

Mexico Journal 2005-2006

We left home on Sunday November 13. Packing the car in the morning we headed to my parent's house to make dinner to celebrate my sister's birthday. It was the last roast beast and chocolate mousse cake with meandering family talk around the table we were to have for a while. As the afternoon wore on and children begged off for homework, my dad and Dennis for a nap, we saw it was nearing 5:00 and put the kettle on for a cup of tea and a slice of good peach pie that couldn't have been faced a few hours earlier. It was delicious and a perfect end to the feast. The table cleared, goodbyes were said, Mom and Margi went to watch tv at her place with Dan and Jenna, Dad headed to the meeting and Dennis and I headed off to a concert I had bought tickets for months before.

It was my third time seeing John Cale and as it turned out, the first non-acoustic show. It was great. The energy of Cale and the band was the perfect stimulant to the next part of our day--getting in the car and driving as far as we could. Dennis took the first shift and despite having been quite wired from the show, I managed to doze. A quick 3 a.m. Tim's washroom break and coffee for Driver Two before the border, and we were back on the road looking more wide awake with our passports-in-hand ready to meet the nice lady at the Detroit border. She must have been bored or had some grudge with those working inside that night. There was no one else in line. She pasted a slip to our windshield and directed us to park to the left for inspection. The uniformed team on the other side instructed us gruffly to remain in the car as they approached. Then we were instructed to slowly get out of the vehicle leaving everything but our passports. We complied, although I was roughly admonished that "The Dog Stays". I couldn't help but nervously laugh at the officious talk--bad move. Sophie defended the car while Dennis and I made our way inside. The guards circled the car again. Inside another guard took our passports and re-ran whatever information it contained, then told us to sit down on the bench. Our perfect getaway plan seemed stalled in Detroit. We tried to look innocent and breathe calmly. I was worried about Sophie. A few minutes later without a word the guard handed us our passports and pointed to the door. We took this as a sign to obey. Outside the guards were standing back in their original huddle. We could go they said. They didn't search the car. Perhaps the cute dog on high alert in the front seat was all they needed to see. We were ok.

At the first gas station in Detroit we gassed up and changed seats. I put on headphones, chose some good driving tunes and Dennis and Sophie cuddled up to a pillow. I couldn't relive the Cale concert (yet) since I had no disk, but Cale and Eno, and several Pixies had me sailing down route I-75 long after the sun came up. We breakfasted in Ohio somewhere. Tip: Don't be fooled by those yellow roofs painted "Waffle House". We had tried one a few years ago and should have known better: they're all bad. We were the only one's not smoking in the restaurant. With thin, barely warm coffee, cold eggs and a small "Famous Waffle" for Dennis, we were barely fed, smelling worse than when we arrived, and now officially "On Vacation". Driver 1 got back in control, inflicted his own tunes, *sin* headphones, and we were off again. The rest is a blur of passing landscape and switching drivers until we pulled into a Texarkana Walmart that evening. There was a funny vibration coming from the front end that Dennis thought probably meant that we needed the tires balanced. Free balancing for life at any Walmart is why one buys tires at Walmart and not Canadian Tire, so the story goes. We walked the parking lot with Sophie for a while and then Dennis watched the tire procedure and I browsed the store until my name was

called and we finished that experience. We needed a motel, showers, something to eat and bed. We did each quickly, with little discussion, and then slept. Tomorrow we had all of Texas before us: tonight we slept across the street in Arkansas.

Texas starts out green and hilly like the previous states and progressively becomes drier and flatter. Usually. Just as we were getting to the drier and flatter (and also more populated) outskirts of Houston the rain started. Not regular rain. Dark, lashing, hailing, can't-see-through-the-windshield-rain. Hydroplaning rain. Much-rather-not-be-negotiating-rush-hour-in-a big-unfamiliar-city-rain. We chose what we thought was an outskirts ring-road and did our best to keep moving. The disturbing noise from the front wheel worsened, despite a second slow Walmart wheel-balancing stop, as we found ourselves driving through mile after mile of suburban Houston strip-malls---in the rain. Dennis finally detoured into a Goodyear garage, to see if this actual mechanic could tell us what the noise was coming from the front wheel. A tour around the block and the car was hoisted to reveal what the mechanic presented to us in the waiting room as a shot wheel bearing and hub. It might last. It might not. It had already chewed up the housing. It being my car, I opted for repair. (Dennis may have been more cavalier, or willing to spend a few days camped in a small Mexican town --if we were lucky--waiting for a similar part.) The mechanic said he could get us the parts by the morning. He would have one of the guys drive us to a nearby motel. So we spent a night in Texas. We were in a largely Mexican neighborhood of Houston and had already eaten one taco waiting for the initial diagnosis, so we opted to take on vacation mode, and say 'manana', in Texas.

With Sophie safely smuggled into the motel room, we turned on the tv and left her with the movie channel while we ventured up the street (still in the rain) to look for a more substantial dinner. We ended up in a Mexican grocery store getting our first bbq-ed chicken of our trip, something to drink and some dodgy-looking danishes for breakfast. We ate the chicken in our room sitting on the bed with an attentive dog-audience, watching the first of many movies we would see over the night and morning in this motel room. The car was ready by ten the next day, and although I may never know whether Lucy will end up with that nice Jack or his rich brother who she saved, but has been in a coma most of the film...I can kind of guess. The housemaid walked in while Dennis was taking loads to the car and blew Sophie and my cover while we tried to catch the end of the film. I politely turned the tv off, handed the woman the key, said thankyou and hauled a barking, illegal dog to the car.

This day was what Texas is purported to be: big and dry and flat. We made it to the Mexican border town of Brownsville by 5 and decided we had had enough of Texas and would cross the border this evening instead of waiting for the morning. It wasn't busy at the Mexican aduana so our paperwork was quickly processed and we were in Mexico just as the sun was setting. Now we had the thrill of being 2/3 of the way to Oaxaca while negotiating the vagaries of Matamoros in the dark. We congratulated ourselves and followed the trucks and few signs marking "Direccion Victoria." We remembered there were some tryst hotels on the outskirts and made that our goal. Food however would be an issue out there, so we detoured into a more upscale taco-place along the highway (*upscale*=it had a washroom). Fed and washroomed we lurched back into the line of trucks on the two-lane, unlit road and watched for a would-be tryst hotel. There were many. Unfortunately it wasn't lovers who were filling them up tonight but convoys similarly-thinking Mexican migrant workers returning home with cars and vans in tow, stuffed to

brimming with gifts for everyone. Like us they saw an inexpensive tryst hotel with its curtained-vehicle policy as an ideal safe-haven for the night. Eventually we found a hotel with room for us and we settled into our first 150 peso-a-night concrete home. At least we were out of Texas, even if this time we were just across a river.

In the morning the convoys were gone long before our departure at 7:30 and we drove a relatively clear road down the coast past Tampico (Take the toll-bridge! Follow the airport road through town!) to Tuxpan. We strolled around Tuxpan for a while with Sophie and deposited her in the car so we could go into a restaurant to eat. There was a cool breeze off the gulf so not much was happening outdoors down by the river or in the square. I was too tired to think of what to eat so ordered tostadas vegetariano, remembering to insist-*sin mayonnaisa*. (Small! Perfect! Lots of avocado!) Dennis diligently chewed his way through a Milanesa (breaded) tasajo (skirt steak) and we were fed. I found us a nice little room for the night--with agua caliente! -- and we settled in to read for the rest of the evening.

We slipped up slightly in the morning thinking we would put in a few miles before we stopped for breakfast. We were at the cut-off for Veracruz, 185 miles (300 k) away and it was past noon before we spied a roadside restaurant with a Desayuno sign. Despite the time, our pleading insistence that we didn't want a seafood cocktail or a dinner, but Desayuno, got us the 25 peso eggs and tortilla special. We were their only clients so they turned up the volume on the tv for our benefit and obliged. The four staff didn't watch the tv but us, hoping I guess that once we had finished with the preliminaries of the day, we would move on to their seafood specialties. We ate. Gave an overgenerous tip. Said gracias too many times and left feeling somewhat less empty.

We took the toll road bypass of Veracruz and rather than heading further on the toll road towards Puebla, then on to the city of Oaxaca, we chose to take the libre and cut through the sugar cane plantations of Tuxtepec and Tierra Blanca and up Mexican highway 175 as it wound up the Sierra Juarez to the high plains of the valley of Oaxaca. This was a shorter but slower route that we had taken home last year. We had enjoyed the views on the steep mountain road and looked forward to them again. This time however, the afternoon became cloudy and as we climbed into the mountains it was easy to see why everything always seemed so lush. It was misty and it seemed to have rained a lot recently as the roads were wet and washed out in a few places. We decided to stay for the night in the last real town before the twistiest climb began, Valle Nacional, and had our choice of two little hotels near the bus station.

We walked the length of town with Sophie and chose a comida corrida from a woman cutting vegetables in her empty restaurant while watching a soap-opera. She offered us chicken or pork and we accepted one of each and watched the soap opera with her while we ate. At the hotel, we relied on a little girl to rouse her *Abuelo* to let us in. (Grandfather. Shouted many times at the top of her lungs while rattling the gate) Eventually, he emerged from the depths of the building and showed us a room that would do for the night. To our dismay we heard the rain start again in earnest a short while later. It continued rattling on the tin roof all night, but I must have finally dozed for when we left in the morning it had thankfully stopped. The roads were wet and we saw little of the spectacular mountain views we remembered for a long time, but there was some

oncoming traffic on the road this Saturday morning, so the road had not disappeared down the mountain in the night as I had feared.

If we were true Road Warriors, Dennis argued, we could have a late lunch in, by this time sunny Oaxaca, and take 131 down to Puerto Escondido and probably make it there just after dark. No. I argued that we had survived enough first and second gear hairpin driving, avoiding rocks on the road to indicate cave-ins and following slow diesel buses for one day. I wanted to catch my breath with an excellent cup of Oaxacan cafe con leche sitting in the Zocalo, eat something that wasn't chicken, and spend a few pleasant hours strolling the city and looking at art. I should have taken Dennis up on the Kamikaze Road Warrior Scenario just to see if he was serious, but he acquiesced to slow eating, strolling and art too quickly. (Den: I just was making the point that it could be done, not suggesting we do it. Liz: Sure.)

While Dennis and Sophie stayed on a side-street, I reconnoitered us a good nearby hotel, with parking for the reasonable Oaxaca rate of \$300 pesos. I think the manager of the Aurora, our familiar first choice, must have seen us with Sophie lingering over coffee on the Zocalo, for when I went to inquire about a room he asked directly if we had a dog. Honest gringa that I am, I said yes, but she was small and quiet. He replied, with a smile "No dogs". I smiled too. Oh well. I think the new place I found, Hotel Culiacan, will have to be my favorite. There is actually more parking and the room was quite spacious and had a nice hand-woven bedspread with matching curtain. Thankfully, the scent of liberally applied disinfectant used to swab the tile floor had dissipated by the time we went to our room in the evening. Although because there were two beds in the room and we had only paid for one, I had been admonished not to use the one spread only with a pristine white sheet. It was a trick to keep an excited dog, who *loves* hotel rooms, from bouncing around after being released from her smuggling-bag-- off the white bed. I want to keep our future options open.

After breakfast on the Zocalo, watching preparations for Mexican Independence Day celebrations, we got in the car and headed for Escondido. Being a national holiday we were slowed in several towns along the highway for parades or groups of long distance bicyclists fundraising for the annual Teleton we had seen advertised on tv. There is nothing to do on a narrow Mexican road but be patient and enjoy the unexpected diversion. This was my mantra and reminder to Dennis who would rather seek a detour, or attempt to pass on a blind curve and make it to the coast as planned to meet Evan and Darlene the rental agents by four o'clock. *No problema*. We actually had a beautiful sunny drive through the mountains and made it to our apartment well before 4. We waited. Dennis finally went to see if he could find someone at the local convenience store who would know where Evan and Darlene lived. Dennis had emailed them from Oaxaca to tell them when we thought we'd arrive, but we did not have their phone number. Dennis finally roused Evan from an afternoon tv football-snooze and by the time Dennis had walked back and we had unloaded a few things, Evan and Darlene arrived with the keys. They hadn't expected us to make it so quickly. (Road Warriors they are not. Laid back, they are.) Pleasantries, keys and money exchanged, we were here. We unpacked and went into town to buy some food, but it was Sunday evening, Mexican Independence Day. We bought bbq-ed chicken and returned to our apartment to work on the Road-Warrior to Laid-Back-Vacationer transition.

It's been a week since all this happened. How's that for Laid Back? I think we're getting into the L.B. Groove. We're sleeping more, but both of us have been working all week in our respective corners on our projects. Dennis has been battling the bugs in his monitoring software and tripping me with cables hooked up to temperature sensors in the freezer and fridge. It took a while before I could get a drink the other day. I couldn't open either door because his sensor's calibrations were still off and he had to get the temperature consistent in the cold for at least an hour. I was thirsty, but I must admit I was thirstier and the extra-cold water tasted better after waiting an hour... Dennis has also figured out that the reason we have a new fridge (I like it. It's quiet. It's cold.), and why the overhead light blew the other evening, is that the power runs higher than it should. Most days it runs at 130 or 131 Volts, today it was 135 (rather than normal 110-120V). His theory is that it is inconsistent because of inconsistent demand. It is not yet high season. We have had outages here in the past. He thinks they keep it high because people complain more when there are brownouts (Voltage too low) than when there is too much. But it's hard on motors and light bulbs. Our computers should be fine however (my fear) because they are designed to be compatible with a higher European voltages. (I learned something.) I am sitting with my computer on a book, on my lap however, because it was giving me little shocks. This apparently is because of the extra current too.

Sophie has been lounging. She sleeps a lot (Den: like at home, no more than 20 hours or so per day). She has met a few nice dogs. She went to the *Esthetica* on Friday and had her October haircut revamped to beach length. She emerged a *muy* cool dudette, very happy to be reunited with us, sporting what Dennis called a Wedge-head or alternately She-Flat-top. She was fully shaved with a neat rectangle left longer on top of her head. It gave her a somewhat military look. Later that day, I did point out to Dennis a buffed up guy with a similar do at the beach. It suited him marginally better. Sophie has bulges too, old-age lumps and bumps, but her matronly doggy bulges and the Wedge were at odds. After giving her a day's rest from too much hair-attention, I corralled her on the floor yesterday and softened the edges into a much more becoming proto-bouffant.

I have been collecting, of course. I've painted a few decaying blossoms--two on linen. Like the other *Surrendered Truths* there is something bruise-like about them. They sit on/within the linen and appear/disappear into it. Visible/invisible; lovely but damaged. Other blossoms were painted into the squares of *The Popular Nature Project*. I drew two of them as drypoint plates to be paired (I think) with the historical-patterned plates of the same size I have proofed at home. The blossoms shift and change so much as they age. I have been photographing them too. I have several lined up on the dresser in varying states of decay. They are quite sculptural. I'll keep toying with them---and collecting others on morning walks with Sophie, but I haven't quite decided what else will become of them.

The Domestic Fealty video project I was planning to do with the china shard digital photos and video clips from Loop gallery has stalled. I had fooled around a bit with iMovie before I left, but I guess not enough to realize that I had to buy Quicktime Pro to get the video clips from my camera. I can import the digital stills into iMovie and I can play the video clips on my desktop, just not move the video clips into iMovie. I spent two hours at the Internet Cafe the other afternoon trying to find a way to download an earlier version of Quicktime Pro that would be compatible with the system I run on my computer. I was stuck in some hellish Apple Quicktime

Pro loop where the only link to any of my searches was “Buy NEW Quicktime Pro 7! Works with System 10.3 and higher!” My beloved ibook is maximized using System 10.2.8. I think perhaps I could have wanted to scream less--maybe found a solution to my problem sanely, if the tv above where I was sitting wasn't so loud, and the competing music repetitive, and the construction workers hammering on the cement roof of the next store didn't seem to get so much pleasure in shouting over the reverberating clanging. They thought it funny that the nearby dogs were howling. Was it their noise that upset the dogs or the backfiring truck that passed several times? I clearly had not yet become Ms. Laid Back Puerto Escondido.

I have read a great collection of short stories by Anthony Doerr called *The Shell Collector* and am working on another by Howard Norman called *The Chauffeur*--beach and breakfast reading. I read a small history of Chelsea figurines and today I finished *Mrs. Dalloway*. (That almost sounds like a Woolfian statement.) I am having to slow myself down from devouring *The Postmodern Animal*. I wish I had found it sooner. There are some great references in it I could have used for my Fealty project and my paper on Wonder and collecting. Oh well. I'm sure it will be useful background for future projects.

Oh yes. And we've been to all the beaches for our 3:30-4--ish swims. We've snorkeled at some and bodysurfed at others. We still have no boogie-boards but time and more days of waves may have us plunk down the cash. There have been some lovely sunsets. And the weather is warm. And the sun shines. The coffee is excellent and the cinnamon rolls are ready when Sophie and I walk by at 7. The pineapple and papaya are good. My guacamole is delicious. The fish is fresh and I haven't eaten chicken in a week!

Den's additions: We've had more clouds than we remember here, and as I write it's raining fairly hard, a first in our experience in Puerto. For dinner we walked as far as the shops a few blocks away and settled on dining at the little café attached to the youth hostel. We had planned to walk all the way downtown to see what was happening on the adoquin, but then it started spitting. We dodged most of the scattered shower under trees along the streets home, but it cut loose since we got back and we will finally get to see if the thatched roof holds and how big the leaks are in the places we see light coming through.

I've been spending my days doing energy-monitoring-system programming in Visual Basic.Net and conducting temperature sensor calibration experiments on the side. It may sound like a waste of time in paradise but the point is to get away from distractions of various sorts to allow concentration on a complex problem that gets put off otherwise. I've also been running again, though there's not a nice beach run available on this side of town. I got up to maybe 4 1/2 miles in about 42 minutes today, my 5th day out. I've been reading old New Yorkers, the current Atlantic and an old Updike short story collection. Also driving over to a hotel half a mile from here some mornings and evenings to use their free wireless internet connection. I was hoping I could get a signal at home this time, and I do get a few weak signals, but they are all password protected so I can't get on. At least I don't have to drive across town daily like last year (though that connection was faster). I can't complain.

Deciembre 3, 2005.

Blue, blue sky and a breeze.

It was Dennis' turn to run this morning so Sophie and I just took a walk. I have been running on alternate mornings-not as far, not as conscious of speed, time and distance-but enjoying it. I make my way through the streets looking at the trees and various blossoms, to the road leading down to Playa Baccocho, walk along the beach and through the rocks to Playa Coral, cooling down in the breeze and watching the fishermen. I then walk up the path up the cliff, and run back home. I notice that climbing back up the stairs to our apartment is getting progressively easier and although my shins are sore, by the time I run again they are usually better. Now, I need to find a pair of running shoes. I have been running in my old hiking shoes and I feel like my feet are leaden. I don't like running shoes so haven't owned a pair in years, but I like my route and the steady, plodding thinking it affords; I could get into this. It reminds me of length swimming, after awhile one's stroke, breathing and kicking are forgotten and the mind can wander to other things. (The ocean waves make this kind of swimming impossible for me here.)

I went into town by myself yesterday with a Mission. I had been battling with the colour of a decaying blossom all the previous afternoon, and had finally admitted that I couldn't mix it with the reds I had with me. I had feared this from my first stroke, but kept playing with it-mucking it up-unwilling to admit I had brought the wrong reds. Yes, I brought the wrong reds. I have a medium and light cadmium and an alizarin crimson. I brought the wrong quinadron. I brought the nice scarlet that I had been using in my October in Ontario studio to mix rusts, red-browns - blood. The quinadron I need here is for magenta, hot and pink-purple that will mix down with pthalo blue red shade to dusky curled-edged purple-black. My mission was to find such a colour, a pair of running shoes and maybe buy some fish for dinner.

I had an idea that a certain stationers near the secondary school may have it, but I was distracted from this goal by the sight of a shoe store on the road up. I parked. Next to where I was parked was a store which sold ribbons, threads, artificial leaves, googly eyes and sequined saints. It was a fascinating, packed-tight-with-so-much-possibility-store, and without dog or partner who may not share my excitement, I ventured in. It was long and narrow and dark. On one wall was a glass case with the collection of aforementioned eyes and saints, on the other were reels of every kind of ribbon imaginable-thick, thin, velvet, satin, organza.decorated, gilt. At the back were threads of all colours and thickness for embroidery. Things to buy and make hung from the ceiling. There was so much possibility. Fabric stamped with various designs hung on a high rack next to another with an assortment of scissors, hoops and some children's plastic masks of insects and animals. A painted paper mask was further down that wall, and that is when I discovered the corner counter with drawing supplies and miniature containers of paint.

You are served in Mexican stores. Things are generally not self-serve. As much as one may want to touch and handle the merchandise, examine it and consider what it might become, this is not done. My Spanish was enough to politely greet the saleswoman at the paint counter and make my request. "Tiene la pintura acrylico?" Then the difficulties of specifics came into play. I don't have a dictionary of paint colours so I said "Me gusta mucho roja, mas tinto." (I'd like a red,

more pink.) Eventually, being handed individually, the range from red to pink, and each being dutifully put back as I said *mas tinto* or *mas roja*, I finally got a colour that was close to what I needed. It is more magenta than I would have liked, but will do. A fresh leaf green to replace the gummy one of mine whose film-case lid had come off en route, completed my purchase. The woman filled out a sales slip for 16 pesos and I was sent across the floor to another woman to pay. She took my money, stamped my slip and sent me back to the first woman who now had my purchase in a small bag and traded me the *receibo* for my purchase. There is rarely a receipt for customers here, so my less than \$2.00 expenditure will have to be omitted from Revenue Canada's perusal. Proudly however, I had Mission 1 a. successfully completed. I am however still trying to think what else I could buy in that store. I'd also really like to take pictures of all the things neatly arranged. I'll have to go back.

I next crossed the road to the shoe store. Here everything but the ubiquitous flip-flops was behind glass. There were rows of white running shoes, all huge, all ugly, all unpriced. Perhaps a price-point would persuade me I reasoned. I was not inspired to ask to see one pair over another or inquire after price. The arrangement did not thrill, but depressed. I would try the next store. Next-door the display was the same. I couldn't distinguish one from the other. I left. I decided to walk up the street further. Perhaps I would find another shoe store with a more inspiring running shoe display, a more palatable shoe. Do such things exist? I thought not, but I was on a Mission. If I were to enjoy running, I would have to choose.

Thankfully (or not) there were no more shoe stores on this street. This was unusual. Usually a block of stores is filled with one kind of store and another block has another kind. Perhaps the Main Shoe District had been back around the corner. I did not go back to look. Instead I explored hardware and house paint stores examining tools, cabinet hardware and light fixtures; touching large brushes and memorizing the names of obscure colours on paint chips. This calmed me. I could bring Dennis here. He would be happy looking at other things while I concentrated on paint chips and the variety of tiles.

The next store sold Wedding dresses. These were behind glass. This made sense. The elaborate dresses, with layers of lace, some beaded, others with hand-painting of birds or flowers on silk-bodices were things of fantasy. I tried to imagine an *Escondido* Bride in one of these enormous elaborations. They would be beautiful. They would also be very hot. Their dress would remain clean on the sand strewn streets a very short time. Wearing the satin shoes would be another trick: high heels on uneven pavement would make walking, let alone dancing very dicey. It was not my fantasy. But, there was a red and blue girl's dress that was equally elaborate and much more inspiring. It was not behind glass but displayed on a dressmaker's manikin on the tiles at the front of the store. The red satin skirt had a big crinoline that made it bloom. It was embroidered with gold thread. The bodice was white with lacy puff sleeves and what appeared to be a small royal blue velvet waistcoat with tiny gold buttons. A red satin cape hung to from a larger gold button at the neck. This dress took my breath away. It was a Snow White dress if I had ever imagined one. It was perfect. Although my true fantasy has always been Red Riding Hood, I could imagine an event in this dress, in spite of the heat.

I walked a bit further, then crossed the street again to return to the car. I checked out a plastics store. It was not the biggest or most colourful in Puerto, but I liked it. The rows of brightly

coloured kitchen utensils and toys look so exciting. I didn't need anything so moved on. The 10 Peso Store next to it was a disappointment in comparison. I checked my watch and decided I had better get moving or there would be no fish left at the market. I picked up some tangerines and cilantro at a store down the block and next to it browsed some surfer shorts-very cute, retro-looking flower pattern (could I wear that?) -and returned to the car.

There were a few more shoe stores near the market, but I was losing my interest in shopping. I cursorily looked through the glass at two displays of the same white horrors in two stores right next to where I had reparked the car, and then went into the market. I bought what I thought were the same filets from the same stall as the last time. The price was 15 pesos. The last time it had been 28. Is the price less later in the day? Was it the same fish? Who knows? I had fish for dinner. Mission 1 c. was accomplished. Today everyone had papaya. Earlier in the week no one had them. I bought a papaya. Bonus! But running shoes alluded me. I looked in a dulsatory manner at the few shoe stalls open and bought a pair of flip-flops.

Dennis: My week in Puerto.

There has been more going on than one shopping trip, though it is noteworthy that our situation here is stable and routine enough that such are the highlights. I've still got a jumble of wires on my table as I continue my measurements and software development, which is going generally well, though in fits and starts, as is the nature of it. I keep having ideas about features to add to my monitoring system, so I guess it will never be 'done'.

We've had a few swims and walks, dinner out at Brad's BBQ place (now in the fifth location in six years) which was unfortunately not his best work (Liz, a stickler for such things pertaining to meat, thought her chicken underdone), and a good large pizza that supplied leftovers for a second dinner, though reheating pizza here with neither a microwave or a oven is a bit of a trick. (How's that for a full sentence?) We filled two trash bags with refuse from Playa Coral, our local beach, so far, and think a third might finish the job. The beaches are noticeably eroded in several places but it's hard to tell if the sand is disappearing or just getting moved around. We walked down to the Adoquin last night for an ice cream cone and caught a taxi back (my idea -I had work I was thinking about. Liz wanted a walk.) It was a quiet Sunday night with a few Mexican families strolling and eating icecream or empanadas like us. With the gringo crown now concentrating out along Zicatela, and beyond there toward the Point, there seems to be developing a division of tourist dollars.

Liz again, several days later as Dennis is preoccupied with programming...The Adoquin seems more and more the place for helados (delicious Michoacan icecream in wonderful small scoops like in Italy, or a fantastic array of paletas (fruit flavoured ice cream and ice water bars). It is also the place to buy silkscreened playeras (one size fits all t-shirts that most Mexicans wear while swimming) sold in stacks 4/100 pesos, colourful beach inflatables, flip flops and other regular beachside tat. We haven't found a phone on the Adoquin that functions fully for international calls. At the moment there are a few people with various trinkets laid out on blankets for sale, but not as many young hippy-dudes as there once were. Perhaps this will change in high season and the young Mexican drummers, dancers and jewelry hawkers will be back. I'm hoping to see the girls from Chiapas selling their sewing and weaving again, although two of dolls I bought

from them previously had to be thrown out when Ontario moths started propagating in them. As well the great wrap-around skirt/pants I bought last year is really too big and should be given to someone who will wear it. But, I like the girls, and want to support their efforts, so will probably keep buying if they return. Several of the restaurants we have frequented are gone or moved to Zicatela, although Alicia's eatery is still regularly packed with low-budget surfer boys and Mexican families watching tv while they eat their fish and rice. There are still a few bar/danceclubs on the Adoquin but none seem to be open at the "icecream hour." Perhaps we should take a nap some evening and come out to see if they're hopping at midnight. It *could* be a totally different place.

Zicatela, despite the concentration of surfer dudes has more and more upscale hotels and restaurants. Shops here concentrate on selling or renting surfboards and associated cool apparel with local logos like Mexpipe. An older surf dude crowd also has jazz now in the evening in a couple of restaurants. The late night Babylon (opens at 10:30) still appears to be the place the younger dudes hang and jam and exchange books, if they are not just sitting on the street curbs talking. Cafecito has moved to a bigger location further out along the strip. It still seems to have a big crowd although the two restaurants that took over their old location are always empty when we pass.

The Pizza we had was at a new place just beyond Cafecito although judging from its menu and the large poster of the Italian film "Puerto Escondido" on the walls, it is a new incarnation of an Italian place that was once just off the Adoquin by the town beach. There were only a few customers Saturday when we decided on pizza, but judging from the excellent food, they should become quite successful here. We sat slightly elevated, overlooking the street and enjoyed a nice ocean breeze and star-filled view while we ate. The crescent moon was in its odd (for a Canadian) 'almost-smile' position and Venus was winking nearby. It was beautiful. I don't think it was only that I was hungry after swimming and had only made a fruit liquado for lunch, but the pizza was terrific. The restaurant has a wood-fired oven that crisps the crust deliciously. We ordered a large pizza despite the protestations from the waiter that a medium would be enough—when in Canada do we get that response from a waiter? Dennis reasoned with me that it was only 20 pesos more and he wanted leftovers for lunch. It was so good that we saved it for dinner. It was also no problem that we had half vegetarian and half meat although I am sure that my half was better than the ham and cheese Dennis ended up with. I think all the vegetables were on my half: tomatoes, spinach, onions, olives, peppers, zucchini..ahhh. The tomato sauce was tart not sweet like is usually the case on pizzas. They must make their own...I am so glad that there are so many Italians here!

A problem is arising that I will have sworn off having pizza at home, fish and chicken at home (fresher here), avocados at home (always perfect, never hard or black and mushy here), papaya (can you ever find a sweetly ripe papaya at home?) bananas (sweeter and so many different kinds!), pineapple (see papaya and banana) yogurt (Lala Natural rules over Astro!), coffee (yes, but I can bring that home) that I won't have much reason to eat at home. O.K. so there's no almond butter here and it is hit and miss finding tinned tomatoes for pasta in the stores, but I can change our diet. The cilantro in the pasta makes up for any lack of basil too. I will also not be continuing my search for an edible veggie burger: Mangos, on the Zicatela strip wins hands-down. For 38 pesos you are served a large salad of shredded beets, carrots and jicama (each is

kept separate so the red, white and orange looks very good on the plate.) On top of this are laid slices of avocado. Next to this is a homemade soya burger served on a homemade whole-wheat bun with lettuce, tomato and more avocado slices. It is soooo good with the fresh and cooked salsas that are on the table. It is also so big that I get to enjoy the second half of the burger for lunch the next day. We've had to go there twice since we've arrived because they make a decent hamburguesa (carne) con queso y patatas fritas for Dennis too.

The Point used to have a couple of palapa restaurants and a few surfers learning their sport in the more gentle waves at the end of the Zicatela beach wave run. The road there was dirt with a few Mexican homes and chickens and goats running around. Now there is a paved road (cement) leading right to the end. New fancier homes have been built and are in the process of being built, a little back from the shore. This makes sense because the ground is fairly level here and could possibly get flooded in a big storm. The homes are also being built up the side of the rocky outcrop which is the actual point. Thankfully, there seems to have been some planning in the construction so-far. From the beach the houses seem to be somewhat hidden in the trees. They also seem to have been situated so that one doesn't block the view—or breeze—of another. From the beach what you see is a succession of palapa roofs rising into the palm trees. Not bad for tourism's progress. Because of this new interest in the Point, there are a few more mini-supers on the road and the Palapa places are a bit busier. We have noticed a couple of new, small bungalow-type hotel places while detouring for road construction but nothing on a huge scale. The dirt roads with Mexican compounds of chickens and goats are still the norm. There are still a few tents pitched near the restaurants by discount surfer dudes-and a couple of very good Japanese surfer chicas, but we wonder how long this casual accommodation will be tolerated once the casas are complete.

Brad the BBQ guy has bought a place here apparently. While he and Dennis were standing around the bbq, guy-talking and waiting for my pterodactyl-chicken breast to cook (some for me, most cooked up in a pot later to falling-from-bone-tenderness for Sophia), Brad mentioned that he had a five year lease on his new bar-restaurant location. By that time he assured Dennis that it would be time to open his own place down at the Point. Everything's happening out that way. “Buy in now.”

Dennis' amigo Dan Wadosky might be coming to PE toward the end of our stay. He will be our first visitor. “Hopefully others will follow in the future” says Dennis. “Buy in now.” (Or move down the coast to San Augustinillo-say I.)

Dec. 13 2005

Today we will have been away a month. *Is that all? So quickly?* I don't know which question is more accurate. We are in a fairly comfortable routine although I feel like a bit of a harpy sometimes getting Dennis out of his office/hammock, to go to the beach, eat or sleep. I've given up on the last one. I think he naps through the day with the computer quietly humming in its sleep on his lap too. He is quite a bit more comfortable in a hammock than I am with my old Printmaker's Back, and he says that he and the computer are safe within the hammock's net cocoon. With the screen illuminated Dennis is oblivious to darkness and so remains focused through the night on trouble shooting his program. I hope he resolves some of its issues soon.

(She doesn't realize that the nature of the task is that is never done; as long as I can think of another feature, or an improvement it isn't finished. And no I haven't been sleeping with the laptop on in the hammock, only with a book or magazine... But my energy-use monitoring program is working well now, and will continue to improve.)

I have finished paintings on all five stretched linens that I brought with me. I should have brought more. Somehow the tone of the linen really appeals to me this year. *The Popular Nature Project* continues in fits and starts. At the moment I have more collected detritus littering my little work table than paintings in progress, but I guess I have added new information to about a dozen boards and papers. I have also finished fifteen paintings on the small 3" squares shown both as *Identification* and *Hope*. Interestingly the fifteen are of only two different blossoms. The background printings of course are all different on these papers, but there is something interesting to me about painting the same image repeatedly. Is it the process? Is it the ritual? It is similar to the interest in seeing number, but quite different from the repetition of printmaking. The paintings are recognizably related but are distinct individuals. I'll have to keep thinking about this.

I have been collecting fallen blossoms from the many flowering trees in the area. I bring home at least a few on each morning walk with Sophie. I have been photographing these alone and in groups as they dry and decay. They are really quite interesting forms. I probably have close to a hundred images now and although I revisit them in iphoto regularly and add to them whenever I collect another, or see it changing as it dries, I have yet to take this project further than collecting.

I have reread or read Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *Orlando*. They remain quite wonderful. I took a break from Woolf after Dennis' complaints about having to drag her heavy Collected Writings to the beach and find room for himself in bed once I had fallen asleep with the tome splayed beside me. He suggested 'lighter fare.' For a change I have read several short story collections and a novel by Michael Crummy called *Mr. Mee* which is ostensibly about a book collector, but is more about writing, truth and fiction—Proust's comment that his novel concerns a person called I who is not always myself among others—and literary biography. Two of the characters in the novel are foolish copyists Minard and Ferrand (mentioned by Rousseau and imagined further by Crummy) who are very similar to Flaubert's *Bouvard and Pechuchet*, which I have brought with me to finish.

My current "light" beach reading is Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle* which Libby had given to me as a MFA gift and which I had had to put down once I had to immerse myself in critical theory. It is perfect to read here! The descriptions of the coasts of South America and the flora and fauna found there are exceptional and make looking at the landscape here even more interesting. I find I read a small chapter about geology or insect collecting and minutes later realize I have been staring off at the cliffs thinking about their geological make-up or the many spiders, ants or beetles here. Darwin's enthusiasm for collecting is also truly inspiring. I am also re-reading Woolf again—*A Room of One's Own*— only in the apartment. Here too am reminded about the 'I' that is only a convenient term ...it may be lies it may have some truth in it. This is the "I" walking through my house that I tried to create in my process paper. Now I'll have to re-read that too...

I just finished reading *The Postmodern Animal*, an interesting collection of essays by Steve Baker, that I wish I had found earlier. He talks about some theories on animals in art which I would have loved to work into my curator's statement for *The Domestic Fealty Collection* or *Sentimental Favourites*. Next time. I love that Deleuz and Guatari had such contempt for pets! Why didn't anyone say anything to me about that? Now I'll have to read *1000 Plateaus* to work out my arguments for pursuing that imagery further. *The Postmodern Animal* has also given me some ideas to work through for that digital print/drypoint project of 'wild' ceramic animals I have in progress and a project I'd like to develop for my students.

In the five years we have come to Mexico in the winter, no one has visited us. This year after a little note saying our apartment now had two beds, we got an enthusiastic response from my nephew Danny and his girlfriend Jenna. Jenna arrives on Thursday and Danny will be coming December 26. We are excited by the opportunity to share our experience with Danny and Jenna and show them some of our favourite haunts. We expect that they will be doing some exploring of their own and are looking forward to hearing their stories. Having four adult humans (plus Sophia) in our 500- square-foot apartment will take some rearrangement of space, but both Dennis and I have been working to tighten up our acts, finish off some cluttering experiments and get ready for a different kind of holiday. We have yet to hear conclusively whether Dennis' friend Dan is coming as well. "It'll be a Fiesta" says Dennis, although I think the reading and relaxation is more what Jenna had in mind. Jenna has an introductory Spanish class to her credit, so with mine we should be able to practice together. I'm sure she'll be a little more enthusiastic about going to the beach to swim or exploring the town too.

It is now 2:30 in the afternoon. Siesta. Things are generally quieter. School is out, the little boy downstairs is home for his dinner. The aroma of his father's cooking and their quiet talk wafts up to us and then becomes stilled. I'm sure there are people at the beaches, but we usually wait for another hour before making a move in that direction. The sun is less intense then and Dennis and Sophie prefer it that way. Finding shade at the beach is Dennis' number one priority. He keeps saying that we should buy ourselves one of those large, but collapsible beach umbrellas, but he never gets around to it when we see them advertised in summer sales. I wear a hat and sunscreen and love the sun for an hour or two. (Who do we suppose would need to carry this large umbrella to & from the beach? Yes, but who complains when there is no shade?)

The big decision in a hour will be "where to go?" It being Tuesday, Dennis has already reminded me that Villa Real, the little hotel around the corner from us, has free drinks for women today and 2 for 1 cocktails for men. We've never gone. The place is always empty except for the odd bus tour, so I suppose this is an appeal for some customers. They have a nice enough garden with a pool, but I don't think I'm the female customer they're looking for. Besides, why go to a pool when you can swim in the ocean? Maybe we should go when our Fiesta crowd is here, they should have a busload of holidayers by that time as well and it would be more fun in the pool with the kids.

Yesterday we went to the closest beach to us, Playa Coral. You get to the beach by walking down the cliff on a dirt path. The bushes rustle with life on each side—Birds? Rodents? Scorpions? Rivers of ants cross the path at intervals. We have to be careful not to step on them

inadvertently or we'll be swarmed and bitten. At the bottom of the hill is a small beach bounded by a rock outcropping of the cliff on one side and large smoothly worn boulders on the other. Walking through the boulders will take you to the long stretch of Playa Bacocho. We often have Playa Coral to ourselves. Yesterday it appeared that there was no one on Bacocho either. A hotel at the top of the cliff, more towards Bacocho, is rebuilding a few overlooking rooms and a small beach club that was damaged in an earthquake a few years ago. But they seem to be moving slowly. We haven't seen anyone there this year although it is slightly more finished than last year. Part of the old building is still hanging over the cliff top, but it seems that they are making some progress on building a new retaining wall.

Late in the day a Mexican family came down to the beach to play among the rocks, but other than them we were alone. The water has been fairly calm recently so we took our masks and snorkels with us to Playa Coral. We have in the past seen large schools of flat yellow tailed fish, spotted blue fish, small electric blue fish, long thin fish, mantarays, a sea turtle, and an octopus. Yesterday was just too choppy. I gave up when the most distinct thing I saw in the water was a cup floating towards me. Because Coral isn't a big tourist beach, there isn't anyone who takes responsibility for its clean-up. Dennis and I usually take a bag to pick up litter, but there always seems to be a bit more. Still, we like Playa Coral for its solitude. Sophie is happy and out of trouble hunting crabs, there is a bit of shade for Dennis near the rocks and the snorkeling is generally better here than elsewhere.

Playa Bacocho is a mile long beach with big waves that break too close to shore for surfers. There are usually more people here in the morning when I run than later in the day. Usually there are 6-8 people running or walking along the beach to the rock cliffs at the end and maybe one or two others fishing near the rocks that lead through to Playa Coral. There is a road down the hill to Bacocho that is maintained by the big hotels at the top. They have two beach clubs set back from the beach at the bottom of the hill, otherwise the beach is empty and is bounded by a lagoon and cliffs. Walking Bacocho is very enjoyable as long as it is early or late in the day. On Sunday I decided to take Sophie to Bacocho instead of taking our usual walk and sniff around the neighborhood. I drove, knowing that by the time we meandered the mile or so down there, Sophie would be too tired. Dennis was completing his second lap when we went out to the car and decided to join us. The three of us had a nice walk to the rocks and back, me walking in the water, Dennis still in running attire, testing sand densities at various distances from the water for future running-reference, and Sophie running and chasing ghost crabs most of the way. She was flagging on the way back, but didn't need to be carried as she did after one such excursion when the sun was higher.

Beyond the rocks the beach restarts and arcs away to the west many uninterrupted miles to the next point just visible through the salt spray and haze. This beach is mostly inaccessible (for now) because of lagoons on the inland side blocking roads. It is amazing to see a beach this long and lovely and essentially undeveloped.

Playa Carrizalillo is also within walking distance of our apartment. It is also down the cliff, but here the town has built a stone and concrete stairway with 168 steps to the bottom. (with a big umbrella!?) This is the best beach at Escondido for swimming. It is getting more crowded as the holiday season progresses, but is never unpleasantly so. Carrizalillo is a deep little bay with a

sand beach at the end. Mango trees and small palapa restaurants provide shade close to the cliff. There is usually a man diving for oysters off the rocks at the end. He will crack the oysters and bring them to you at any of the restaurants. Because we arrive late in the day there is a bit of shade at the far end of the beach near the rocks where he works. Dennis likes to set himself up here, with towels laid out, water for Sophia and I and a cold cerveza for himself. I swim first, making my way out to the middle of the inlet and floating on my back looking up at the blue sky meeting the curve of the surrounding cliffs. Since we have been here the waves have been high enough for some 'easy' surfing at the mouth of the inlet and calm enough for me to snorkel out along the rocks the same distance. The water always seems clear here and you can see fish swimming among the paddlers standing in the water at the shore. Most of the bay here has a sand bottom and the water is generally so clear that it is deceptive how deep the water is farther out. I have tried in the middle to touch bottom several times but have not yet been successful. I can see it clearly, I just can't get there.

We went to the town beach on Sunday. I thought it would have been busier but was quite quiet. The water was calmer than we had seen so the usual boogie-boarding boys were not near the rocks at the far end. As you walk around the bay to the rocks, the water is more open to the Pacific and becomes rougher. The large stone outcropping at the end separates this beach from Playa Zicatela. Most of the town beach has the fishing fleet anchored off shore. Some more boats are hauled up onto the sand closest to the Adoquin and fish is sold here early in the morning when the boats come in. The bay is relatively sheltered and many families swim here in the calm waters between the boats.

Dennis, as usual, was looking for a Sunday volleyball game. Seeing no balls in the air on a walk along the town beach, he left me swimming and went with Sophie through the rocks to Zicatela. There was more Sunday tourist action there, but he found no game so returned and the three of us lolled in the sand for a while reading. We decided to stay and watch the sunset before returning home and made our way through the rocks to Zicatela thinking we would find an open palapa for a cold drink while watching the evening colour. On our way Dennis spied a volleyball game in progress and changed his mind on the sunset view. While he ran off to join a group of French tourists, Sophie and I made ourselves comfortable nearby on a large dune. While Sophie watched to see that Dennis didn't injure himself diving for balls in the sand, I watched the sun sinking and the colour of the sky glowing orange and magenta. We don't often see the colour reflected in the water here, but Sunday it did. I was looking at the water when I noticed three black shapes in the water not too far from shore. They were dolphins! In the unusually calm waters it was amazing to see them circling and diving while catching fish. It was quite a show. They stayed in one area for a long time and then slowly swam along the shore towards the town beach. Just as the sun was finally setting I could see that they had returned and were circling again close to me. Dennis and his teammates were ending their game and were able to see the dolphins too when they all threw themselves into the water after their hot game.

Playa Zicatela is about 2.5 miles long from the rocks separating it from the town beach to the Point. It is a straight beach open to the Pacific, with generally high waves that break far enough out to provide good surfing. It is called the Mexican Pipeline. A surf competition was just ending when we arrived a month ago. This beach attracts an international surf crowd and many others

who come to watch the surfers in the waves while sitting in the deep sand or lying in the shade of one of many palapa restaurants. Zicatela is not generally considered swimmable except by strong swimmers. Novice surfers practice near the Point and the swimming is also safer here, although it is still more bobbing in the waves than swimming. Walking or running Zicatela from one end to the other is practiced by many in the morning and evening. We made this trek daily when we stayed nearby, but have not walked more than sections of it this year. There is the occasional volleyball net hung near a restaurant and more often, spontaneous soccer games in the sand, but these seem the only other physical exertions visible. Over the Christmas week a group of skydivers has in the past camped nearby, offering daily tandem dives to any interested. Watching the divers fall from the sky is another Zicatela diversion.

Wednesday Den: My running was going well until Monday when I ran the furthest and fastest yet (about 5.3 miles in 40 minutes) but on top of the volleyball or previous running it was a bit more than my right knee could take. I limped badly yesterday, and thought I might try running this morning but made it about 4 steps and turned around. We three walked Bacocho again this morning instead. With the days full of walks, beaches, grocery shopping, computer programming and daily searches for free wireless internet service the days and weeks seem to flutter past effortlessly. One shouldn't complain about an old knee.

4. Mexico Journal 05-06

Life in Puerto:

My nephew Danny's girlfriend Jenna arrived December 15. She flew into Acapulco and then I picked her up at the bus station. The old Estrella Blanca is right at the crucero downtown. We had gone there earlier in the week to check out the schedule so we could email Jenna. On the night she was to arrive we went out to a late dinner and then went to the station. It was dark. Two derelict looking buses were sitting in the yard. We eventually went home and Dennis thought he'd go out two hours later to wait for the next bus and meanwhile pickup an internet connection nearby. The station was dark. Had he missed her? She hadn't arrived by taxi at the apartment, when he got back, although this of course was our backup plan. Before midnight I decided to take a turn looking for her and again found the station dark. Suspiciously there were few taxis around when the bus was due to arrive, although many were racing up Avenida Oaxaca as usual. I decided to follow the taxis.

At the far edge of town a new multi-busline station was being constructed. We knew this. What we didn't know was that it was already being used. I parked in the rutted, empty lot with one or two taxi drivers hanging around chatting or snoozing in their cars listening to the radio. Inside there were a few people waiting. Also mostly snoozing. A bus came, but it wasn't from Acapulco. I asked a taxi driver if he knew when the next bus from Acapulco would arrive. He thought maybe one might come at 1 o'clock. I snoozed in the car listening to the radio and swatting mosquitos. Nearing 1 o'clock a few more taxis arrived. I didn't see the bus come in, but later a few passengers came out of the station and got in taxis. Then I saw Jenna wander out. She had had a very long day. She hadn't slept the night before she left. Her brother took her to the station by 4:30 am. She got into Acapulco about 1 p.m. having changed planes in Chicago on her way from Toronto. The bus from Acapulco stopped frequently despite its being a directo. We

had expected her by 9 or 10, not 1. Tired as she was (and we were), Jenna seemed happy and ready for more Mexican adventures.

Little has changed in our routine since Jenna's arrival. Perhaps the dynamic will change when Dan arrives. After she caught up on her sleep and we spent an afternoon showing her the various beaches, Jenna has headed off each afternoon to explore on her own. She has met travelers from Italy, France, Denmark, Australia, Canada, the U.S, and various other parts of Mexico hanging out at Zicatella beach. She is on a different schedule from us, sleeping until the afternoon, then heading to the beach and not returning until late at night or morning. She seems to be having a good time.

Dennis has had to stop running, leaving me to carry the torch. I continue my 7 a.m.-ish mile run (we clocked the distance one day in the car) along the backstreets and down the hill to Playa Bococho. Once I have run the length of the dirt road past the beach clubs, I stop at the public beach access and walk. The sand here is very deep. I couldn't imagine getting much traction for running anyway. The morning breeze off the ocean is wonderful to cool down in, and I happily walk along the beach looking for pelicans skimming the waves. I saw porpoises one day! There is usually a man standing in the water fishing by the rocks. There seem to be fewer runners down on the beach, despite the increasing population here because of the holidays. I walk through the rocks to Playa Coral and up the steep path to the road. Sometimes this path seems harder to take than the original run. This morning climbing the path I was surprised by a boy on a horse coming around the corner. I managed to step into the bushes to let him past and had my back turned watching him negotiate the steep hill, when a second horse (without a rider) came galloping after the first along the path. It is a mile back to our apartment from the top of the cliff. I usually walk back instead of running because by this time I have too many odd ocean bits or plant bits in my hands.

Walking home the other day I found a tarantula! I thought at first it was a balled-up black shoelace. Coming closer I noticed the tell-tale sign of death and decay—thousands of ants. Finding a large leaf, I knocked the ants away (thankfully I was wearing socks and hiking shoes) and picked up the tarantula on the leaf. Now I really felt like running home to show Dennis my treasure! Despite the size and stiffness of the mango leaf I was carrying it on, running was not possible and I gingerly carried my treasure home, careful not to let the fist size dead spider fall. I wasn't quite brave enough to pick-it up again with out leaf and stick aid and was a bit worried about grabbing it in my hand if it started earthward. The tarantula is cool though and now that I am courageous enough to touch it, very furry. I have it in a cup because all of my collection tins are too small. I thought I might draw or paint it but haven't yet found the right place for it. I have managed to keep more ants from finding it, but am a bit concerned that some other agent of decay will begin its job soon. At the moment it doesn't smell too bad and I see no evidence of fly larva, so maybe I'll be lucky and it will just 'dry'.

Dennis' knee is bothering him and doesn't seem to be getting any better the more days he doesn't run, works on his computer with his leg raised and doesn't even walk much. He seems to be on a steady diet of Ibuprofin, which isn't great, but helps he says. Yesterday Sophia was limping too! Dennis maintained that she was just more sympathetic than me and was limping to make him feel better. I couldn't find anything wrong with her foot or sore part to her leg, so

perhaps his theory was correct. She *needed* me to carry her up the 168 steps at Carrizalillo however and then walked home and seems fine today. Perhaps she's losing sympathy for Dennis and gaining it for me. It was a lot of steps to carry a wet, sandy, 25 pound dog, but perhaps the running is good for me after all, as I passed many more winded holidayers taking a break on the steps, who were carrying a lot less.

Last weekend was the Fiesta of the Virgin of the Solidad (Oaxaca's patron saint). We went to a great evening of singing, plays (the prodigal son, story of the bestowing of the Solidad..) which culminated in a fantastic fireworks display. A bamboo tower, "El Castillo", was built on the edge of the square and fitted out with fireworks. There were six large spinnable hoops attached to the sides of the tower as well as fireworks running around the outside of each circle. Each of these also had an image of a fish, or a star or a cross or a silhouette of the Solidad. Two large hoops, a sun and an anchor, were centrally located on the tower. At the very top and meant to spin horizontally was a huge hoop with a prayer to the Solidad written in fireworks.

At the end of the regular program the singing priest and master of ceremonies, asked everyone to move their chairs to the far side of the plaza. Everyone moved except two mariachi bands on either side of the plaza. The bands' function was to play a kind of duel-one side to the other as each stage of the tower was lit. Before the lighting of the tower however the bands played while young men ran and danced around the cleared area with a paper mache bull over their heads that shot out fireworks—spinning roman candles and screamers. Young men and boys ran in and taunted the bull while the bands played at full tilt. This was repeated with about 6 bulls as the boys got more daring and the squeals from the audience (either mothers fearing for their son's eyes and lovely unscarred faces, or crowd members concerned about the rearing bull with roman candles getting too close for comfort.)

Next the band closest to us played and the first stage of the Castillo was lit. The crowd was silent as the wicks sparked up the feet of the Castillo and started the lowest hoops spinning. We all cheered (and the band got louder) as the fireworks lit up the figures on the hoops and it all went up in flames. While the next wicks were getting ready the crowd was distracted by larger sky rockets booming and the sky turning gold and magenta with falling stars. Then the band on the other side of the square started up and the wicks ran up the tower to the middle four outside spinning disks. When they lit up and started spinning we all cheered again. The sequence continued with the distraction of the bigger sky rockets, to the upper four disks and our side's band. Then there were even larger skyrockets and the central Castillo hoops started. Now both bands played and we cheered louder. The skyrockets went off again; this time the trumpets took a breather and the drummers continued to roll while the wicks went up and the prayer to the virgin was illuminated with burning rockets. This time however it didn't just burn out but shot high into the sky, with the bands playing with all their might, the crowd cheering their loudest and finally the biggest and brightest sky rockets of them all illuminating the sky. It was spectacular!

The Solidad celebrations go on for several days. Dennis' knee was bothering him or I would have convinced him to follow the candlelit procession through town the night before and see the huge puppet performances that we went to last year. We could also have gone to a sunrise mass and blessing of the fishing fleet as well. All the boats are decorated and the statue of the virgin is

taken out to sea with the fleet after the mass. I have seen them returning and it is quite the scene with all the boats in a convoy, heavily laden with celebrants and flowers and one boat leading with the priest, nuns and statue of the Virgin.

Viernes 23 Diciembre, 2005

Isaac died Tuesday night. I haven't been able to think of much else. My nephew Ben wrote that he was riding his bike and was hit by a truck. And died. I imagine the slushy Toronto street. At night. Probably on Queen East going home. He rode that route regularly. It's what you do. What he did.

It seems I've always known Isaac. He was there since I was hardly a teenager. Part of my sister's crowd. Peter's friend. The lovely South African voice. The helpful boy. I was included. Later we dated: played chess in my parent's living room, went to movies in his big old car, crooned to BeeGees or gospel hymns, stayed up all night working on my assignments, at the expense of his. When I finally went to university the world opened up for me. Isaac wanted it the same: small and family. I wanted more. We struggled and years later settled into friendship because he was still part of my sister's crowd, her family and mine.

Generous Isaac helped with building, moves and painting. He brought bbq's and laughter. He sang. He danced. He was the children's favourite uncle. He talked late into the night. Then he'd disappear. He didn't like Christmas. He had other lives. I respected that. But I always thought he'd be back and we could pick up where we left off, as always. I will miss him.

Diciembre 31, 2005

Feliz y Prospero Ano Nuevo a todos!

We realized yesterday that we had just another week in Puerto. How time flies in paradise. We leave here on January 5th and begin our trek north. We are not looking forward to the cold but have been making plans to visit the colonial cities of Morelia, Guanajuato, Aguascalientes, Zacatecas and maybe Durango on our way home, so are looking forward to exploring again. We are also planning on stopping to see Dennis' niece Rachel in Kansas. One afternoon I finished curating the prints she had asked me to make for an exchange portfolio for the Southern Graphics Conference. I think they look good and I'd like to get Rachel's approval too when I deliver them. I'm also looking forward to hearing all about her recent artist's residency at the Vermont Studio and the opportunity she has of teaching a book making workshop in Italy next summer. Of course we also want to congratulate she and Tor on their recent engagement and will be looking for just the right gift on our way home.

The Noche Buena (Christmas Eve) was as easy for us as going out for our favourite pizza with Jenna and then on to a bar with open mike music and a late breakfast out to celebrate the Navidad (Christmas) the next day. The music wasn't too bad with a blues guy from Mexico City (youngish with a great grin) and a couple of old gringos later singing and playing guitar to any old southern blues song the crowd could come up with. Dennis was very impressed with one of

them. He said it was the best version of the John Prine song “Angel from Montgomery” (also sung by Bonnie Raitt) that he’d ever heard and made a friend by going to talk to Doug, the musician later. There were about 25 people squeezed into the little bar in a mixture of ages. Jenna and I leaned against the rail looking down the hill and out over the lights of town and ocean watching fireworks and making up Mariachi versions of songs. (We had heard Mariachi Beatles over dinner so there were 40 years of pop songs to go through).

My nephew Dan arrived late Tuesday night. Things are “awesome” and “wicked”. He can’t believe the trees—Bananas! Palms! He and Jenna spent most of his first afternoon with the mission to buy him a bathing suit not chosen by a mother. I think they must have gone into every shop on the Adoquin and Zicatella twice. We met them later at Cabo Blanco bar/restaurant and heard their tale while admiring the new Dan the Beach Dude Duds. Cabo has good 30 peso burgers, an excellent 30 peso fish dinner and 15 peso cerveza and not a bad dj for both age groups so we enjoyed ourselves.

At the next table was an Oregonian family who had just arrived from Oaxaca. Their crazy van ride through the mountains became crazier when the van broke down. While the driver worked on the engine, they helped the woman in front of them fan her 102-year-old mother. All were very happy when the engine started again and they could resume their lurching down the mountains in the air conditioned bus. Their next problem was finding accommodations. This had not so far proved easy. Their taxi driver from the bus station had just laughed when asked for advice. You could tell they were a bit stressed. Cabo Blanco was full, but the owner and current waitress, said she’d call around while they sat with their luggage, ate and tried to recuperate from the previous all-day driving adventure. They looked tired. Thankfully their eldest son was fluent in Spanish having just completed a semester abroad in Chile. Their trip was a Mexican circuit with him as tour guide and interpreter, ending in Morelia where he would begin a further semester of studies in January. Seeing that the restaurant owner was a bit frazzled because her waitress had not shown up, this young man jumped up and negotiated a bilingual job for the evening. With no luck on the hotel room front, the owner offered the family an unfinished room she had at the back—she’d have to go home later for bedding. Her offer came free of charge since their son had come to her rescue. Pitching our tent in the last corner of our apartment had been their other option. Jenna and Dan had already claimed the hammocks and offered up their bed. Briefly this had seemed the way the evening would go. We could have managed but the Cabo Blanco offer sounded better for everyone.

Solution found, we all relaxed a bit and talked as travelers do about places visited and home. Of course seeing Sophia under our table they mentioned missing their old dog left at home. They ran a greenhouse and could only spare this time away with their sons because of the longer western Oregon growing season. They would begin germinating seeds when they got home. They loved visiting the markets in Mexico as I do and we talked about many we had all visited—although they had a more proprietary interest comparing their own herbs and produce with what they saw here. We hope they got some rest (we hoped they had earplugs for the late night music) and had a pleasant day or two at the beach before heading off on the bus again up the coast and inland towards Morelia. Dan and Jenna wandered off to see what was happening on the music and party scene, and Dennis, Sophia and I headed home with their wet towels and bathing suits as well as our own.

Thursday Dan and Jenna headed off mid-afternoon with plans to check out some jazz that was supposed to be happening at one of the restaurants in the evening. Dennis and I settled into our projects and then went to our local beach, Coral, to snorkel. We had a nice time in the relatively calm waters floating and following huge schools of fish. We returned to our apartment for sunset and to work on our Marguerita project toasting the passing of the day and our friend Isaac. I had been to the market in the morning and had bought two Marlin filets which I cooked “mojo al ajo con arroz, verduras, y tortillas.” I put on music that reminded me of Isaac and we had a pleasant dinner talking about him and his enjoyment of the simple pleasures of life. Later we went out to phone home to find out how the funeral had been and all the old friends who had gathered.

Yesterday we drove down the coast to the small beach towns of Mazunte, San Augustinillo, Zipolite and Puerto Angel. Dan and Jenna arose on the planned schedule and we got on the road by 9:30. The coast road is much improved since last year and we made it to the turnoff to Mazunte on smooth even pavement. We found the small beach towns busy with holidayers and like Puerto Escondido visibly growing with building projects appearing on many of the hills. The mountains come down to the ocean here, so there is little room for building, but up. These towns are much more laid-back than even Puerto so most of the construction was palapa roofed although some was being built more substantially. Our regular refrain —“we should have bought 5 years ago, you should have seen it...”—was getting a bit much for Jenna and Dan, let alone ourselves, so we made a pact to stop. At Mazunte Dan and Jenna and I visited the turtle sanctuary while Dennis and Sophie went for a walk and had a cool drink at the car. Next we drove over the hill and walked along my favourite beach, San Augustinillo. The tide was out so we could walk much further than we ever had before. We explored a cave in the rocks at sea level, saw a flock of pelicans, a Scotty dog (very exciting for Sophia), marveled at the peculiar rock islands offshore (they almost look like the flowerpots at Tobermory, but these are granite not limestone). We splashed in the water, climbed the rocks at the end, took lots of pictures and then went for a swim. Sitting at a palapa restaurant, a lunch of refrescos, delicious guacamole and homemade tostadas made us all happy.

Next we drove on through Zipolite and Angel to Playa Estachute to go snorkeling. The road in is tricky to find and more steep and rutted and tricky to drive, especially in a little car with four passengers. After various undercarriage scrapes and groans from all, Dennis heroically parked on the dirt road, jumped out to jam stones under the tires to prevent finding the car in the ocean, and we had landed. We slipped and slid in our flip-flops in the dust, with Jenna squealing for sound effect, further down the hill to the small coral lined bays of Estachute. Even with the treacherous entry we noticed signs of development to come. (Sigh.) Still the snorkeling was fantastic. Dan had never snorkeled before and Jenna had only done it in Lake Couchiching looking for sunken dinky cars. We took turns swimming with the one good mask (the other broke just as we tried to use it again) and all came back with exciting tales of brilliantly coloured fish—big and small, huge schools of them, coral caves and spiny purple urchins. Finally Dennis looked at his watch and reminded us all that we had better get moving or we’d be driving home in the dark. We made it back to the car, and praised Dennis’s cowboy driving maneuvers while groaning over bumps, before relaxing again back at the pavement. Dan and Jenna fell asleep almost immediately and Dennis and I drove back to Puerto once again talking about all the changes and how we should have bought...

Once back, bathing suits were peeled off and dry clothes donned while hammocks were unfurled for evening cocktails with Jenna serving a little bowl of Mexican peanuts to each. The spicy salty peanuts with lime squeezed over them are perfect this time of day, while watching the sunset with a cold drink. Cleaned up we moved our lazy party to Brad's BBQ where an open mike was promised later. Dennis and Jenna ordered big juicy hamburgers and sighed with satisfaction all the way through. Dan chose Brad's Ribs and seeing the enormous things heaped over his plate grinned so much he had trouble chewing. We all had a little taste and agreed they were, as Dan crooned "sooooo good". My tuna steak was less exciting (D:she never has great luck at Brad's – he's a meat sort of guy) — I prefer the 30 peso Cabo Blanco version — what is in that marinade??— but we were all satisfied. The music was slow in starting and less intense than it had been Christmas Eve; perhaps people were saving up for New Year's Eve. We listened to two performers and then headed out. I drove through town to Zicatela — Dennis and I wondered what was happening at Rockaway's and Dan and Jenna were heading to Bar Fly. Rockaway's was quiet so Dennis and I kept driving, letting the 'young folks' off to wait in line at their club of choice. Commenting again, once they were out of earshot, about on all the changes.... Dennis and I slowly drove past the end of the pavement at Zicatela and down the dirt road that we used to walk, back to our previous apartments. Further along candles in paper bags marked the way to a 'campground' from which music was coming and promising an all night laid-back party. Some things, thankfully, stay the same, we said as we avoided a dog lying in the road and drove up to the highway and home.

So now its New Years Eve. I ran as usual soon after 7, showered and went to the market. There had been no good looking fruit when I had been there on Thursday. Today however the market was busy and pineapples, papayas, watermelons, bananas and oranges were everywhere. I got what we needed and came back to make breakfast. In the meantime Dennis had walked Sophie to the bakery and was back with four cinnamon rolls. While I made coffee and tackled the pineapple into four bowls with melon and bananas (the papaya needs a day or two of ripening) Dennis checked his email. There was the usual junk to be cleared out and this wonderful letter from my nephew Jono describing Isaac's funeral.

Date: Dec 31, 2005 6:11 AM

Subject: Happy Old Year's Night!

Good Morning Liz,

Just had a smoke with Zoe on the cliff and we nearly froze. Thinking of you guys on a beach somewhere makes me a little warmer though.

I awoke at quarter past four this morning and decided to stay up, since my teenage sister is still sleeping, it's a perfect opportunity to use the computer here and send you some love in a letter form and tell you a little about Isaac's funeral.

It was really a nice funeral. I would venture to write that it was just about as nice as a funeral could be. It took place at an Anglican church near Mount Pleasant Cemetery, and it was raining.

It had been raining since sometime the day before. Very appropriate weather. Since five thirty in the morning I had had two coffees with grown up cream (Bailey's) and a shot of Crown Royale and still I hadn't finished my speech about Isaac as we pulled up. It was difficult, in Pickering to even find the right environment to promote the right head space to write about Isaac.

So, I was flipping through my book out front of the church as friends and family of Isaac were arriving. Jonathan Thompson and Lucas showed up and we went in together. I opted to sit with them as close to the front as I could. I saw my divided family sitting within spitting distance of each other. The minister came in and spoke for a short time and asked me and Curtis Fehey to come to the front and say a few words. Curtis asked me to go first. I walked to the front and put my book on top of the bible and said:

One great man has left this world last week. His name was Isaac Morkel. He was my lifelong friend and I loved him. When my mother told me that Nick asked me to say a few words on this occasion I felt honoured, and though I've never done something like this before, I didn't find it difficult to call up wonderful memories about Isaac. In fact even if there was only one person that it's easy to say nice things about I'm sure we could all agree that it would be Isaac.

Last Monday I had the pleasure of having dinner with Isaac. We had corned beef sandwiches and french fries and coleslaw, and two bottles of Canadian. Isaac was a very intelligent man. He was well read, he was aware of the political world around him. He was up to date on current events and he knew his history. He was very good at chess.

Isaac was also very musical and had an incredible singing voice. He loved Hymns and classical music as well as Opera and Jazz. Listening to the radio with him he would often tell me who composed the piece we were listening to. Occasionally he could even name the musicians. Those of us who had the pleasure of sharing the dance floor with Isaac knew that he had some great moves.

Isaac also had unparalleled culinary artistry. -When he would come through our front door with parcels of meat in brown paper and little bags of spice everyone in our family knew that we were in for a celebration no matter what the occasion. Isaac had many ways of showing love and affection for any one whom he cared for. He was generous and kind. My siblings and I spoke of how he used to tickle us and wrestle with us and sometimes our family dog. He would sometimes poke us and sometimes prod us, but it was more often he would embrace us and he gave a new meaning to the Bear Hug.

Isaac was a painter and a very good one too. He gave my brother Ben and I our first jobs painting with him. I'm sure my brother would agree that he taught us many things during those summers."

At this point I froze a little, all of my courage had been depleted and I waited and thought I'd remember what I was to say next, but it didn't come to me so I said something like Isaac will be missed, thank you. The only other thing that I wanted to talk about in that speech was about Isaac's laugh, but I was relieved to hear about from Curtis and Nick when they spoke.

So, it's time for another smoke and probably more coffee. Please let anyone who wants to read this, read this and I'll see you when you get back into town. I think that I'm spending old years' night at my new apartment (old apartment) with Zoe.

Love you Liz,

Jono xox

I am very proud of Jono's maturity, strength and compassion. He accepted the role of spokesperson at the funeral without hesitation at a time of personal turmoil in the aftermath of his break-up with Claire and the jeopardy of his own living situation. Jono and I have already promised each other one of our private Sneaky Dee's Dates when I get back, to talk and remember more.

We've had a quiet day so far. The loudest things I've heard are planes heading home. All hammocks are occupied with sleeping and reading bodies. Sophie has taken up her position on Grandma's blanket strategically wrinkled between the hammocks, and is also sleeping. Tonight there will be more fireworks. We'll all be wandering in our same holiday uniforms—flip-flops and tank tops and shorts or little skirts—listening to music here or there, stopping for a drink perhaps, watching the fireworks or gasping at the latest unexpected firecracker. Dennis heard from Brad that Rockaway's is the place to be. I'm sure we'll all float by at one time or another. You can hear what's going on from the street in front of Bar Fly too, so that may or may not be the destination of choice for some of us. The street is really the party anyway and we're looking forward just to wandering and seeing and hearing what we see and hear. Last year, Babylon, the reading room, picked up musicians throughout the night, so some we had heard at one beachside party were later found climbing in the window (the door was closed) to take part in the music there. Spontaneously traffic was stopped on the street for the rest of the evening as people walking stopped to swell the crowds of dancers growing on the street, on the nearby hotel lawn and down onto the beach.

We hope that all your New Year's Eve celebrations are as pleasant and relaxed. We wish everyone una Feliz Ano Nuevo!

Bienvenidos a Ano Dos Mil Seis.

(Dennis) Uno Enero Dos Mil Seis (1 January 2006)

We made it to another year successfully, the big moment arriving while the band paused between sets at the Rockaway, the 50ish hangout. We had put off going out to dinner until 9 PM and never considered making a reservation for any of the especial dinners offered at much-inflated prices by better restaurants. We had parked just up from the east end of the Zicatela strip and walked unsuccessfully and hungrily west and back east looking for a favorite, a decent, an acceptable and finally ANY restaurant still serving a dinner we could afford to buy. (Sigh... tourism's progress strikes again..) Eventually we wound up at Papaya Surf, the Italian surfer hotel/restaurant nearest the car, for fish (large and good) and pasta (too rich for Danny & Jenna's

taste). We had to take what they had left. Papaya Surf had a small band badly thumping through some reggae and rock standards and echoing off the cement walls. We made our way eventually to the Rockaway and after some goofy attempts at learning to dance to Danny's special moves, the young folks left us for more DJ partying at the Bar Fly or somewhere. Dan had at the last minute had left his trumpet at the apartment and regretted not sitting in with this young funky Mexican band—so onward! The last set at the Rockaway featured a good ultra funky—up version of Pink Floyd's "The Wall" ('We don't need no education...') and we danced along once again attempting to perfect our moves from memory.

We eventually wandered beyond the paved strip to pass the Iguana, a beachfront open palapa place which sometimes holds parties on big nights. One of the DJ's was going strong with Jungle beat and a crowd half our age or less slowly girating to the thumping bass; I guess we're officially too old for that sort of scene now, but if my knee hadn't been acting up again after wild attempts to imitate 21-year-old Dan, we might have taken the plunge--incognito. My knee is slowly, slowly getting stronger but the long food hunt and the earlier dancing were pushing the limits on that.

This New Year's morning started late and has been progressing slowly; with no action yet from half of us. Liz, Sophie and I have already been to Bacocho for a walk along the beach and crab chase. We picked-up pastries on the way back, cut up the fruit for everyone, ground coffee, percolated it, ate breakfast and there are still two quiet lumps on the other side of the room. The Danny Dance must have worn them out good.

The changing calendar does require some reflection. 2005 brought not only the sudden, shocking, and tragic loss of our friend Isaac as you have been reading, but my mother's passing as well. Modern western medical science (to which I owe my own life) managed to keep her going and living at home with her wits about her to beyond 78 years, for which we are all thankful. Her passing was sudden last September 2nd, but coming after a long period of less-than-wellness (if no particular illness) with a weak heart, it was not a complete shock either. She was just a day short of her 56th wedding anniversary, a milestone few of us have much hope of reaching. Of course there's plenty of other tragedy around us and around the world but we'd best concentrate on the good and many wonderful people still sharing our lives.

Puerto Escondido began 2006 at about 75.5 degrees F (24.2 C) according to my monitoring system. We will accept that and leave it to others to observe the clear, crisp winter air, the sparkling of the snow in moonlight, the view of Polaris high in the sky.... Our part of the deal seems better, but we'll be there in a few weeks, um, enjoying, the delights of the north.

6. Mexico Journal 2005-06

It is always difficult to get back in the journal-writing mode after we get back home and immersed in all the duties, culture, and stresses of home, but Liz's memory and note-taking have made it possible. As I start editing her stream-of-consciousness travelogue we've been home two weeks, the big moon we started home under is gone, the stars are back in their northern positions, and its too cold and dark.

Both of our voices run in and out of this narrative, sometimes commenting on each other with a different point-of-view and sometimes agreeing on the same story. It's the way memory works and is all we have now of the final days of our Mexican vacation. Our laundry is done, the warm weather wear is back in the Rubbermaid bins in the closet. The cooler, camping equipment, snorkels, fins, and hammocks are all put away. The car still has some of Dennis' sticky-keep-on-driving-coke spills and all the sand may never be out of it, but we're home.

We left off part 5 on New Year's day, with a only few days left in Puerto Escondido. Danny and Jenna got bus tickets to go down the coast to a small pre-hispanic ruins site near Tehuantepec. They wound up hiking to ruins there, getting a bus to Oaxaca for a few days exploring there, then bussing through Mexico City and back to Acapulco for their flights home. They had fun, ate grasshoppers (Chapulines) in Oaxaca and can tell their own stories.

We had things to do in Puerto still, and little time to do them. The waves were up, so we rented a boogie board one afternoon and had a great time. Why had we put off trying it before? We tried to get good fish at Cabo Blanco again without success (had they closed permanently?), but did get back to Brad's for a good burger (and fish) our last night. The previous night Brad tipped us off to some good music at the Rockaway on Zicatela so we had an Italian dinner, drinks, and dancing there.

Having wasted all the appropriate time, I decided to get a little serious about the thought of buying some property in Puerto. Prices are rising rapidly so we should have done this years ago (not to mention weeks ago). I made a few calls and we went for a drive around likely areas. I've been in touch with a realtor since we got back and am thinking about some lots out toward the point. They seem to be going for about \$200,000 for a 200 square meter lot (2000 square feet to Americans) which seems like a lot but that's pesos so it's about \$19000 US. The way its been going there they have to be a good investment even if we never build there. (Liz: I am more ambivalent. I like Puerto, but there are more places in the world that I would like to visit.)

Finally our time ran out, and we stuffed everything back in the Escort for the trip home. We got our rental deposit back, had one last breakfast at Cafecito, and hit the road toward Acapulco, (and started hitting topes with the car riding low almost immediately—there are a lot of topes from Puerto to Acapulco, we met people a few years ago that had counted over 200!). The road isn't great or particularly scenic south of Acapulco, but with Sophie perched in a nice soft spot above and behind us we were back in car mode.

We lacked a decent map of the route through Acapulco and wound up lost. Liz is the better city driver, so we switched places in mid-city. Soon she was stuck on a ridiculously steep hill with a VW inches behind and the emergency brake slipping. Holding our breaths, my extra leverage on the brake lever and her gunning the little Ford's motor got us going. (With some anxiety felt by all!) I navigated us backward for a while but eventually Liz spied a big green sign with the direction we needed and we were able to enjoy the brightly painted busses of Acapulco with the confidence we were on our way out of this huge metropolis.

Just past Acapulco is Pie de la Cuesta (Foot of the Hill), a beach area with cheaper, typically run-down motels. The guides warn of dangers and few lodging choices beyond Pie, and getting

through Acapulco took longer than planned, so we let a hotel operator wave us in. It was Friday night after all and we feared that things would book up quickly. Fine. Paying 250 pesos for a concrete cell wasn't our idea of a good deal but we also knew things were more expensive here than in Oaxaca because of demand. Dennis checked out the room, shrugged that it was ok and we unloaded. (This is why I usually insist SHE looks at the rooms!) As soon as the light was turned on and I saw the litter on the floor and the unmade beds I said "Dennis, This room is dirty." After losing his temper with me (or Acapulco), he conceded that it was true and went to find our host. I think that was what the man was trying to tell D in the first place—this was the room and he'd have it cleaned soon –but D was tired and didn't catch all the details.

Anyway...eventually, while we took Sophie for a walk on the beach, the room was cleaned. The beach here is a disappointment after being further south. The surf is big, and the undertow strong, so swimming is dangerous. Wading and getting splashed in the waves is the usual fun, but this Friday night there was a dreadful smell on the beach. Something yellow was washing in with the waves. It smelled to me like creamed corn and we really didn't want to think about it any further. There were lots of people on the beach walking, sitting eating in family groups, hired horses for riding and people selling various souvenirs and snacks. But the smell seemed way too nauseating to us to enjoy any of these things. And the water was just plain scary looking. With the population of Acapulco and the hump of the Christmas holidays just past, it was not pleasant to think of overworked sewage plants, etc. Tired and discouraged by this aspect of Mexico we walked back to our hotel and sat down for dinner at their beach view palapa. The sunset at Pie is famous; tonight we watched it through a smoggy haze and a dilapidated (but necessary?) chain link fence, and toasted the Pacific goodbye. Tomorrow we would leave the coast and drive north and east into the mountains.

Sophie got up in the night barking. Neither Dennis or I slept well either. We got up eventually, made coffee, ate buns we had bought in Puerto, and were on the road. With the light on we discovered Sophie's concern—something had been taking her food. There was a line of dog kibble across the floor to the wall and into the bathroom. Whatever it was seemed to get in and out through the hole next to the water pipes that were supposed to be part of a shower. The whole bathroom, pipe-coming-out-the wall shower, dark stained wall, leaking cracked sink and lovely tank cover-less and no toilet seat toilet, were something we had tried to avoid anyway. Nobody wanted a shower and preferred to use the toilet without the light. We needed to get out of here. It may not have been the worst place we've ever stayed but at this point in our wonderful trip it was certainly depressing. Packing the car and taking off in the early morning darkness we made a pact that if we had to ever come this way again we would ignore the warnings about the lack of services north of Acapulco and Pie. It couldn't get much worse than this. Then we discovered that on top of everything it was actually only 4:30 am since Dennis in his restless night had inadvertently reset his watch while fumbling to set an alarm.

We decided we'd eat a more substantial breakfast in Zihuatanejo, 3 hours north. The road was new and smooth and we sailed along the empty road behind a small truck probably taking fruit to market. With the warnings we'd read about carjackings on this road we were glad when sun came up. We eventually saw numerous roadside hotels; although basic they couldn't have been much worse or more expensive than the one in which we had sort-of slept. Next time...

Zihuatanejo, near the government-developed Ixtapa resort area is now itself large and gringoized. We'd already been disappointed by lunch on the main beach several years before. The water wasn't very pristine there when we saw it either—the idea of fish from that water was totally unappealing. The Lonely Planet Guide recommended a breakfast spot in the old town run by New Zealanders. (Why not Mexicans?) it served good (now read: Gringoized) Mexican specials and good coffee. We had an address and managed to find it, after passing many reasonable looking Mexican places. It was Ok, frequented by Americans, and more pricey than we were used to in Puerto. Their cappuccino was not up to Oaxacan standards either. But they had a big shiny menu in English. The guides are great helps for your first trip or two, but at this point its probably better to trust our own intuition and luck. (Famous Last Words) Maybe we were still crabby after our sleepless night. Fed and caffinated, we found our way out of town past Ixtapa, curving north. Before long, we turned on to a new toll road connecting the port city of Lazaro Cardenas with the large inland cities. Under Fox, Mexico has been building roads at an amazing rate. (D: I'm wondering if this is funded by all the oil and gas going north these days.)

This new toll road north and east is amazing, blasted through mountains with graceful bridges, and smooth new pavement. Part of the route is along and over fingers of a large reservoir. Though expensive (\$25!), it cut the time over the mountains to Uruapan in half, (3 hours vs. 6-8) Compared to the trip over the mountains from Oaxaca, we felt like we were flying instead of driving.

This is volcanic country again. Near Uruapan is a volcano that burst from a farmer's field 50 years ago and eventually buried a village, leaving only the church steeple above the frozen lava. We thought of going to see this, but reading the Lonely Planet Guide more closely, we discovered that this detour would require another day and more heavy-duty hiking gear than we had. (Was this true? This is the problem with reading between the lines of guidebooks...were the lava fields really such an adventure or was it now ringed with souvenir shops and guides ready to show you 'everything'. Or were we just still crabby?)

As we came into Patzquaro, now high enough for pine trees, we looked at a campground recommended by the guide. It was very nice, but reading between the lines we also noticed that we would be the only people with a tent and the winter mountain air was much cooler than we were used to. The lodging question would wait till later, we could camp—although we probably wouldn't sleep much tonight either.

We walked around a busy Saturday market and bought a bag of fruit to share—big beautiful, delicious, black raspberries for only 5 pesos! Den got a few beef tacos at another stall too. We felt better. Patzquaro's a colonial town with all the history, architecture and charm that entails; it was the best find of the trip home. Toward sunset we slowly drove up a tall hill to a developed viewpoint. Up and up, between lines of tall pines, the road got worse and worse and we feared we wouldn't make the summit before sunset. Finally we turned a corner into a parking lot with an incredible vista of Lake Patzquaro, the town and all the villages and mountains in the distance. It was spectacular! Then we got out of the car and...it was so cold!! We were still wearing beach clothes! Quickly we dug out sweaters, jackets, shoes, and socks (how depressing) and changed by the car so that we could semi-comfortably enjoy the view.

As the sun began to descend we knew it was time to think about dinner and lodging. On the way up to the look-out we had seen an appropriate-looking place and we relocated it, but couldn't find an office or manager. It looked very cute—behind the usual Mexican gates were two wooden 'mountain cottages—think Switzerland and Heidi if you are like Liz. These cabins are apparently typical of the region. We went for dinner –inside – and returned later. Persistence worked and we finally paid 250 pesos for our streetside double room (the cottages were already taken) with good blankets, though this being Mexico, no heat. Later, we heard the two women running the place struggling outside with a gas cylinder to get our hot water going. We drifted off to sleep confident that we could make a morning dash from cozy bed to (eventually) hot shower in the cold mountain air.

Our morning plan was to walk Sophie, eat something, and go to museum when it opened. It was a beautiful sunny Sunday morning, yes there was a layer of frost on the car, but it was slowly warming and the atmosphere was beautifully clear. Near the cathedral Liz spotted masks for sale: wolf, fox, boar, goat -- how to choose? (Get them all.) And throw in a rocking chair. Disassembled (6 bolts), the chair has a very simple wood frame with caned seat and back and cost all of 220 pesos (\$24 Canadian). Leaving Liz to explore the museum, I decided to save the museum entry and read in the warm car with Sophie. Each room of the museum had an attendant to explain the exhibit (in Spanish). There were painted plaster walls, plus local variations on ceramics and weaving. Unfortunately no photos were allowed. The building was part of the show, with excavations showing its earlier use as a monastery. At the very back of the building were narrow cells with days scratched in the stone walls. Beyond that another stone wall showed indigenous carvings. The layers of history in Mexico—right there to touch and *try* to come to terms with are incredible. We definitely need to return and spend more time in Mexico and in lovely Patzquaro.

Sunday is free museum day, so we wanted to get to Morelia, the capital of Morelos state, for some free culture. On the way we visited a hilltop ruin on the outskirts of Patzquaro, with views of the city and lake – a great spot. Though the ruins are mostly unexcavated they were clearly a huge project for their time. We would have to come back and learn more about the town's precolonial, colonial and current affairs. In Morelia we found a hotel downtown with shaded courtyard parking (Hotel Fenix listed in the Lonely Planet) and left Sophie to guard the car and catch up on her rest. After a lot of walking to free but closed museums (why?) we finally sat in the city's large main square facing the public buildings and the cathedral with one expensive drink each. On our walk we did discover one fine exhibit – a new Boutique Hotel we chanced upon with three large woodcuts hanging in lobby. The desk clerk directed us to an upper floor with more of the artist's woodcuts chine colled (glued) directly onto wall. The combination of the spare modern architecture and the printed and integrated paper was striking and very inspiring.

Sunday walking and square-sitting seemed to be popular with Morelenos. We bought a paper and read it in the square like everyone else. Eventually we got to the movie ads. Like many big cities most theatres are in the suburbs. Here there was one still downtown. We decided to go and see King Kong -- Danny had recommended it as "hilarious" having gone to see it with his brothers on his birthday just before Christmas. We went back to the hotel and walked and fed our guard-dog Sophie before trekking out again to locate the theatre. It was practically behind

our hotel and the tickets were about \$4. The evening's entertainment was perfect for walked-out tourists. It was a silly film, but the only way Liz will go to a big stupid Hollywood movie is if its cheap, she's too tired to object, and with subtitles it could be a learning experience, too. Finding something to eat after the film was tricky but we joined the waiters, cooks, and their families at a pizza place down the block from our hotel and ate passable pizza watching TV.

Monday morning we hoped to find breakfast along the way. Sometimes this works, depending on luck and instinct...but often we end up hungry. The road north from Morelia fords a lake, skirts many industrial towns and eventually, many hours later led to a breakfast of sorts in Salamanca. The truckstop we found wasn't cheap or clean or particularly good...but we were hungry...Our destination was Guanajuato, an old mining town with a maze of roads both above and below the surface. We'd heard years ago that it was worth a visit and Liz had read about it in numerous guides. It is, I guess, an interesting colonial town, with great road tunnels and the usual charming maze of streets and paths and nice shops and well-charted attractions, but it all adds up to a well-discovered, somewhat sanitized tourist experience. We did go to see the Mummy Museum, which is pretty much a lot of unidentified corpses, displayed in glass-fronted cabinets having been desiccated and preserved by this particular dry environment. It was rather creepy and I (D) certainly don't feel I ever need to see it again. Liz was disappointed and disturbed by the circus-like character of the displays. She likes museums and wanted a more researched and respectful presentation of these unearthed people. Instead we were treated to case after case of nameless mummies—the oldest, the smallest, the nicest dressed...it was depressing and too voyeuristic.

Later, wandering through a centro that had been described so enticingly, Liz had a too-expensive espresso at an outdoor table and we decided, with afternoon passing, that Guanajuato wasn't where we wanted to spend the night. Back in the car we joined the line of traffic, then circled the town a bit for the views and backtracked to the highway north toward Leon.

The Lonely Planet mentioned some major shoe malls in Leon (Heaven! Hell!) which we managed to find after a pass or two using their less than complete map. One was even sort of open. Shoes were seen, store after store—the entire two-level mall—but our money stayed in our pockets. It was like any other mall, except all the stores sold shoes. Malls are not our thing. The question of where to stay loomed. The plan became to head out of town and hope for good motel luck on the outskirts where the tryst places tend to be. This time the plan worked to near perfection. Our huge and luxurious room had a giant (kingsize—the first one we'd seen in Mexico—ever!), very firm bed, appropriately placed ceiling mirror, a big color TV, dining corner with starlit domed ceiling, room service (barely adequate burger, fries, and 5 little Coronitas in a bucket with ice—Liz had some of her yogurt and granola instead), and an appealingly clean shower with actual towels, soap and shampoo! All this luxury came for the same 250 pesos we seem to have been quoted everywhere. Find this place in your Lonely Planet! The key seems to be finding not one but two tryst places close together; the competition for the finite adulterer trade leads to better quality and lower prices. (Liz: also find a city big enough to support the trade at this level. Dennis never mentions that his favourite lodging is usually found in the industrial outskirts, far from any museums, restaurants or other tourist destinations. The “charm” of the location is always on the inside.)

One of the reasons for choosing our route home was a planned visit to Aguascalientes, a city and small state we had never visited. We took the toll road there from Leon in the morning and headed downtown, looking (surprise, surprise) for breakfast. We parked among many others near the downtown cathedral and happened upon a wonderful coffee shop. Liz got an excellent caffeine fix and I indulged in Mexico's delicious hot chocolate. Back at the car we were shocked to see no license plate and a parking ticket on our window. This is a very effective way of collecting fines. We had the address of the police station and ticket office but it seemed unlikely our plate would get back there right away. We circled Aguascalientes' core of one-way streets hoping to find the parking enforcement person who had given us the ticket, but it looked like we would be in Aguas for the day. We wanted to see some museums here anyway, so decided to be plateless until later in the afternoon when we hoped our plate would find its way to the ticket office. We tried not to think of the upcoming ordeal of line-up and who knew what fine.

Unfortunately in Aguascalientes, the main museum was closed Tuesday, not Monday as is usual. Our bad luck with museums continued when we failed to understand and follow one set of directions to the contemporary museum, and soon after failed again despite the considerable help offered by a kind local woman with sons in tow. Back at the car (now legally parked) we found our map -- we had been within a block of it all the time the woman, her sons, teachers at the school...had been trying to help. Back we went, and entered the lobby of the relatively new museum to find it CLOSED! A new exhibit was being installed. Thankfully the curator, just leaving, took pity on the dramatically crestfallen Liz and let us in to see the work just coming down—Vangelus—yes, that sappy musician, makes equally awful sentimental acrylic abstractions. Another smaller, more interesting show of a local artist the curator assured us was important, but the Vangelus was more popular. (sigh) Later we found, in what seemed like the rectory of a small church, the Posada Museum and saw a great display of his prints and printing blocks. This made up for our previous disappointments. Posada is the main source of the many dancing and politically charged skeletons in hispanic art. Amazingly there was no museum shop to sell cards, books or prints. Up north it sometimes seems like the museums are just there to prep you for the gift store you must pass through to exit, but they seem to have missed that marketing lesson here.

We also eventually found the Aguascalientes printshop, also not far from where we had been circling the streets all morning. Unfortunately these very civilized printmakers had all left for lunch. The guard at the door was not going to let us in until they returned in another hour and a half. Again, Liz managed to persuade the guard with her disappointed body language and polite but insistent Spanish that we had come a long way, she too was a printmaker and although sadly she would not get to meet any fellow printmakers, she would really love to see the studio. It worked and he showed us around the well-equipped studio, with Liz complimenting the work, space and equipment much to the guard's obvious pride. Thanking him very much for his help, we left. Was everything she said true? Yeah. It's a good studio. They need better ventilation though. Liz couldn't think of the Spanish translation of ventilation so didn't mention the strong solvent fumes with the lunch-hour shut windows. She also only wanted to be positive with the rule-breaking guard who showed us around.

After a morning of driving, then museums, fueled only by café con leche and chocolata, lunch was becoming a necessity. It was well into the afternoon. If the artist's could all leave their work for lunch (Liz still can't get over that) we could take a break from looking at art to eat too. There was a puzzling lack of passable food on the downtown streets. We walked and walked again. Eventually we found one empty, little, taco place. It turned out to serve great and economical food. Liz used her best Spanish to request tacos for herself *sin carne*—they had lots of vegetables—and I ordered enough of various dead animals to make up for the special request. Liz raved on and on about her fresh carrot juice and wanted to return later for more. As if we could find it again...

It was time to attempt retrieval of our Ontario license plate. Our trepidation proved to be misplaced. We found the office with only a couple of loops through the more distant one-way streets, and three clerical types at various desks and counters guided us through the process. They even had the plate (among a couple of dozen from today...and thousands more on dusty shelves behind). There was no line-up. Perhaps only tourists bother to get their license plates back. The fine was about 6 bucks. We thanked the woman who took our money for our trouble.

We left the relatively flat city/state of Aguascalientes behind, and headed northwest for Zacatecas, another colonial mining city, again in its own state, although a much larger one than Aguascalientes. Incidentally, finally with Aguas, I (D) have been to every state in Mexico! Liz wasn't along on my long-ago trips to Baja California (North and South) or Chihuahua. I've visited 46 US states (plus DC); only Florida, South Carolina, Alabama & Georgia remain, plus PEI, Nunavut, and the Northwest Territories in Canada. Also, incredibly, I've never been to Manitoba! On the other hand, I also haven't set foot on any other continent. Liz wants to change that and keeps talking about Europe where she has (Liz: *only*) been three times.

Our plan from Aguascalientes was to drive 160 km in the late afternoon and hopefully find a tryst place or something similar on the outskirts of mountainous Zacatecas. No such luck. Zacatecas now has a new freeway leading to the center with limited opportunities for commerce. One place we noticed off the road on the way in looked derelict and unappealing, and no others were around. On the far side of town among the new roads and interchanges there was nothing either. Now dark and back in town we finally found parking near a nice city park. Sophie found the park adequate for her uses and settled into the car while we ventured out on foot looking for food and lodging.

Hungry, roomless and afoot in the relatively cool mountain evening we wandered down the main commercial street till we spotted the guide-recommended Hostel del Rio in a colonial-era edifice. The rooms we were shown were 250 pesos, in the basement and were airless, small and dark, or were up many flights upstairs, and were small, dark and more expensive. With dog-smuggling in mind I opted for the more secluded downstairs option and told the boy at the front desk we'd be back to our foot-thick, stone-walled dungeon cell after dinner. We went searching for dinner with little success...a large Chinese place with no clients seemed scary, and little else appealed to the near-vegetarian among us or to my budget thinking. We wound up in a over-lit cafe-type place with a view of taxis at a stop light, but at least at last there was food.

We walked back to the car and it now being late parked across from the hotel on the downtown street for the night with a policeman's assurance that it was fine and so it was. I hefted Sophie in her bag and we hauled in a few clothes, laptop, etc. to our little cell. Liz was wondering what we would do in an earthquake; I figured these massive stones had already stood around quite a while and our karma was probably not bad enough to bring them down in the next 10 hours.

In the morning we smuggled Sophie back out, walked her and left her in charge of the car, checked in with the Parkinsons by phone, and looked for breakfast. Many blocks and turns later we wound up with a pretty ordinary breakfast at the restaurant adjacent to a better hotel. The museums and sites of Zacatecas beckoned. (D hasn't mentioned that his dissatisfaction in all of this was also coloured by a raging cold. Sometimes travel is a little bit of a struggle, especially with someone determined to stick to his budget...and a stuffed-up head only exacerbates things.)

First up was the Rafael Colonel Museum, housed in an ex-convento, and praised in the guides. It was closed for installation work. We moved on to the Pedro Colonel museum, Rafael's brother and also a successful artist who had also donated his personal collection to the city. I brought Sophie out of the car and decided to let Liz peruse alone for an hour while we looked around. Our view: She was in there forever, completely oblivious to our interminable wait in the cool mountain air. The taxis in Zacatecas are numbered up to 400 or so and we saw most of them, some two or three times passing though this little plaza. Her view: I had to absolutely run through this fascinating museum full of extremely rare books and manuscripts, wonderful prints (a huge collection of early and mid-20th c masters, Goya, Japanese woodcuts...) masks from all over the world as well as Mexican dance masks (finally with explanations of the dances!), sculptures (pre and post-colonial Mexican and worldwide indigenous as well as 20th c) and paintings (Pedro Colonel's large abstractions and many others...) What a collector! I could spend days in there, certainly many hours if I didn't have to rush to rejoin my unreasonably impatient family. How good can the more-famous brother's museum be? A return trip will be required.

After our reunion we happened past the Museo Zacatecateno which was unimpressive in comparison. Liz took 15 minutes this time and had to look for me. The new Manuel Felguérez Museum of Abstract Art, however, which we both went into, was striking more for the site than the art. A former seminary, then prison, it had huge galleries with room for massive works – sculptures and murals. The many rooms, galleries, courtyards, alcoves, and hallways had Liz's Art Exhibitionist head spinning. On the second floor we found an operational print studio locked-up but we continued up to an office on the third floor to see some prints and gain admittance to the studio. It was a great high-ceilinged, window-lit space, though lacking in any ventilation except open windows (a consistent problem in Mexican printshops). I could tell Liz was scheming for an artist residency here and a return to the museums of the brothers Colonel before she even opened her mouth.

We still wanted to take the Swiss-made gondola (Telerifico) above town to the Cerra de Buffo (an oddly shaped hilltop) and maybe drive part of the elevated winding route around the city, so we rejoined Sophie in the Escort to find our way up. We eventually wound around Zacatecas and found ourselves at the upper Telerifico terminal near the Buffo and had a picnic with some buns and car-warm cheese overlooking the city. We then walked around the cathedral that is on

this hill overlook and by oversized statues of military heroes on horses. (Pancho Villa is viewed somewhat differently here than in Texas). The Telerifico operators were happy to let Sophie ride too, so we paid our one-way fare and were hanging out over the town shortly afterwards. We had a great perspective of a particularly three-dimensional town from the height of the gondola. It seemed like once was enough, for me, though, so Liz paid the return fare, and hiked back to fetch the car while Sophie and I walked up the hill to the ring-road to sit and wait for her to drive back.

Our next tourist stop was the El Eden Mine. This was once one of Mexico's richest mines and operated from 1586 to the 1950's. The wealth of the city's colonial architecture, not to mention the long enslavement of the indigenous people is because of this mine, which produced silver, gold, iron, copper, and zinc and at one time the deaths of up to five people a day from accidents and diseases.

The fourth of the seven levels of the mine are kept open for tours that explain part of the mine's history as well as a late night disco—The Disco Malacate, which our young guide told us was fantastic. With few tourists this Wednesday afternoon, we took a small gauge train into the mine with our guide and his buddy the train driver. After our very interesting tour, our guide was a geology student who knew quite a lot and also insisted on practicing his English on us, it was time to leave. He left us to summon the train that had returned to the surface.. His friend the train driver did not answer the radio. We waited. He tried again. Eventually, breaking all rules, we decided to walk out, avoiding electrical wires and hoping that the train carrying a new group of visitors would not appear in the long narrow tunnel.

Now we had a decision: stay another night in the Hostal del Rio's dungeon cell; try to find other lodging in Zacatecas, or hit the road north to Saltillo (not our favourite city) where we would be arriving late. North it was. Liz drove. I rested. The roads generally are much better than a few years ago, and the northern roads through wide-open deserts present fewer hazards, plus we had a near-full moon rising, so the eventual night-time drive to Saltillo posed no problem. How hard could it be to find a serviceable tryst motel in a large industrial city? Hours later we pulled out of Saltillo, defeated by the search on the way in, the search for the guide-recommended spots downtown (only the worst hotel we had ever stayed in in Mexico had a room) and the search for luck on the northern edge of town. A stop for dinner, already long overdue, was also unsuccessful (they were just closing and could only offer goat tacos). It was very quiet in the car.

The moon was still high, and our hopes were for some beckoning neon lights along the highway. Nope. As Wednesday became Thursday we watched desert go by, determined to stay in the next town, Monclova, at pretty much any price. Liz indicated that driving all night was not an option. An adequate hotel finally appeared and 265 pesos was paid. Dinner at 1:30 a.m. was crackers and the not yet green part of the cheese for me, and a few peanuts from the bottom of the bag for Liz. All this driving saved us at least, um, 9 bucks. (Liz: And how many good experiences in Zacatecas?) There was no point in regrets. We now were a day ahead of our rough schedule and our thoughts were further north, thinking about what day would be best to get to Rachel's house in Kansas.

The rumbling trucks of our fellow guests in the motel courtyard made it hard to sleep late. It took a little extra time to get the car tidied up and ready for the border, but we were on the road

nevertheless by 8 a.m.. We stopped an hour later for breakfast and were Texas-bound. One advantage of this western route home is more time in Mexico and less in Texas; we were 250 miles north of Brownsville before we crossed at Acuna/Del Rio. With a little wandering I found where to cancel our FMT permits and then Liz found the car-permit people and cancelled that too. We bought one more tank of cheaper Pemex gas and rolled across the Rio Grande toll bridge to the USA. The border guard asked the usual questions, but our less-usual answers (2 months, Oaxaca, etc.) piqued his curiosity so we got the semi-full treatment. Liz walked Sophie into a nightmare of burrs while I waited, smiling and confident they would find nothing. The arrival of a drug-sniffing dog had us worried for a bit about a total deconstruction of the car, but I think the dog only came up with the scent of Sophie's dogfood, so we were eventually sent on our way.

We phoned home, and re-entered American commerce at Wendy's for lunch. I then left Liz at a nearby Ross's clothes store while I went to Wal-Mart to get a card to turn on my cell phone. Liz came up with sale-priced sandals and running shoes (!!) for a total \$43 (over 380 pesos!), and by now it was mid-afternoon. We couldn't wait to see lots of flat scrubby Texas, and we did. Abilene, famed in song and story, was our goal. Even here food was scarce. Where were the restaurants? Eventually we found a Pizza Hut near the Christian College. It had enough political pull to outlaw beer sales, so our pizza was 'to go' and consumed in our motel room with thin, but cold American convenience store beer. The evening drive to Abilene put us in range of Rachel's in Manhattan, Kansas on Friday afternoon, so this became the plan.

The drive across Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas was close to 600 miles (900+ km), but with American speed limits through uncrowded country, we were watching the now-full moon rise as we neared Manhattan through rolling prairie hills. Rachel and Tor had homemade spaghetti waiting and Liz and Rachel dove into conversation of school, teaching, printmaking, art, portfolios, etc. Tor, Rachel's now-fiancee is starting a graduate program in landscape architecture, though with some misgivings about the KS program's emphasis. After dinner and more discussion they set us up in their spare room for the night.

Saturday was full of a visit to Rachel's great new studio/office, and a pilgrimage to the Wizard of Oz Museum in a nearby town. Rachel also needed to pick up a piece of letterpress printing equipment there, from a colorful fellow who has made his hobbies of historical re-enactments and antique printing presses into a bit of a career. We made the rounds of the thrift stores and Liz was able to pick up a Pentax camera like the one's she teaches with (and loses one or two per year). Now her head is almost all the way home: It seems to be in school, thinking about darkrooms and having dreams about teaching. Late in the afternoon Tor guided us to a prairie preserve (where he is a volunteer docent) and we drove past groups of bison and went for a hike up and around the hills. It was beautiful. Later we took them out for a good Thai dinner as thanks for two nights lodging and a congratulations on their recent engagement. It was fun. We went to bed fairly early after a full day for all and the fact that Manhattan, KS is a long, long way from southern Ontario.

Intrepid drivers like us were determined to make it home. It was Sunday so there was less traffic, the weather was clear and dry and after our day of 'rest' Saturday we got an early start. Breakfast proved elusive again (Denny's has failed me our entire trip!) and we were in Iowa before we

found food along I-80. Being mid-Sunday, we skirted Chicago and passed Indiana without trouble or incident (or even tolls) and as daylight waned made our way over the poor pavement of Michigan toward the final border crossing at Sarnia, Ontario, Canada.

Our late-evening welcome to Canada was quick and easy; we didn't even have to leave the car. The roads continued clear and dry, the traffic light, so we had the comfort of exceeding our very own speed limits instead of foreign ones for the last three hours to Liz's parent's home in Pickering. The porch lights were on and the door unlocked so we stretched, washed up and went to bed at 1:30 a.m.

To be fair I guess the trip lasted until noon Monday January 16 when we got back to Port Hope and unloaded the car and got the boiler to our furnace going. Overall we drove 7200 miles in 9 weeks (one-third—2400—on the first and last days) with six and a half weeks in Puerto Escondido. All of our expenses added up to about \$5,000 (Canadian), about \$3000 more than we would have spent in Ontario in the same time. It works out to about \$50 a day (gas, food, lodging and car repair in Houston) for the three of us. It seems like a great deal as I sit here with eight pieces of clothing on and my feet still chilly. Ontario's having an unusually balmy January, with temperatures mostly around the freezing point, but somehow it doesn't feel so warm to us as our tans and Spanish-language skills fade away.