

Journal, Mexico City, 1961

Introduction

How can I now, looking back 34 years ago, remember the circumstances surrounding my decision to study Spanish in Mexico City during the summer of 1961? I cannot be sure.

I had spent the previous summer, 1960, studying Spanish at the Monterey Institute of Foreign Studies and later that year I remember applying to the International Institute of Educational Studies for a year's grant to study the Mexican school system.

I was 26 years old and teaching English at Sacred Heart High School in San Francisco when I decided that I wanted to learn a foreign language and live abroad, maybe as a missionary or just as a graduate student. And yet I knew that because I had no seniority in the Christian Brothers, my chances of being approved for such a study program were minimal. But at the same time I felt that I could package myself in such a way to convince an appropriate organization to give me a scholarship to do just that.

I confided in no one. I filled out the lengthy application forms, wrote the supporting essays and filed them - supremely confident - that I would be accepted for a fellowship grant. And I was accepted, all expenses paid. When I announced this to my superiors, they were nonplussed. I came to them with a financial bird-in-the-hand, a year's study and research in Mexico, all expenses paid, but in their eyes, I did not yet have enough seniority in the Brothers to qualify for advanced study and I was carrying a full teaching load at Sacred Heart in addition to my extra-curricular activities with the students. What were they to do?

As sure as I was of obtaining the fellowship, I was equally sure that I would not be given permission to take advantage of it. But I could sense that my superiors did not want to refuse me outright. After all, I was probably the only Brother in the Province that year to qualify for an all-expenses-paid grant for anything. What to do? How to handle this situation? I forget the nuances of the negotiations, but my recollection is that I offered - or perhaps they offered - to exchange this wonderful educational opportunity for a summer of study in Mexico City living in community with the Christian Brothers. A deal was

struck and the California Province paid all my expenses for the summer of 1961 in Mexico City.

I can't say what prompted my desire to become a global person. After all, I had never been out of California except when I lived with my parents for a few months in Parker, Arizona while my father harvested crops at the Japanese concentration camp in Poston and once or twice when I crossed the Nevada state line to see what a gambling casino looked like. Whatever the driving force, I was determined to break the bonds of being just an American. I wanted to have a foreign cultural experience.

Now, 34 years later, re-reading this Journal I am struck by my self-confidence and fearlessness in the face of the complete unknown. I did not know a single person in Mexico City; I had only a letter of introduction from Brother Robert of Mary to his "friend", the Master of Novices, in Mexico City. I had never taken a long airplane flight before. I had to dress in civilian clothes instead of a religious habit for the first time in nine years and I was not fluent in the language of the country that I wanted to visit. What on earth was I thinking about?

With the benefit of hindsight, I believe this decision to seek out a foreign experience was simply my first effort to break the artificial boundaries of religious life, at least as defined by the Christian Brothers. And I was clever enough to manipulate the Brothers into granting me legitimate approval to break away, at least for a summer, from the external constraints of my chosen life style.

Somehow I knew they could not leave me empty handed when I offered them an all expenses paid fellowship financed by an educational foundation. After all, I had been honored as one of their own, a Christian Brother. How could they not respect the independent judgment of their peers about my worthiness, and by extension, their own?

I knew they could, and would not, grant me permission to accept this honor, but I also knew they had to make a counter proposal.

Four years later, I left the Christian Brothers in October of 1965 to join the farm workers movement. I now believe that I took my first step to strike out on my own in 1961. I had willingly, even eagerly, embraced the monastic discipline since 1949, when I entered the Brothers. Now, twelve years later, I began to loose the bonds.

A flood of memories overwhelms me during the process of reading, typing and editing this Mexico City journal.

Without doubt, the most human experience I had during that summer was my camaraderie with the kitchen Sisters. They adopted me as one their own. They looked after me, talked Spanish to me, cooked for me and nursed me when I was ill. I had never experienced such feminine care giving. They made me their king for a summer and showered me with affection. I did not expect it, I did not ask for it, but I loved it.

When I left to return to the United States, they presented me with a simple handkerchief with all their names sewn into the fabric. It was such a fitting gift. I kept it as a long forgotten treasure until just a year or two ago when I took it out from the box in my dresser to examine it. I could no longer make out their names, or perhaps I had just forgotten them over these past decades. I threw it out.

I remember the pageantry and the ritual of the bullfights. For some reason, I did not memorialize these adventures in my Journal. In all, I attended 3 or 4 fights. I still tingle with the feelings of the expectation and the thrill of the crowds as the matador plied his deadly trade. The music, the liturgy and the ritual of the event were very moving. I felt that something far more important was at stake than simply the killing of a wounded and raging bull.

And the poverty. I had never imagined such poverty. I still remember the young boy sweeping up the rice with his hands on the sidewalk in front of the church after a wedding. Food for home. Or looking through the marvelous wrought iron gates of the Hacienda (now a resort) and seeing women and children in abject poverty looking back at me. They were not begging but stared in wonderment about our mutual fate in life. This Mexican poverty was such a shock for a religious Brother like myself, who had taken a vow of poverty, and yet possessed everything I had ever wanted. This poverty seared my conscience and I have never forgotten it.

And finally, the greatest meal I ever had. After we crossed the border at Mexicali on our reentry into the United States, we stopped at a diner and I had the biggest, and the best, milkshake of my entire life.

Journal, Mexico City, 1961

June 15, 1961

Departure as planned, more or less. And so it is with all plans, more or less.

My first Spanish word, "quinze". That is my seat number. When the stewardess gave me an English newspaper I bravely said, "en Espanol". She answered in Spanish that she didn't have one right then. Already a failure. Oh, well.

There is something nonchalant - and proudly so - about being a world traveler, especially a loner like myself. You casually take every thing in stride, watching the others around you scurrying, complaining, edging for first place, and fanning themselves and whatever. But we, professional travelers, just watch the world go by, aloof and undisturbed.

L.A. International was confusion supreme. No one seemed to know where to go or where to sit. One Pan Am clerk checking in Mexico City passengers knew absolutely no Spanish and very little about his job. Perhaps he was hired just for the day.

Ordered a bourbon and ice on the plane. I have an idea the steward is accepting only American money. "That will be 80 cents", he said in perfect English. I will break through the dollar barrier here pretty soon, I guess. My change was two pesos. I feel more Mexican already.

Just caught bits and pieces of a conversation comparing Los Angeles, San Francisco and Chicago to Mexico City. The United States was the loser. Singing, dancing, gayety and nightclubs took it on the chin. It seemed to me - remember this was all in Spanish - that Los Angeles took it the worst. Except for the beaches in San Francisco, "frio y sucio".

June 16, 1961

This morning, I tore myself away from the security of the Continental Hilton and walked out into Mexico City. To Sanborns for breakfast. All world travelers meet at Sanborns. I had bacon, eggs and coffee. Then walked at a leisurely pace towards the Zocalo. There was a church at Madera and La Isabel del Catolica, so I stopped to attend Mass. The name of the church is La Profesa Catolica. While Mass was being said, workmen were high aloft making

repairs. There were very few people at this 9:00 AM Mass. No Communion given that I could see. A collection was taken up during the service.

I walked through a rain shower to the Zocalo, where a solemn High Mass was underway in the Cathedral. There is a large organ here and a choir of young boys, or so it sounds to me. And here too, in the nooks and crannies of the Church, repair work is ongoing. Sawing, scraping, chiseling and nailing. The work will probably take several generations to complete but the sooner we get started, the soon we will finish, seems to be the prevailing attitude. The architecture of both churches is Roman with the use of much wood for decorative purposes along with gold colored altars and pillars. During the Offertory, the organist played a selection from Bach. It sounded somewhat muddled, but the baroque classical sound was very pleasing and reassuring to me. The choir just filed out close by where I am sitting, jotting down these notes. All are clad in white and red leggings but as boys will, pushing, shoving, grinning and whispering. I ventured a "Que tal" to one but he said "no". I wonder what he meant by that. Many women in the Cathedral walk from statue to statue.

At La Profesa I saw an old man, his sombrero at his side, dressed in a ragged and dirty fashion weeping at a shrine of Our Lady. Here at the Cathedral, priests sit in the open confessional waiting for someone to come up and make their confession. And does it really matter whether others, who are standing around, hear you or not? After all did we not offend them too? I notice that many of the men here use such tokens of worship as the Sign of the Cross and money for prayer offerings, but it is the women who actually kneel down and say prayers. This is probably a very hasty conclusion, but it seems so to me.

Atop the Latin American Tower

Last night was most disheartening. Some of the ice breaks around the world traveler, I guess. But consider this: alone in a strange country and trapped as a victim in a commercial enterprise. How that irritates me. People running around waiting on you, taking advantage of you, liking you for money. And the irony of the situation is that all of it is being done in perfect English. I have been here eighteen hours and have not needed to speak Spanish at all. Just money, just being a tourist. It is not their fault entirely, it is ours too. We have reaped what we have sown. But I do not believe this is the real Mexico, the real people or the real country.

Leblon Restaurante

My whole trip to Mexico has been worth it. Just came from the Institute Mexicana where I investigated the possibility of going to school. At first I talked with the receptionist in English and she asked me to speak in Spanish and so we did. At the end of our conversation she told me that I spoke very well and without accent. I told her she was very kind, but all the same, I was pleased. And now I am next door at the Leblon Restaurante with a Carta Blanca listening to the waitresses talk. What a happy group they are and talk, talk and talk. I had noticed the same thing at the Tower. The girls kidding back and forth. Some of the topics discussed I can understand: love and money, but all in a carefree, lighthearted and chattering manner.

June 17, 1961
Simon Bolivar

I wrote a short poem in Ken Cervisi's yearbook entitled "From a Roof Top," which has turned out to be providential. I am living here in Mexico City on a rooftop. My room has faded green walls, a spotted plaster ceiling with the brick showing and faded red checkered tiles on the floor. It is old, perhaps thirty years or more. All the Brothers are apologizing to me for my quarters and their own as well. A new wing of rooms, also on the rooftop, will be open in two weeks. By way of contrast, moving to the new wing will be like moving back to the Hilton. And once again, it just depends on your point of view. When you accustom yourself to something, even though it has many inconveniences, when a little improvement is made, you consider yourself to be very fortunate indeed. But at the same time, if the improvement is too great, you do not understand and appreciate it. Actually, my material surroundings are the worst in my short life so far, but perhaps these days will turn out to be the happiest. And why not? The Brothers are hospitable and most helpful. They go out of their way to find things that an American would like and thus try to make the change more palatable. Hot water at the meals, for example, so I can make instant coffee. You say it is a little thing, but when you consider that they never have hot water at meals, it takes on a new meaning.

June 18, 1961

Another exciting day begins for the learner in the land of Spring. We had to go out for Mass this morning. It was raining. In fact, it was a downpour. But we only got a little wet going from the cars to the church.

The church, as all the others I have seen thus far, was in a state of disrepair. The main arch over the altar was supported with two large beams, crisscrossing about half way up. Today they were having Exposition. A Sodality of men - and rather young at that - all wearing scarlet scapulars around their necks, weighted down in front by a very large medal, were in attendance. The two leaders had special prieu-dieus in the middle aisle where they recited aloud the prayers to be said. At the consecration, these two went up into the sanctuary and lowered the flag of the Republic and the flag of the Pope before the raised Host and Chalice. Two others who gave the impression of being pressed into duty held aloft candles by means of long bronze candleholders. We did not have Communion during the Mass. Benediction followed immediately after, with an unintelligible Tantum Ergo. At the blessing, the flags were again lowered and the candles held aloft. A large hand bell was rung vigorously for several minutes. At this point a woman came forward, dressed with a large white scapular, front and back, complete with cords and knelt at the altar rail. After Benediction, the priest gave Communion. When we left some ten minutes later, the Sodality of men was still praying and God only knows how long they would continue. I found out afterwards that they were very poor workers who take turns during the night each Saturday night to pray before the Blessed Sacramento. I was impressed.

12:20 PM

Patio of Simon Bolivar

Simon Bolivar is actually one school in three different locations. Here, where I live, are the Primary Grades, 1-6. Near University Ave is the Secondary School, grades 7 - 10 and out in the residential area near the University, is another elementary school but taught exclusively by the Sisters and managed by the Brothers. All are called Simon Bolivar and treated as one. In all there are 1,200 students with about 800 here at Galicia St.

At one time this used to be a ranch (or hacienda) that was given by a widow to the Brothers to convert into a school. As is the custom in Mexico, this school is built from the outside in. First, a wall about twelve feet in height encloses the entire area. The front wall on the main street is built up three stories high and this is where the Brothers have their residence, their offices, some classrooms, the kitchen and the dining rooms. As you enter through the gate in the wall, you find yourself in a small courtyard colonnaded on three sides, two stories high. Very Spanish and very romantic if your are so inclined. Turning to the right as you pass through this small interior courtyard is the large playground and what used to be the fields of this farm. It has now been

cemented and well equipped for sports. There are four basketball courts, two volleyball courts, a dirt area for soccer, with six large, orange colored school buses parked at the far end. In Mexico, all the school buses are painted orange. On one side of the playground are the open urinals and toilets with doors, twelve of each. The other classrooms are built up three stories high along one of the walls and about half of its length.

June 19, 1961

Adventure. So many exciting things happened today that it is difficult to get them all down. I was so tired last night and getting up at 4:30 AM is so dreadful, that I slept straight through (pillow and mattress of straw notwithstanding) the religious exercises. After breakfast I kicked around for a while and finally settled down in the common room to write a few postcards. The common room here is no larger than the size of two small bedrooms at Sacred Heart High School, San Francisco. Just as I was getting settled, one of the domestic sisters came in to clean up the chapel, which adjoins the common room. Her name is Placida Ortiz. She was assigned for two and one-half years at a Christian Brothers School in Minnesota and speaks English well enough to get along. We talked. She worked and then we talked some more, all in Spanish.

After she left I decided visit one of the primary classes. My choice was Sexte C. The Brother teaching the class gave a lesson reviewing verbs, for my benefit I suspect, but I was grateful because it proved to be helpful. Then to prayers, to eat and to the schoolyard to talk with the boys until about 2:30. School starts here at 8:00 AM and lasts until 11:30 AM. It takes up again at 2:30 PM and lasts until 4:40 PM. There is one recess in the morning and one in the afternoon. These hours might seem long, but you would be surprised how relaxing it is to teach school under these circumstances. "Leisurely" is the only word I can think of right now to describe it. At 2:30 PM when the boys went back to class, I thought it best to walk outside and find a place to buy stamps. I stopped in the kitchen first to get a drink of water. And the floodgates opened! I asked one sister whom I saw working in the dining room for a glass of water and off she ran but came back with another sister and then another and yet another and so we started to talk. The Superior herself came and what a good time we had. They trying to make me understand and I trying like the devil to do so, if only for their sakes. After they finished working, they took me to their Mother House, which was just around the corner at #28 Asturias St. I was shown the whole place from top to bottom and met all the sisters. I left them about 4:30 PM and came back through the yard to the common room

but I was waylaid by some of the students who wanted to talk some more. If I could keep up this talking for a week or two, I would soon be a native speaker. But it is very tiring to think in English, translate what you want to say into the few words of Spanish you know how to say, and then translate their responses back into English.

But more about those Sisters. About fifteen years ago, Brother Antonio Maria, the Assistant at that time, founded their Order. They are domestic sisters and their work is to help the work of the Brothers by cooking, doing the laundry and the cleaning. A girl enters at the age of 16, has one-half year of postulancy, a year of novitiate and then a year (or perhaps more) of scholasticate. Until now, they are able to take only annual vows because Rome has not as yet officially approved them. They are called, "Sisters of the Christian Schools of St. John Baptist de la Salle." Young and bouncy and work like slaves, believe me. The Brothers donated their Mother House and again, according to the architectural custom here in Mexico, it is built from the outside in. The front walls are three stories high. The first floor contains the parlors and the sewing room. The second and third floors are for the Novices and Postulants. The spacious gardens are filled with flowers and caged birds. There is a parrot and two shaggy brown dogs the size of small horses. Their open kitchen reminded me of a sort of wash house that I have seen on a ranch somewhere. There are three dining rooms that open out onto the back yard. Some of these openings are natural but others are more like windows without panes or doorways without doors.

These Sisters of mine are poor indeed but very happy too. And they chatter like the birds in the garden. During my tour I tried to avoid being stepped on by the animals they call dogs but those little nuns just ordered those brutes around with a word or two. The weak shall confound the strong. The Superior's name is Salud del Nino Jesus, which means Health of the Child Jesus. A beautiful name.

June 20, 1961

Took a nap after breakfast this morning only to be rudely awakened by a revolution or so it sounded. It was only the band called "La Banda Guerra" practicing outside my window three stories down below in the playground. It was a stirring march the drummers were beating out. So much so that I got up to watch them. Read the paper. Wrote two postcards. Watched the semester exams in calisthenics from the balcony. Every boy who did not have a uniform consisting of a blue T-shirt, white pants and tennis shoes had to sit on the

benches at the side of the yard and received an automatic failure. During the recess I stayed up on the balcony because I had learned that if I went out into the yard among the boys, I would get mobbed. These kids just love affection and want to be near the Brothers. I have seen them run from afar just to shake hands with a Brother or to hold his hand while they are walking from one place to another. In fact, when they come up to me they shake my hand, say good morning or good afternoon, depending upon the time of day, and when they are ready to leave, shake my hand again and say “con su permiso” or “buenos” and off they go. If I ask a boy his name he says for example Carlos Ortiz, “a sus ordenes” (at your service) or Roberto Romero “para servile” (at your service). If they are nothing else, they are politeness personified. This salutation would be very strange for American boys, wouldn't you say?

At 11:00 AM I went to the kitchen and that was my undoing. The Sisters were waiting for me, sat me down with a cup of coffee and some pears and away we went. Talk, talk, and talk. Some would leave but would soon return and listen or talk some more. And we all laughed and had a grand time. The cook's name is Sister Basilia Peres. Another is named Marte Eugene. They are going to ask the Superior General when she returns, if I can teach them English at the Convent. And wouldn't that be fun. Two Brothers, exiled from Cuba, were here today and their Spanish was very poor or so it seemed to me. They spoke so fast, they chopped off all their endings. It isn't as musical sounding to me as the Spanish I hear in Mexico City. They told me that unless Castro is overthrown in six months, all of South America would be lost to Communism.

June 21, 1961

Customs. In Mexican churches, it is the custom for women to kneel at either side of the confessional, but the men kneel directly in front, before the priest. Holy Water is used, but very seldom. For example, we do not have Holy Water here in the Brother's chapel. After a death, the rosary is recited in a church for nine evenings after the burial. Friends and relatives come in great numbers, or so I am told.

At 9:30 PM, a padlock is put on the front gate of the school compound to secure the premises. If you are not in by 9:30 PM, you are locked out. During certain confessional prayers, it is the custom to strike your breast in a “crushing” manner. The first time or two that I tried to do this, it made my spine tingle.

June 23, 1961

I have just spent my hour with the Sisters in the kitchen. They are very devoted women but simple too. I went in a little earlier than usual today and they were working to prepare the meal and reciting the rosary aloud at the same time. Happy as birds. When they saw me coming, all was made ready and I sat down at the middle of the table and they took turns talking to me. Yesterday they told me their names and so today I had to be tested. I learned more names today, Judith and Oliva.

The sun has just broken through the overcast and here comes the rain. I'll wait it out. Perhaps it will be just a shower. My very good friend, Sister Placida, says I am sick because I look sad. I said no, that is the way I always look but the consensus in the kitchen is that I am sick. It is time for prayers.

I like the food, if that is any recommendation. We have breakfast at 7:00 AM, which consists of hot milk with Nescafe, bread, beans, meat, lettuce and fruit. Lunch is at 12:30 PM and consists of soup, lemonade, bread, beans, two kinds of vegetables, meat, rice, tortillas, fruit, sweet rolls and hot water for me. A snack at 4:00 PM consisting of sweet rolls, lemonade and milk, hot or cold, as you will. Supper is at 7:30 PM. Soup, bread, beans, vegetables, hot or cold milk and tea.

This is my first week. Perhaps this menu will change.

There seems to be no special order about what should be eaten first. I have seen some of the Brothers start with fruit and work their way through the rest of the dishes. But as I see it, you eat only one thing at a time. You don't put several kinds of food on your plate at the same time. Salt is used rarely. The food is not spicy. Peanuts are often served and can be eaten at any time, before, during or after the meal.

Each place setting consists of a plate, a soup bowl, a cereal bowl (this is also your cup), a knife, fork, spoon and glass. At the main meal an additional plate is added to your setting. This is called a two-plate meal. But I have seen some of the Brothers use all the plates and bowls while others use just the soup bowl, putting each kind of food into it as they are ready to eat it.

The Brothers don't ask for others to pass the food, they simply get up and fetch it. They go out of their way to pass things to me but not to each other. Sugar is used in great quantity. The Brother sitting next to me pours two

teaspoons of Nescafe into his bowl, adds hot milk and then half a cup of sugar. The sugar jars are refilled after each meal.

The beans are usually served last. The rice is cooked dry, not moist, as I am used to it. Lime is used to add taste, instead of salt. Some examples of fruits served are sliced oranges, raw pineapple, mangos and plums. Examples of vegetables: peas, squash, sweet potatoes, mashed potatoes, fried potato chips, lentils, beets and turnips.

June 25, 1961

The Brothers from New York began to arrive on Friday; there will be six in all. When the Mexican Brothers first found out I was attending the Institute and not the University, they attempted to persuade me to change because the University was so much better and last year the Brothers from New York were “so pleased”. But now, when the New York Brothers found out I am attending the Institute, they have decided not to attend the University and are going to go with me. At least that is they’re thinking as of this writing.

Yesterday morning, I played basketball for an hour and a half and then went to Cuernavaca on a “paseo” with the Brothers. They own a house there with a pool, lawn and easy chairs. There is also a field to play soccer. The weather is warm and provides a welcome change from Mexico City. One of the Brothers and I took a long walk and came upon Marymount, a boarding school for rich girls. The nuns were from the U.S. and spoke little, if any Spanish. I introduced myself and asked if we might be shown around. But God! What a cold reception we received. I was ashamed at her cynicism and sarcastic attitude towards the Church and Mexico and all. They must be very unhappy here in Mexico and I fear their prayers and efforts will be for naught.

June 27, 1995

The daily regimen of the Brothers, Monday through Friday, is as follows:

4: 30 AM - Rising
5:00 AM - Morning Prayers
6:00 AM - Mass
6:30 AM - Catechism Study
7:00 AM - Breakfast
8:00 AM - Classes Begin
12:15 PM - Noon Prayers

12:30 PM - Main Meal
2:30 PM - Classes Begin
4:30 PM - Classes Dismissed
6:30 PM - Spiritual Reading
7:00 PM - Meditation
7:30 PM - Supper
8:10 PM - Night Prayer
8:30 PM - Free/ Retiring

Not all of the Brothers are able to follow this strict schedule. Some Brothers work in after-school programs with the kids and some Brothers attend night school, thereby missing most of the afternoon and evening exercises. I noticed that only a handful of us ever attended spiritual reading. Morning religious exercises seem to be well attended.

Saturday is pretty much of a free day. Dinner is at 1:00 PM followed by a trip out of the city that is voluntary. In our car coming back from a paseo, we made up the religious exercises that we could, but that might have been due to the presence of a sub-director, who is an old Frenchman.

On Sunday, the schedule is pretty much the same as Saturday with Dinner at 1:00 PM. Free until Spiritual Reading at 6:30 PM, Director's Conference at 7:00 PM and supper at 7:30 PM.

Most of the Brothers are studious and many take university courses at night. Apparently those who study are those who advance. For example, the Director is very studious and most anxious to come to the U.S. for study. Needless to say, other Brothers don't care too much for study and only take what they have to.

What a rain we are having! Lightning like I have never seen before. Rolling and crashing thunder that make your ears tingle. A couple of brilliant flashes at the window made me turn away. That one was so close it really shook me.

June 28, 1961

Today was one of those days when everything went wrong. I slept in until 8:00 AM and this caused a small revolution. Everyone concluded that I was dying or dead. It is true that for these last few days, I have felt lousy and tired, I but couldn't get that across. The Director came with anti-diarrhea pills and another Brother came with sympathy. I really think they were concerned about me.

Off to the kitchen for a royal American breakfast, thanks to my Sisters. Corn flakes and warm milk, scrambled eggs and bacon, coffee, plums and cookies. And then the gas in the kitchen went out. The Brother in charge of the facility, who is always forgetting or putting off until tomorrow, forgot to order the gas. So here at 9:00 AM with some 85 people to be fed in a few hours, my Sisters are without cooking gas.

June 30, 1961

From the rooftop where my apartment is located, I take in the early morning sun and look out over the neighborhood. The garbage boy is stopping at each gate in the wall to empty the containers put out by the maids. The girls are loitering their way to the Secundaria School close by. A bus, running surprisingly well, brings the boys here to the Primary and then roars off for another load. The play of the sun on the square and the pastel colored houses. No, this must be Mexico all right. The nuns, looking like widows dressed in black, make their way to the school. Their hair is knotted up close about their heads and covered with a transparent veil. Many are wearing flats or loafers and their black dresses come just to the ankle. The hospital too, is busy. No sirens but I see the ambulances moving to and from. The bells of the churches ring when the Mass is finished. There are so many churches here in Mexico City, from where I stand; I see three located close-by in the neighborhood.

There are approximately 800 pupils at the Secundaria. They seem well disciplined. When the whistle blows, they line up by class in the basketball courts in virtual silence. They march to their rooms, where the teachers are waiting for them. The boys, who come late, report to the Inspector who takes their names. I don't know what their punishment will be. The classes seem quiet enough.

July 1, 1961

Ideas to develop later:

1. Digame.
2. Shrines on buses.
3. Use of uniforms.
4. On Paseo with the Sisters.
5. Use of sugar and candy.

6. Notes on meals: more variety, raw pineapple, ate everything except pig's feet and a fruit, the smell of which I cannot stand.
7. Buying in Mexico is not cheap.
8. No television, no radio, no typewriter, no car, no hot water, no washing machines and no panes in the windows.
9. Move slower. Many hands to do the work.
10. Woman at the Basilica crawling on her bare knees for 3 city blocks.
11. Lighted candles in the aisles during Mass.

July 4, 1961

Worked in the kitchen all morning. Made guacamole with the Sisters. It was fun and I am learning. The Visitor was here. He seems to be on the ball. He ate little or nothing. One of the American Brothers is really sick. Some American Brothers went to the U.S. Embassy this morning; I have no desire to go. Eating very well

July 5, 1961

I am in the auditorium listening to a former radio announcer speaking to us about the Institute. Rather boring but necessary for most. Many middle aged women here, probably schoolteachers. Some kids too, who are combining vacation and making up grades. Will be glad to get to class to hear Spanish again. Miss it already.

July 7, 1961

Riding public buses downtown to school is interesting. The buses are stuffy and I have to stand most of the way but I get to watch more people. Every seat is up for grabs. I always feel ill at ease sitting, while a woman stands next to me. The same in the States too. So here on these crowded busses I always stand and watch the men grab the seats or the women too, if they can.

Yesterday I rode in a bus that did not have a shrine. Noticed this morning that there was an electric vigil light burning on my bus. Still have not figured out the price system of the buses. When you get on the bus, you have a choice: 40 cents, 35, 30, or 20. I think it depends upon the distance you are going. I have ridden the same distance for all prices, so I guess it depends upon the honesty of each rider. The women here tend to dress California style, especially the secretary types, and with some success. But it is difficult for them to

compensate for their flat breasts and spindle like legs. Perhaps it has its own beauty but the shape of their legs certainly puts me off.

Very melancholy. No letters. Sister Basilia cannot give me lessons. Bad headache. Walked up Insurgentes Ave and went into 2 supermarkets. Purchased: 2 bags of cookies, 2 bars of soap, 1 light bulb and a tin of coffee. Cost: \$24 pesos. Came back off the main drag. Nice section. Quiet, modern-style homes mixed with the old style of the outside walls. Went to bed. Woke with headache. Showered. Read. Prayed. Ate. Am contemplating a private pilgrimage to Guadalupe tomorrow. Observations: 1) Cars and buses have special exhaust pipes that cause them to roar. 2) Use of uniforms: cops, scouts, teachers, games. 3) Competition among each other. Insecurity. Each one on his own. At table for example. 4) Too much eye make-up. 5) A type of liquor served, some kind of cider.

July 12, 1961

A city of comic books. Every other corner, or so it seems, has its stand selling magazines and the daily papers. A good 75% of the stand, consists of comic books. And the stand tender is likely to be engrossed in reading his own comic books. People on the bus read them, mostly men and they seem to be of the working class. And the kids, of course, at least the boys read them perpetually and in class too, I noticed. A newspaper costs 60 centavos or about 5 cents U.S. They are modeled pretty much on U.S.A. papers. News, editorials, movies, crime, social and advertising sections. But in many ways, better. Crime, rape, etc. have their own section and do not clutter up the front page with headlines and pictures. And they have better news coverage of politics than the San Francisco Chronicle or Examiner. Articles are generally by-lined and have a very frank editorial ring to them. Very little attempt at the stupid, god-like impersonal writing. They are very national minded. Mexico has to be built up at all costs and any unpleasant aspects are played down or ignored. The U.S. gets a big play here in Mexico City, especially about science. The crime page, which is not very extensive, given the size of the city, is detailed but not sordid. Robberies and murder get the play. Very little about rape, though some articles editorialize about men attacking defenseless women. And sports too. Mexican leagues and sports first, but American baseball especially, gets a big play. Newspapers are read here, at least on the buses.

And it rains. Every single day. Still have not been able to figure out a system for determining when. Generally in the late afternoon but still, you cannot be sure. The rains are tropical, producing a lot of water in a very short time period.

July 15, 1961

Thirty days ago, I arrived here, in the land of La Virgen. And today, I am in her house here at Guadalupe. Are there 10,000 flowers or 100,000? Pilgrims in an out with candles, on their knees, some well dressed, some poor and some very, very poor. And La Virgen? Looking out from her shrine of gold and silver and more gold again, she is beautiful. But these precious metals do not compare with her simplicity. Her delicate choice of colors and dress. Just fabulous. Have just finished High Mass and at least two other Masses are now in progress and in yet another adjacent chapel, lined with gold, Communion is distributed. The Bishop sits in the chantry behind the altar as his choir sings. A Mexican peasant kneels next to me dressed in sandals, white shirt and hat, is clutching 5 pesos in his hand to purchase a candle and make his offering.

The woman on the sidewalk, perhaps 30 years old, a mile away from the Basilica moving step by step on her knees supported on either side by servants or friends and accompanied by a man laying out serapes in front of her. Another man is just starting his journey.

July 19, 1961

Notes for future discussion:

1. Sickness. No diarrhea but something worse.
2. Value of peanuts - 3 times a day.
3. Sickness away from home.
4. Man in space - American prestige means more when away from home.
5. Sisters taken for granted here.
6. Buying a serape in the villa.
7. Women shy at first then very possessive.
8. Few vacation away from Mexico City. Why?

July 21, 1961

After my sickness, a change of attitude. During sickness everything becomes muddled and frustrating. Afterwards you are surprised. Time erases the memories.

Care for the sick. How necessary it is. A change of sheets makes you feel new again. Sweeping the room helps too. Providing medical care is important in

religious life because there is no spouse or children to whom to turn. Every religious director should know the rudiments of medicine and the care for fever, flu, colds, etc. No reflection on this Director here at Simon Bolivar but I find Brothers in general to be helpless in such practical matters. They have a survival of the fittest attitude or worse yet, sickness is a kind of human weakness.

I am still impressed by the coverage this Mexico City newspaper gives to world events. It is so much better than the San Francisco newspapers.

Mexico City doesn't seem to be a violent city with guns, sirens and fires. In fact, judging by the sounds of the city and what I read in the newspapers, there are not many fires. The crush of automobile traffic downtown causes the most noise.

July 22, 1961

Haircut and shoeshine for six pesos. I like to get my haircut. I feel fresh. Back on my feet today. Mass at the Parroquia with its terrible organ playing. Breakfast. Read the papers. Prayers and lunch with the Brothers for the first time in a week. Ate very little because I was queasy. I lay down and slept deliciously until 2:00 PM. The Sisters in the kitchen are exhausted. Basilia is going to Winona. All will miss her. The idea of taking a rest does not seem to occur to them. One day I counted 15 pots and pans they had used to prepare the meal and now Zita was washing them to use for the main meal. The idea of "work as you go" doesn't exist. If I ask for a glass of water it comes served with a dish underneath the glass. A glass of juice is served on another dish and so it goes. These Sisters must wash 1,000 plates a day, or so it seems.

I am reading the Diary of Anne Frank in Spanish. It still holds me spellbound. Her acute observations of self-certainty strike a familiar chord.

The Brothers have finished the new living quarters on the rooftop. They are very nice and as comfortable as any I have seen here. It is really a shame these Brothers have so little, when with a little imagination and money, they could have much better and I don't mean luxurious, either. For example, they could take the small chapel adjacent to the common room, which holds less than fifteen people and turn it into a recreation room. If they moved the old musty bookcases and put in decent lighting and tile on the floor, they would have a respectable size common room. And the anteroom could be turned into a typing or all-purpose room.

Today, I saw a mother bring her little boy to school so he could go on a hiking trip with the scouts. She blessed him three times and then kissed him soundly once. I thought this gesture to be a good mixture of Catholic and mother.

July 23, 1961

Up at 5:30 AM this morning. The community went out for Mass to the same church I had visited after my arrival in Mexico City. Quite a crowd for this 6:00 AM Mass. The priest gave a lengthy sermon on Communion. I followed his drift but that was about all. He talked so fast. The big bell was rung before Mass, at the Consecration and at the end of Mass. A beggar walked up and down the main aisle after Mass soliciting alms. Poor man, he became quite frustrated with some of the Brothers because when he put out his hand, they shook it.

People rise early in Mexico City. At 5:30 AM working people are lined up for buses or in front of stores. Perhaps they do not have electricity and must live by the natural light or perhaps they just work very long hours.

I have seen workers here start at 7:00 AM and stop to eat at 1:00 PM. Then back to work from 1:30 PM to 7:00 PM. That's a very long day. They work slowly to be sure but the work (construction) is difficult. Believe me, carrying baskets of cement on your back is hard work.

Attended a soccer game at the University Stadium. Very exciting. America 2, Toluca 0. Actually the game was lopsided. 80,000 plus fans were there - very rabid and vocal. The shoeshine boys were present. Our seats were not reserved; it was each man for himself. A typical traffic jam after the game. It took more than an hour and a half to go a mile and one-half to home.

Soccer has all the appeal a sport should have. Fast and yet paced with frequent climaxes that the audience can foresee coming. The game is always moving, no time outs, no substitutions and the agility of the human body is something to behold - reflexes, the use of the head and body faking. Good coaching with good talent wins out almost every time. The game plan of the America's was always pressing the goal with short passing patterns, getting good shots time and time again. Toluca on the other hand made long passes and took long shots that were easily blocked. They always seemed on the defensive.

July 26, 1961

Visited Dr. Joachim Aspiroz. I was most impressed. A half-hour visit cost me 50 pesos and in addition to a full examination we talked about Communism and America. He gave me two kinds of pills. His friendly and thorough manner gave me great confidence that I was OK.

Met with Father Kohles and another priest from the San Francisco Archdiocese. Nice to talk to someone from "home". I have decided to accompany them back to California in their car.

July 28, 1961

Can honestly say I feel fine. I slept seven hours yesterday and slept well again last night. It is raining here this morning, which is unusual. And the raindrops seem remarkably large. On the way back from Mass this morning, I saw large numbers of people standing in lines with milk pails waiting for the stores to open. I shopped in the San Juan market for two serapes. The price started at \$ 6.40 each and I stopped negotiating at \$ 5.60.

July 29, 1961

San Jose de Vista Hermosa

I see this contrast so often in Mexico: the ancient architecture side-by-side with modern, the rich side-by-side with indigent, the beautiful amidst the ugly and the Spanish opposite the Indian. Cortez built this Hacienda some miles from Cuernevaca. It has everything: a large pool, a complete bull ring with stadium seats, magnificent views, high walls to seal it in from those who live outside and vast living quarters. Now it is a resort for the wealthy. One end of the Hacienda is sealed by locked wrought iron gates that open up into a town square surrounded by pitiful shops, indigent inhabitants and dozens of scrawny dogs. The other end of the Hacienda opens out to a valley stretching 6 miles or more to purple colored mountains.

The Hacienda is landscaped with lush, tropical-like flowers and shrubs - very fragrant, very beautiful. Wealthy Mexicans and Americans are here. English is spoken as much as Spanish. I notice honeymooners and families - and maids in the background - waiting for the call of the family member.

July 30, 1961

With every ill wind blows some good. Trapped in this paradise with English, we left this morning to hunt for a church for Fathers Kohles and Poget to say their Masses. That took us to Xox, a pueblo of 10,000 souls surrounding a very old church that was small, clean and garishly decorated with statues, crucifixes, animals, fresh flowers, lighted candles and artificial flowers. I think it is fair to say that all was in bad taste, at least for my liking.

Some of the villagers, dressed in denims and white shirts were lounging in the coolness of the porch outside the church. They were without shoes and passed the time talking and joking with one another. The priest was away. He was expected back in an hour. All was made ready for the Mass and the villagers were called together by the church bell. The men collected together in one spot under the porch talking all the time. The women and children gathered in front of the Church and they too were talking.

This village, seemingly without any role, surrounded by mud and rock walls, full of small, squat adobe huts, sported a playa in front of the Church complete with a basketball court. Most of the villagers were barefoot or wore poorly made sandals. What is the future for these people and this village? Is this not the Mexican problem? Just because these inhabitants might not now know the difference, it won't be long before their self-contained life of birth, marriage and death will be enough to offset the influences and the lure of the cities. In their desire to break with the past they will dismiss the role of the Church, which not only does not preach social justice but also is the symbol of the status quo and the establishment. Just as an adolescent must rebel against authority, I believe that these villagers must some day strike out against their impoverished conditions.

August 3, 1961

Brothers ate cake for breakfast.

Two kids reading comic books and listening to a transistor radio at the same time.

Absence of teenage element.

Outright sleeping on the buses. Brothers too. Hours are long.

August 4, 1961

Today I am most melancholy - slept late and still very sleepy. Last night I read a very moving chapter of Anne Frank and perhaps that contributed to my downfall. I say downfall because I feel all alone. There has been a big shakeup in the kitchen among the Sisters and thus what was once a very friendly refuge, and I imagine still is, now means that I have to reintroduce myself all over again. Or so it feels to me. I have started eating breakfast downtown just to vary the monotony.

Notes:

1. House construction. In general it looks good but the details are poorly done.
2. Not to use the bells for religious exercises seems contrary to the spirit of Mexico.
3. Many class interruptions to raise money.
4. Length of time the Brothers are on the job. Prefecting, for example, until 5:30 PM and on Saturdays too.
5. Not much reading during the meals. Frequent permission given to the community to talk at meals.
6. Community admonitions written on the black board in French.
7. Living without a religious habit.

August 5, 1961

I went to the Villa again today. The thrill of talking Spanish. Listened to a sermon and understood almost everything said. Bought some prints of Our Lady of Guadalupe and tried to haggle a little but could only negotiate a 10% discount. Prayed as best I could. As I left the grounds of the Villa, a man came up to me and asked me in Spanish about whore houses and if I knew of any and that he was from San Fernando Valley, etc. He talked very mushy and was hard to follow. He then asked a casual bystander about the whorehouse and he in turn gave us the address and described the place and the girls. All of this within the Plaza de la Virgen de Guadalupe! What a city of contrasts! I began to sense I was being set up and so I asked permission to leave and did so. As I was waiting for a cab he came up again and started to discuss pool playing and that he would teach me for a \$100 or play me for a \$100. I waited him out, said no, hailed a cab and left.

No vocations in Mexico. Two reasons given. The problem of religious life being a social step down or a step up. There are four exchanges of Brothers a year from this province to France. One Brother has returned and seems quite isolated.

August 6, 1961

1. Sharon's visit.
2. Bullfights. Man gored. Bull at great disadvantage?
3. Liturgy.
4. Tendency to let inhibitions go when away from the situation. Can talk freely.

August 8, 1961

A construction project had a large crucifix set up in front.

Attitude of Brothers to U.S.A. - and when Russia set up rocket.

August 13, 1961

Yesterday at San Jose Parua. A balenario located at the canyon bottom. Jews. Rich and poor contrast. Magnificent view.

Saturday night in Morelia. A beautiful city and cathedral. Three other churches in immediate vicinity. Chapel of Guadalupe is rich and in the mudejar style.

Today traveled by Lake (?) and on to Pancharo to pick up guitars. Shopped for statues. Bought three. Ate with a Mexican family who cooked on a smoking fire. Dirty courtyard and kids. Wonderful Mexican hospitality and fine food.

Traveling through Mexican countryside. Beautiful towns from a distance with tiled roofs and soaring church steeples. Not unusual to see churches rising up from the countryside with few houses anywhere near it.

Pace of life here is quite different:

1. People walk for miles, place to place.
2. Walking at night.
3. Sunday entertainment takes place in the local Zocalo with girls walking arm in arm, round and round. Boys walking, talking and looking.
4. Market day - Sunday.
5. Courting day.
6. Church day.

Took note of an organ accompaniment with the choir in Morelia. Very unusual and modern.

Bicycle racing on Sunday morning.

High plateau - green paisaje.

San Miguel Allende

Art colony. Very colonial. Beautiful church spires. Burro delivery, narrow hilly streets, town of crafts, many Americans, art school and beautiful green, rolling hills. People do not work hard.

Road to Atotonilco. Desert. Old Indian church. Huge. Murals covering every inch of interior. Fine decorative work. People almost primitive, living in mud houses with thatched roofs. Very, very slow. A lot of sitting, watching cows and goats.

To Dolores Hidalgo to see the church where the "Father of Mexico" proclaimed independence. Clean town. Visited museum.

Poorer area. Climbed into mining country to Guanajuato.

Guanajuato, August 15, 1961

Active town. Houses built on terraces. Narrow, winding streets. Large statue overlooking entire area. Interesting market. Many churches, but I don't like them - cluttered and without character. One very old Church which isn't used. It is ornate and impressive. Old, old theatre which seems Arabic in color and design. The university is the most beautiful building. Mudejar in design with light, varied colored stone.

Guanajuato is not a dirty city, even in the slums. People are more aggressive looking.

