican reps did, eventually save the trip for me. They scheduled customer meetings on Friday the 20th so that if I came in for the all-day meeting on the 17th, then spent two days at the paint show followed with another working day, then I could leave on Sunday the 22nd instead of travelling home with the group on the 23rd. That shifted the balance to three vacation days and four working days.

I am very glad that I went on this trip. It was one of the most interesting international trips I've ever made. It was better than a vacation for me because I didn't have to worry about the rest of the family. I was able to concentrate on the task at hand and really get to know some of the people of Mexico that weren't Eastman employees or customers. It was both exhilarating and sobering in equal measure. It was varied and eventful enough that I'll break it down day-by-day while it's still fresh in my memory.

Day -1 - Pack-out: Tuesday, July 10th

Without really getting a confirmation about my work schedule, I took it on faith that I would get enough days of work to avoid having to pay out of my pocket. They was make-or-break day because this was the point where we were packing everything that was going on the trip.

Based on earlier experience, our team leader, Gary Bush, had determined that a 30-gallon Sterlite (not Rubbermaid) plastic storage box as sold at Wal-Mart has exactly the maximum dimensions allowed as luggage without having to pay for oversize handling. Each member of the team was limited to 35 lbs. of personal luggage, and each trip was packed out to a maximum of 70 lbs. I learned that the maximum luggage allowance is two 30-gallon Sterlite boxes packed to 79 lbs. each. We had 13 people on the team,

so we could carry 1365 lbs. of supplies with us, including 3 lbs. each for the crates themselves.

We placed each tub on the scales along with personal luggage, verified that was less than 35 lbs. and then stuffed in food, medical supplies, donated dry goods, handicraft supplies, books, first-aid equipment and freebies until each crate weighed just under 70 lbs. Each crate was then drilled at six points along the rim and sealed shut with zip-ties and duct tape. Once the boxes were sealed, we loaded them into the church bus for the ride to the airport.

Once the packing was finished, we met in a meeting room to agree on the team mission statement, guidelines and hierarchy. I was elected 2nd in command. We agreed on a schedule for giving daily devotions and kitchen help crews. Dr. Bush had devised an ingenious method for washing dishes that minimized weight, washing time, and freshwater usage. Everyone brought their own plastic eating utensils. After each meal we would have a tub of boiled hot, soapy water, another of tap water with bleach followed by a rinse of bottled fresh water. In this way we were able to wash all of the eating utensils and cooking implements after each meal and use only 2 gallons of purified water for 13 people.

Day 0 Leaving Day: Wednesday, July 11th

On Wednesday I got confirmation from the sales reps in Mexico City that I had four full days of work scheduled so my trip would comply with the expense reimbursement rules. Furthermore, I knew that the church was only five minutes away from Oscar Lagos' house. I confirmed that he could drive by on Tuesday morning and give me a ride to the office. Here was where the Hand of God seemed to start touching the trip.

I sent an i-mail to Steven Carpenter, our host missionary for directions to the church. He replied immediately, then I went to the online map of Mexico City (www.guiaroji.com.mx) to locate it. I printed out the section that included the church and, for some reason, quite a bit of the surrounding area. I cut out the individual map squares and taped them together during my lunch hour so that I had a detailed street map on about 4 square miles of the Atizapán/

Tlatp[lanetla area. Doing this turned out to be prophetic.

One of the guiding principles of the trip was to minimize the expenses so more of the money could go to the targets of the mission. For the reason all of the team but me departed for Atlanta on the church bus on Wednesday night. It would have been fiscally irresponsible and physically impossible for all of us to depart from Kingsport. I doubt that nay of the planes that service our little community airport have 1820 lbs. of luggage-carrying capacity, let alone enough cargo space to hold 26 30-gallon Sterlite storage tubs.

Our church has a regular Wednesday night meal and service and on this night the mission team was the center of attention. At the end of the service, we came forward and the Deacons lay on their hands and the congregation said a prayer for our mission. We then went down to the bus to make sure there were no last-minute changes and then the twelve took off for Atlanta. The plan was to drive through the night and catch an early Continental flight to Houston and then to Mexico City.

Day 1 - Arrival: Thursday, July 12th

Since I was travelling at company expense, I had to take a different route and use Delts. That meant that I got one more night in a bed than the rest of my companions and also got to wake up at a reasonable hour.

When I looked out of my bedroom window on Thursday morning, my heart dropped. The fog was so thick that I could barely see the line of trees along the back of our lot. All of the possible travel horror scenarios started going through my head. My flight was still almost two hours in the future, so I just got ready to do and hoped that things would look better at the airport.

The driver picked me up at about 7:45 AM and we headed toward the airport. As soon as we got out of my neighborhood the sky cleared and by the time we reached the airport there was nothing but blue sky!

I was also paranoid about checking so much baggage. My two crates had a combined weight of 136 lbs., and I had a laptop case plus a carryon

duffel bag with me. I knew that I was flying on a turboprop plane and there seemed to be quite a few people checking in. The gate agent, however, took my crates without comment and checked them through all the way to Mexico City. I was beginning to believe that God was looking over me.

I was convinced of this when I got on the flight to Mexico City and got a three-seat row all to myself! That had never happened to me before. I got to stretch out and enjoy the flight. Once in Mexico there was no line at immigration and my crates came down the carousel promptly. I had arrived right on time and 20 minutes ahead of the rest of the team's flight from Houston, I stationed myself at the baggage carousel once the Houston flight came up and started snagging crates and sorting them by owner onto carts.

By the time most of the crates were loaded the team came downstairs from immigration and were very glad to see me and the work that I had done to sort out the luggage before they had even gotten to baggage claim.

Then came a major potential problem: clearing customs. I took the lead and gave my customs form to the inspector. She looked at me and my boxes and waved over a supervisor. The supervisor asked me what was in the crates, and I answered him in Spanish that it was school supplies and personal provisions for a church. He started to take me over to the inspection office, but he saw 12 others with their crated in tow. He asked me if there was any clothing or shoes in the crates and I told him there was only personal clothing. This was stretching the truth because I knew that there were actually several crates filled with clothing, personal hygiene supplies, crayons and coloring books that we planned to give away. The inspector did a little mental calculation of how much work it would be to open all of those sealed crates, flipped a mental coin and waved the whole lot of us through! I said *Dios de bendiga*, with a smile and led the group out to the reception area.

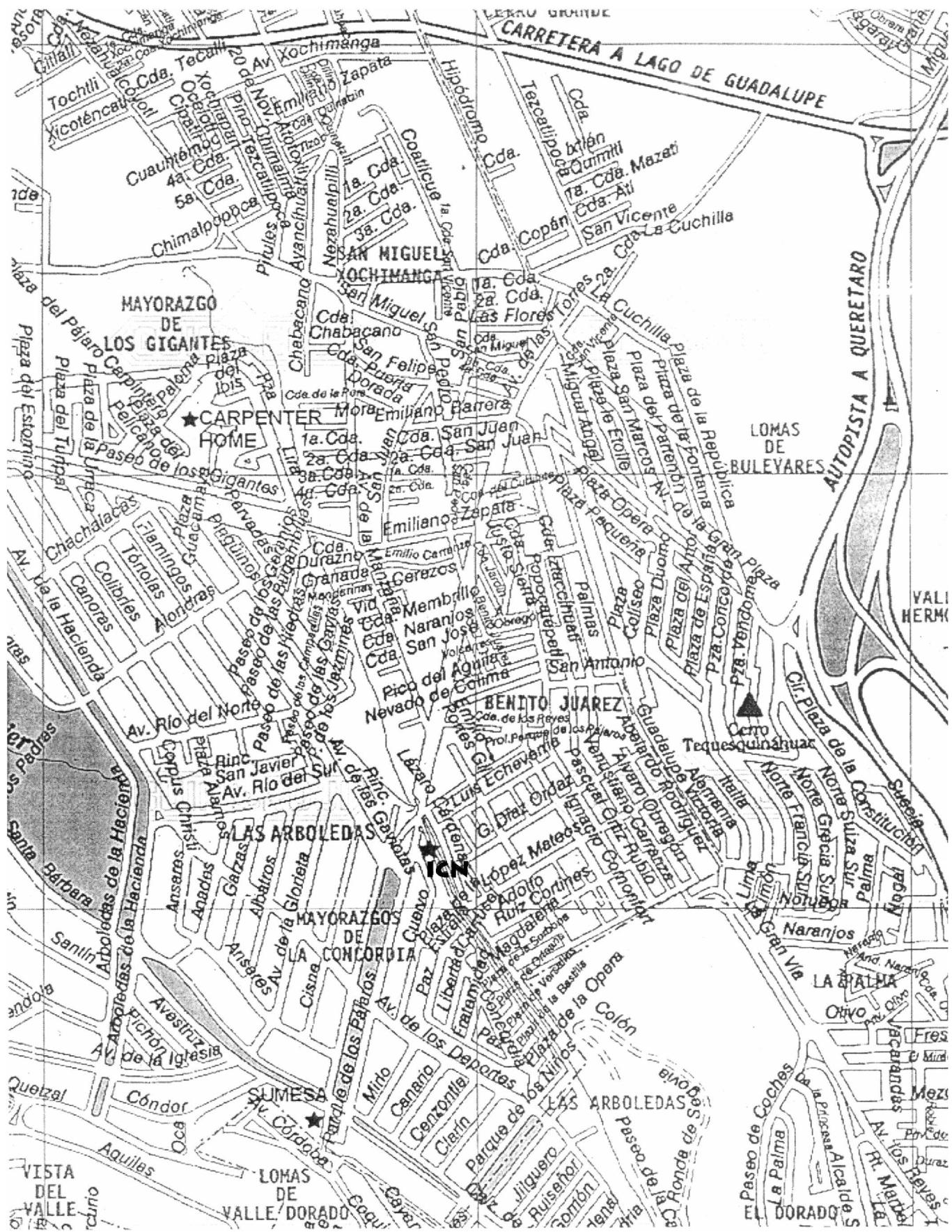
I immediately spotted our host, Steve Carpenter among the crowd waiting for arriving passengers. One slight hitch to our arrival was the Thursday was the one day that he could not drive his 13-passenger van that we had planned to use to transport ourselves and luggage to the church. Mexico City had an air pollution reduction

regulation that forbids driving of all vehicles one day a week based on their license plate number. It's a goofy law that has actually increased the number of cars on Mexico City's overcrowded roads because many have bought second cars to get around the restriction.

The hurdle was overcome by hiring three huge SUV taxis that had enough space for our luggage and passengers. When we got loaded Steve and Dr. Bush went to get Steve's car in the garage. As soon as the two people who were obviously leading the group were out of sight the porters and drivers started clamoring for tips. Dr. Bush had already given them a couple hundred pesos, but they wanted more before they would let the Suburbans roll. Gary had given the tip to the guy who seemed to be in charge but each individual who touched a crate seemed to think he was entitled to a tip. I handed out several 20 peso bills I had with me until the porters were satisfied.

I mentioned to the driver that I had a map of the area where we were headed, but he waved me off saying that we were following each other in a caravan behind *El Señor*. Right. We had three Mexican taxi drivers with a vague idea of where they needed to go and 20 miles of labyrinthine streets to cross. Once we got on the highway, the caravan turned into a race with each driver vying for the lead and Steve's little red Escort completely ignored. We drove into Atizapán and I knew we were off course when we crossed over the Querétaro expressway without turning. The drivers went on for a couple of miles before realizing we were headed into the wrong section of the city. Our driver finally turned off the blaring mariachi music that he had treated us to since our departure from the airport and sheepishly asked to see my map.

It was a salvation that I had printed out so much of the *Guia Rcji* map of Mexico City because although we were not more than two miles from the church, you couldn't get there from where we were unless you knew more about back roads than these jokers obviously did. There was a mountain between our location and the neighborhood where the church was located. The best plan was to backtrack to the Querétaro Expressway and get on the right course. This was a challenge because it was after 5 p.m. by this time and the evening rush hour traffic had



Map of Atizapán showing the location of Iglecia Cristiana del Norte (ICN), Shopping Center, and the Carpenter Home.

Started to build. As we exited the highway in the correct neighborhood, we spotted a very anxious Steve Carpenter and Gary Bush waiting for us. Steve took the lead and within a few minutes we arrived at *La Iglesia Cristiana del Norte*. My fellow travelers now had an exciting story about how they got lost in Mexico City only to be saved by my foresight in having a map of the area.

Day 2 - Preparations: Friday July 13th

The next day we had to pry open all of the crates and sort out all of the paraphernalia we had brought with us. In addition to VBS supplies we had brought nonperishable food, clothing for the homeless, cooking utensils, coloring books and crayons. Lots of crayons.

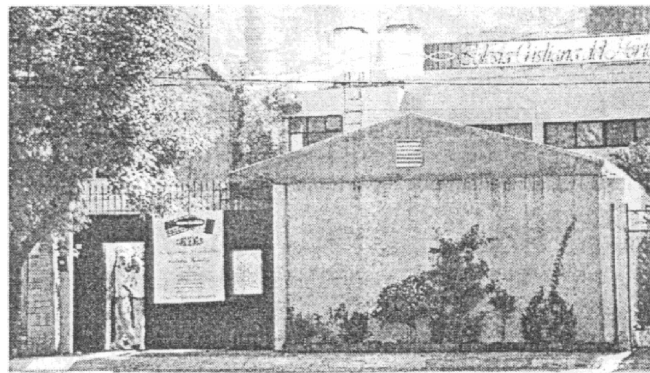
Two weeks earlier during our VBS program at home we challenged the attendees to see which group could donate the biggest pile of small boxes of crayons. We ended up with over 500 boxes to give away at the church in Mexico. A local pharmaceutical company gave us 500 Christian-themed coloring books to go with the crayons. Do you know how much 500 boxes of crayons weigh? It's a lot.

All of this stuff needed to get sorted into boxes for each day's activities and we needed to pre-assemble some of the more difficult daily projects. This took most of the morning to accomplish. Once this was done it was time to meet our audience.

The Carpenters had produced about 300 half-page fliers that we distributed in the neighborhood of Sin Miguel Xochimanga. The church itself is located in a quite nice middle-class neighborhood but following the road *Parque de las Pajaros* (Songbird Park) to the north leads you to into a different world. We walked door-to-door handing out fliers to anyone we could get to answer their door. The population density in this area was hard to comprehend. The houses were crammed together with little attention to aesthetics or even safety. I've seen thousands of these houses clinging to hillsides throughout Latin America but this was the first time I actually got in close enough to one to see what it's like inside.

I felt distinctly uncomfortable, like a Jehovah's Witness or Mormon knocking on doors of

strangers and handing out religious fliers. We did have candy that we were giving to any kids that were there to make it a little friendlier. After a while some of the discomfort wore off because most of the people were quite receptive to our invitation. Many of the houses had signs saying "This is a Catholic Home. We do not accept literature or propaganda from Protestant churches or other sects." We mostly played like dumb Gringos and knocked anyhow. Only one house waved us away without talking.



ICN Looking in from Parque de los Pajaros,
Gary Bush and Larry Wilson Looking Out.

Day 3: Recreation: Saturday, July 14th The group arrived on Thursday because that is the cheapest day for air travel. There was not really enough work to do to keep us busy for four days before the VBS was slated to start. We took Saturday off to travel to the pyramids at Teotihuacan. I had been there several times before, so I knew what was in store and I was not particularly anxious to return because I figured I had seen all there was to see.

The ride out to Teotihuacan was long and arduous. The group got to see a real live Mexico City traffic jam that took us an hour to clear. By the time we arrived the group was getting restless. The pyramids don't look very impressive in the distance. Unlike the Egyptian pyramids these are set in a mountain valley and are dwarfed by their setting. Of course, that impression fades a bit when you stand next to them and realize that people made these mountains.

This visit was different from the others in that I got to see the whole site at my own pace instead of squeezing in a visit between customer calls or being herded in a tour group. For that reason,

this visit made a much bigger impression on me than all of the earlier ones.

To begin with in my previous visits, I just headed straight for the biggest pyramid, climbed it and was ready to leave. This time I explored the whole mile-long extent of the site. I walked from the smaller buildings of the southern end of the Avenue of the Dead where presumably the administrative centers of the Teotihuacan government were located. From there Larry Wilson, Gary Bush and I walked the length of the avenue and poked into whatever was open along the way. Halfway up the avenue we something made the whole complex more interesting.

One of the side pyramids was excavated and the floor was broken through to reveal that the pyramids were more complex and larger than they appear at first glance. At this site a set of stairs descends from the top. Just above the floor a huge stone jaguar head decorates either side of the staircase. Undisturbed, the site looked complete, but the excavators had discovered something more. What looked like a solid stone floor was not.

Archeologists had broken through the floor showing how the stairs continued another 20 feet underground below the level of the floor. At the real foot of the stairs there was a different stone head ornament. This time the carving was Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent god of the Teotihuacan people instead of the Aztec jaguar! The Aztecs conquered Teotihuacan in about 750 AD and redecorated the place a bit. Apparently, the Aztecs were respectful enough of Quetzalcoatl not to destroy his images. Rather, they just paved over them and left them otherwise alone. Here was evidence that two civilizations had come to the same place to die at the hands of outsiders. It humbles you to stand in a place where two cultures powerful and intelligent enough to move mountains were wiped off the face of the earth.

Another observation about the site was personal. Last time I visited Teotihuacan I climbed only the Pyramid of the Sun and after that my legs throbbed and I had trouble walking for two days after. This time I walked the length of the Avenue of the Dead, climbed the Pyramid of the Moon, toured the museum and then climbed the Pyramid on the Sun. My calves and feet were a bit sore, but that went away by the time we got



back to Atizapán. That is what two years of intensive martial arts training does for one's stamina.

Another moment worth mentioning happened at the top of the Pyramid of the Sun. I climbed it with Gary Bush, Glenda Ball and Larry Wilson. At the top there were a handful of sun worshipers sitting in Lotus position and charging their crystals. Dr. Bush said – loud enough for some to hear – “Look at all those people getting their power from the sun. I get mine from the one who made the sun!” that got some hostile stares from the new-agers!



Teotihuacan and The Avenue of the Dead
From The Top Of The Moon

Day 4 - Predicación: Sunday, July 15th

On Sunday morning we had to rise very early so we could clean, prepare breakfast, and ready the church for the Sunday service. This was made more difficult because there was a cantina directly behind the church that had music blaring until about 3 a.m. This church needs preparation for the service because the only seats are folding chairs that have to be set up in advance. We managed to make our morning observances and toilet just before the musicians arrived to set up.

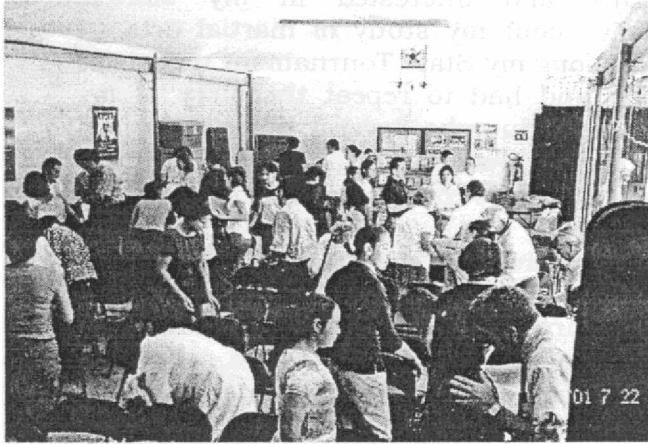
I had been to part of a service at ICN in March, so I knew most of what to expect. Hector Romo preached a pretty forceful Old Testament based sermon that I think caught most of the visitors off guard. If a preacher at home talks about the evils of idolatry, prostitution, sexual immorality and occultism it is usually through euphemisms and politically correct speech. Hector didn't pull

and punches and some of the visitors in the audience were not comfortable.

In order to make the service more accessible to the visitors from East Tennessee, Steve Carpenter provided a running translation of Hector's sermon. This was the first time that Steve had ever tried simultaneous translation, and I admire him for his courage. That is not an easy thing to do, and he did it with no practice and in front of 150 people. There were some funny moments when Steve got stuck on a word and people in the audience called out the translation before he could come up with it. Other times Hector used a complex word, and Steve turned to him with a pleading look as if to say, “surely you don't mean for me to translate that!” It was interesting to me to observe that I could understand quite well what Hector was saying, but when I tried to mentally form the words in English, I couldn't. Apparently, the part of the brain that processes speech is not closely connected to the part that vocalizes. I could almost feel my brain trying to move data from one place to another while trying to verbalize the translation.

That afternoon we had to make final preparations for the VBS starting in the morning. By that time we had met most of the children from the church families. I had become a special friend with a four-year-old named Diego who was the son of one of the people taking English lessons at the church. Diego had turned up one night and was feeling lonely and neglected while his mother studied. He was very shy but started a form of peek-a-boo with me by touching me while I was turned away. At one point when he touched my arm, I jerked it away like he had burned it. This was exceedingly funny. Before long we were rolling around together on the floor and inventing games to play. Although Diego's parents were not members of the church, he told his mother that he wanted to come back to class during the week to play with me.

On Sunday afternoon we had another visitor that was not so welcome when a large rat ran out of the flower garden and climbed the wall of the church. The reaction was typical. The girls all screamed and were generally hysterical and the men devised ways to catch and kill the rat. In the end the rat proved to be too elusive to catch, so we just adopted him and named him (or her) Ralph.



Sunday Service Breaks Up at ICN.
Everyone Stack Up Your Chair!

Day 5 - Getting to Work: Monday, July 16th

This was the first day of the VBS (*Curso de Verano* in Spanish or Summer School) and the only day that I would actually be able to participate in the main objective for the team. I was determined to make the most of it. The morning was hurried in getting the team's stuff out of the way in order to make room for the children. I planned to stay with the group making crafts because they initially had no Spanish speaker, and they had the most complex things to convey to their participants.

My plan changed when the kids started to arrive. It became apparent that the 4-5-year-old group would need constant supervision to keep them from getting lost and because of the separation anxiety that put them on the verge of tears. This was especially true of my buddy Diego because I was the only adult he would allow to get close. This change in plans was OK with me because they needed me, and I got to participate in every part of the program.

There were nine kids in the group, and they ranged from clingy (Diego) to grabby (Esmeralda). Controlling them was exactly like herding cats. My breakthrough with the group came when we stopped for snacks and Diego and I started playing a game we inverted the night before. I held out my hand and he gave me five. I then did something unpredictable with my arm. Sometimes I swung my arm around and rested it on Diego's head. Sometimes I hit my own head. The stupider something is, the funnier it is to a

four-year-old. Soon the whole gaggle wanted to play the "gimme five" game with me and was generally rolling with laughter. I had them under complete control.



Story Time at VBS. The boy at the left is Deigo. The girl third from the left trying to take toys from the other one is Esmeralda.

There were six stations for the day. Each day started with a group sing-a-long that then broke into sections for stories, snacks, handcrafts, Bible history, recreation and then a whole-group closing. It was a big job to coordinate the movement of all those kids from one room to another in the cramped facilities. It was a real struggle to get the 4-5-year-olds to move from one station to another because they all wanted to go back to where they were last having fun. Four-year-olds are very suspicious when they are having fun and you tell them that they have to leave that fun thing for the even more fun thing you have planned in the next room.

The last small group activity of the day was recreation in the park. That was easy because all you have to do is give four-year-olds a ball and let them go. We tried to be a bit more structured. We played a variation of Duck, Duck, Goose in which we put teens and adults in the middle and just let the young ones just throw balls at them. After that started wearing thin, we gave them balls and let them kick them across the field soccer-style. One interesting thing was to see the come programming of these kids had started at four. The girls pretty much kicked the ball at random while the boys actually had pretty good ball control skills. The boys even formed a huddle while they were waiting for the girls to finish running across the field.



The Little Boys Knew To Huddle While
Waiting For The Ball

After the closing ceremonies the mothers started to arrive to collect their children. We gave each of the kids a box of crayons and a coloring book as they left. Many of the kids acted like nobody had ever given them so great a present before. This was a bit of a bribe to get them to come back the next day in case we were giving out more presents. The rest of the day was spent in preparing for the next day's VBS and in providing conversation partners for the English students. Since I was one of the few bilingual people in the mission group, I was busy teaching until after 10 p.m. I was careful to give Diego a big hug when his mother came in for class, but then left him in the care of Cherish Brandon, our other Spanish speaker. I wanted him to get familiar with someone else so the shock wouldn't be too bad when I wasn't there in the morning.

Day 6 - Going to Work: Tuesday July 17th

Some of the group members had not understood that I had to leave for work during the middle of the week and were quite dismayed that I would not be there to support them. I got a very heartfelt sendoff from the group when Oscar Lagos arrived at the church to take me back to the world of business. Oscar was politely interested in what I was doing with the mission group.

Once at the office my "Mexican Fan Club", Jimina Galvan, Marisol Cosio, Elda Cantelano and Cristina Martinez immediately surrounded me. These ladies have always been very

supportive and interested in my stories, especially about my study of martial arts. I brought along my State Tournament medals to show off and had to repeat the story of my tournament triumphs several times. Eduard Tora arrived a few minutes after me and broke up the party so we could start our meeting.

We were involved in the strategy meeting all day. For a while it looked like I was going to get to return to the mission for that night because the next morning we were scheduled to make a call at a customer located no more than five minutes away from ICN. Darn the luck though, the hotel would not let me change my reservation with less than one-days' notice so I had to force myself to stay there instead of my ever-so-comfy mats on the floor of the church.



My room at the Royal Plaza Hotel. Oh the
sacrifices we make in the name of business.

Day 7-8 - The Paint Show: Wednesday- Thursday, July 18-19th

The next two days run together because I was doing duty at the Eastman booth of the Pan-American Coatings Expo. The show ran from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. for two days and I was stuck at the booth for the duration except for short bathroom breaks. The show was, as always, busy although less so than in the last two years. That is because the big International Coatings Expo is in Atlanta this year and that always drains off some of the interest in the local show. Also, I don't feel that the local organizers did a really good job of publicizing the show. I was, however, busy talking to customers most of the time. The most important ones did show up sometime

during the two days and I was able to pitch the projects that I wanted to get moving with them.

I had learned enough from past experiences with trade shows to come prepared for this one. Luckily, there was a Wal-Mart just down the street from my hotel, so I was able to bring in bottled water, Gatorade, and snacks to keep the group going through the show. The first day I brought in six bottles of water, two Gatorades, and a box of Nutra-Grain bars. They were all gone by 6 p.m. The next day I upped the stock to nine bottles of water, four Gatorades, Nutra-Grain bars and bags of peanuts. Eduard got the hint and said that the company would provide snacks the next time. I told him that the company provided them this time, the cost would just be included in my expense statement!



**Eastman Pan-American Coatings Expo Booth
in Full Swing—Service with a Smile From
Elda and Carlos**

WE had the traditional celebration dinner at Angus Butcher House after the show closed on Thursday evening. This is a very nice chain of steak houses in Mexico City famous for high quality beef and friendly waitresses in tight dresses. There was a funny thing we noticed about the menu. Arranchera is a traditional Mexican steak cut. It was listed four times on the menu with different weights and prices. This puzzled several people in the group, and it was explained that it was varying quality of meat. We ordered several different ones to see the difference. I had the one that was supposed to be the best. From what I could tell, they had - tenderized the others with sauces while mine was quite tender with no discernable treatment. If you like the flavor of beef, then mine was the one

to get. If you like meat with sauces, then the others were the better choice. The dinner broke up at about 11:30 and I returned to my room to soak in the jacuzzi until my legs and back stopped aching.

Day 9 - Marathon Man: Friday, July 20th

On the last day of the work week the sales reps had me booked for an endurance test. We made a call in the morning at a customer who was having problems and then had to drive to the other side of the city for a seminar. Eastman's distributor, Egon Meyer had invited customers in for a question-and-answer session from noon to 6 p.m. and I was the only one on the agenda. I explained that the only thing I needed was a projector for my PC and I would be good to go.

When we arrived the only thing absent was, of course, a PC projector. I had to start talking with only the blackboard to work with. Later on one of the customers brought in a projector which promptly overheated so I had to do most of the talk by lecturing. They had collected questions from the customers to direct my presentation. Unfortunately, the agenda was not assembled until after I had left home, so I never had the chance to read my e-mail. Luckily, most of the questions were rather basic, so I was able to answer them and edit my presentation on-the-fly.

I was almost a tired at the end of that day as I had been the previous two. I had been talking almost continuously from 8 in the morning until 6:30 in the evening after two previous marathon days. The church was only about 5 minutes away from Egon Meyer's facility so I was able to rejoin the group within minutes of finishing my business.

Day 10 - Hanging with the Homeless: Saturday, July 21st

ICN supports a sub-mission to aid the homeless population of Mexico City. This is a huge task that all the charitable resources in the world probably couldn't satisfy. With the limited resources available, however, the church does an impressive job. Margarite, a retired nurse and Joy, a young lady who had survived a life on the streets run the program. These two ladies go out every day to bring whatever food, supplies and medical attention that they can scrounge to

whoever is willing to listen to their Christian message. They agreed to take us along to one of the "high-class" colonies that they work with.

WE prepared food to take to the colony and Margarite lectured us on what to expect and do. First, she told us to take off all jewelry, watches, cameras and anything else that we valued. Second, she warned us not to give anything to these people, especially money. She explained that any money they were given would go straight to alcohol or hard drugs. Third, she said not to give them any medicine, even aspirin. Most of these people are taking drugs and may be high when we were there. Any medicine they are given could potentially cause a severe reaction. Last, she warned that these people have next to no hygiene and would almost certainly carry fleas, lice and diseases that could potentially jump to us.



Making sandwiches for the homeless. The lady in the center is Joy, a girl from the streets now running a mission for the homeless

With all of these daunting admonitions, it was explained that we would be going into the colony and rousing the people from their morning stupor. We would then play soccer with them in a nearby park. After we tired of futbol we would have a short evangelistic program and would then distribute the food. After this, they would probably be done with us.

We then loaded into the cars and headed to the mean streets. The place they had picked out for us was typical and very disturbing. The colony

was located under a highway bridge only a few minutes away from the Mexican Presidential Mansion. As promised, the people were at first hidden away in shacks fashioned from whatever building materials that could be scrounged. They had boxes of spoiled produce gathered around a fire pit. This was their food supply. The air was heavy with the smell of rotten vegetables, sweat, and excrement. The shacks were, well, hovels fur built as well as could be expected. One that I went into had at least some packing crates to sit on, A pile of rags in a corner for a bed, and a transistor radio. The occupant of the shack was probably the leader of the colony and was more enterprising than most. He had fashioned models from cardboard that he could sell on the street. He had made a surprisingly faithful model of the *Santa Maria* from trash. Margarete warned us not to offer to buy it.

From there we crossed the street to the park to play our game. The field was covered with tall grass in places and mud in others. It had rained heavily the night before, so everything was wet. The grass hid holes, dog shit and other surprises. The mud smelled like a barnyard. The ball had long ago lost its plastic cover and was now soft and fuzzy and blackened with dirt. Kicking it was a bit like playing with a rotten melon. We divided ourselves into teams and started playing.

The idea was for the visitors to pair off with colonists and to play until a goal was scored. At that point we were supposed to trade off with people on the sidelines so the everyone had the chance to play. It soon became obvious that most of our group just couldn't handle this. By the time the third goal was scored, only Matt Pearce, Steven Carpenter and I were left playing. The three of us kept playing even though by the end we smelled almost like our hosts. Matt got the worst of it because he played goalie. Once the ball got past him and landed on top of a dead rat. He gamely picked up the ball and put it back into play. He later bravely said that just made him play harder-he made sure the ball didn't go to that spot again! The field players didn't have it much better. The treacherous ground made it hard to stay on your feet and every time you tripped you picked up more of the filth. The homeless played a tough game and safe or not we had to make contact with them.

After an hour of play, the game broke up by mutual decision and we gathered around for the sermon. We began by singing *Jesus Loves Me* to the crowd. This delighted the street people more than anything else we did during the visit, and we ended up singing three more songs before turning the program over to the preacher. While we were playing futbol the homeless men seemed to be just normal people in dirty clothes. They outran us and certainly outplayed us. Once they were supposed to sit still and listen, however, it became apparent how damaged these people were.

One of the men who had been competently playing moments before began rolling in the grass like a dog. Another nearly toothless old man who had played goal was wandering around muttering and all but drooling over the girls. When we passed out the food most acted like they didn't know what it was. They did drink the juice and the three women did hoard the food. Most of the men just looked at the sandwiches like they were snakes that were going to bite them and then the toothless man just shredded his and tossed the pieces on the ground until one of the women took it away from him. She told Cherish Brandon that the man was too drunk to know what he was doing and that she would hold onto the sandwich until he sobered up enough to eat it.

After the food was distributed the street people asked us to sing again and we sang three or four more songs. All week we had been singing along with the children and at our daily devotions. This one time we stayed in tune and sounded like a choir. I thanked the men who had played for a good game, wished them *Dios te bendigo* and was glad when we took our leave.

We spent the rest of the day at Xochimilco, the Floating Gardens of Mexico. These are waterways carved out of the volcanic bedrock by the Aztecs in the southern mountains forming the southern edge of Mexico City. Today gaudily painted boats are poled through the Venice-like channels with party groups aboard. I was glad to do something to take my mind off that morning's expedition, but all day the smell of the street clung to my clothes reminding me of where I had been and what I had seen. It's not something that I'll soon forget.

Day 11 - Leavetaking: Sunday, July 22nd

The next day I had to prepare to leave as soon as the church service was over. Our mission group had bought flowers to decorate the church as thanks for all the hospitality. Steve Carpenter gave the sermon. The theme was how to keep the blessing alive once the mission was over. He urged us to stay in contact with the people we had met and to continue thinking, praying and supporting each other on both sides of the border. I was happy to see that Diego and his family attended the service, so I was able to say goodbye to them and to exchange contact information with them. Since I'm currently visiting Mexico four times a year promised to contact them whenever I visited next time.



Diego gives me a goodbye hug.

Right after the service Steve Carpenter drove me to the taxi stand and I headed to the airport. The trip home was uneventful except for a delay in Atlanta so I didn't get home until 1:30 a.m.

Corlis and the kids had left to stay at her grandmother's condo in Daytona Beach the day after I left, so they didn't suffer much in my absence. I say that, but Corlis' grandmother and aunt could be modeled on Lady Catherine de Bourcham from *Pride and Prejudice*. As I returned they were staying with my brother-in-law in Atlanta so I called during my layover to

see how their trip had gone. Corlis was ready to kill someone. Her spinster aunt and been nearly hysterical for the entire week and they had been expected to act like a happy family on vacation, all hanging on every word from Corlis' grandmother. At one point Isaac asked Corlis with no prompting from anyone if Aunt Ann was mentally retarded. I was definitely happier playing futbol with the street people.

What is it all worth?

Why did I make this trip and what good was it? A cynical side of me says that putting on a Vacation Bible School for a bunch of middle-to low class Mexican kids was a waste of time and an exercise in piety and vanity. Perhaps, but it was also an act of kindness and servitude if done with the proper attitude. All depends on the spirit

of the act. In some ways just writing this account is saying too much and being boastful. This journal was written more for my benefit than any other reader, and I apologize to anyone who finds it tedious. I do think some of the ideas and images here were worth sharing.

At the end, the value of the mission trip must be evaluated by its effects. Because of the trip I touched the lives of some people in ways that would have not been otherwise possible. Is that enough to justify the effort? I suppose that if just one person's life takes a better direction because of my influence then the trip was justified. I do not know that our efforts in the VBS and with the street people brought a bit of happiness into some lives that would not have been there otherwise. Is that enough? I just don't know yet.

NEWS FLASH: Horse Cave Paralyzed By Traffic Jam Main Street Horse Cave concerns addressed at meeting to promote downtown development



PARKING ON MAIN STREET is a main concern for citizens. These concerns were addressed last week at a public meeting held at Horse Cave City Hall last week. Pictured above shows congestion on Main Street and inserted shows a common problem of parking on the sidewalk.