

## Travels of a Trade Economist

### Chapter 4 Mexico City 1993



**Monday, February 22, 9:00 AM**

Someone will be here to pick me up in just fifteen minutes, so I can only just start. Perhaps I will get to continue this later. The schedule they sent me has big holes, but that may change.

The trip started in the snow, and I wondered briefly if I would even make it to the airport in Detroit. It was not snowing hard, but the salt trucks hadn't kept up with it and I saw several cars off the road in the ditch. I poked along at 35 for the first part, not much slower than the traffic, though there were plenty of cars, trucks, and one bus, that whizzed past kicking the slush up onto my windshield. The road gradually improved, and by the time I reached the airport, I was going over 50.

I checked in plenty early for my flight to Chicago, which was already running half an hour late. The woman at the counter was very nice and said she'd watch for word on the incoming flight and let me know if I needed to switch to another airline. At one o'clock I went to check with her, saw that my flight had been delayed another 30 minutes, and got her attention just as she was speaking my name into the loudspeaker. She rebooked me on an American flight that was about the board, and I went over to it.

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They boarded us on time, but then announced there would be up to a two-hour delay because of weather in Chicago. One of O'Hare's two runways was shut down. We sat on the plane and after about an hour got clearance to take off. That put us into Chicago at just twenty minutes before my United flight to Mexico was to leave. I checked at the American gate, assuming the United flight too would be running late. It wasn't. The gate agent told me how to get to the United terminal, including going down two flights of stairs and then later back up again. I apparently looked dismayed, because she said, "No. This is best. It will take ten minutes off the time." I was not encouraged that I would make it in twenty minutes, but I set off.

Unfortunately, as I had gotten off the plane, I had found that one of the screws attaching the handle to my suitcase had come out, so I was carrying it in both arms as I rushed through the airport. O'Hare has the reputation of being the busiest airport in the world, and it didn't get that without being large. It was a long walk. Part of it, two flights down, was on moving sidewalks, and that helped a bit. But I was continually having to say "Excuse me" to people who were standing in the way.

I reached the United terminal, found the number of my gate, and of course it was at the very end of the concourse. As I approached it, I saw no signs for the flight and was sure it had already left. However, it hadn't. I reached the gate, out of breath and with my arms still wrapped around my suitcase. I gasped out something to the gate agent. "Mr. Gonzales?" she asked? "No. Deardorff," I croaked. She looked at her list, finally nodded, and said, "Oh yes, we had canceled you because your flight from Detroit isn't here yet. How did you get here?" I told her, and fortunately there was still room on the flight. Why, when the nice woman in Detroit sent me to American, she didn't tell Chicago, I don't know. But it worked out OK, perhaps thanks to Mr. Gonzales.

This flight was delayed only slightly (40 minutes), and the trip to Mexico was uneventful. I was met at the airport by two students with a huge sign with my name on it. I was delighted to see them, and to have them carry my disabled suitcase. They told me their names – Cesar (pronounced "Sess-ar") and Mauro – and I went out of my way to pay attention and to get them to repeat them. It was a longish drive from the airport to the hotel, partly because Cesar took a left instead of a right on the main drag, Reforma, and we saw more of the city than we meant to. Reforma is a very nice street, wide with a strip of green down the middle. There were large modern buildings on the sides, and small traffic circles in several places surrounding statues. I was impressed.

Cesar had a bit of a hard time finding the hotel, and I worried that it might be a small and obscure place that I wouldn't like. Not at all. It is big, modern, and very comfortable. I checked in, got my credit-card-like key with its magnetic strip, and was whisked to the ninth floor in one of four glass elevators that overlook the atrium. The room has all I could want, and after a quick call home and a beer in the lounge, I sacked out for the night.

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This morning I chose the buffet for breakfast, partly to be able to sample things. Most of what it offered was familiar, but there were a few interesting items and lots of fresh fruit. The pineapple was good, and so was the watermelon. Also, there were refried beans that I took just a little of, but they were far better than any I've tasted before.

### **Wednesday, February 24, 9:30 AM**

Monday was an odd day, because they really didn't have anything for me to do, but they kept me busy anyway. I'm afraid they feel the need to occupy my time, when I would rather just have more time to myself.

Cesar picked me up here at the hotel and drove me to the campus. It was quite a drive, first again along Avenue Reforma, and then a long distance on a divided but congested highway running south through the city. The university I am visiting – ITAM – has two campuses, one for undergraduates and one for graduate (Masters-level) students. Cesar is an undergrad, and he pointed out that campus as we went by. Georgina (pronounce the g's like h's), who is my host, has her office at the graduate campus where we eventually arrived. It is a complex of very new buildings and very nice.

In Georgina's office I met both her and Chung, a professor from Korea who works with her and whom I had also met in London last fall. We chatted for a while, interrupted frequently by Georgina's secretary who was bringing her things to do. It seems that Georgina is starting a sabbatical on Wednesday (today) and is leaving that office for a year to work in the government's department of energy. There was a lot for her to do in preparing for the move, and she did much of it while talking to me.

My schedule had me talking with students in the Masters degree program at 10:00. At around 10:30, we noticed that hadn't happened, and Georgina went out looking for these students who apparently had been supposed to come to her office to see me. She found only one, brought him back, and left us alone to talk for half an hour. I enjoyed this conversation, but the student was primarily interested in "real business cycle" models. That's not something I work on, so I couldn't be very helpful except to tell him my reasons for being skeptical of such models. We also talked, though, about graduate school in the U.S., which he hoped to attend, and on that I hope I was more useful.

Georgina and Chung came back, we talked some more, and then they took me to meet the director of ITAM's MPP program (Ned Gramlich's counterpart). This fellow – who was young and dressed in a most unacademic dark suit – met us at the door but couldn't see us quite yet. They dropped me on a chair in the hallway to wait, while they all scurried on about their business.

After about 15 minutes, the MPP guy did invite me in. Chung joined us, and later Georgina too, and we talked for an hour or so about the structure of their program compared to ours. I didn't

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like this guy a lot, and I had to force me interest in most of this. But I was intrigued by one part of the program: a course in "communication skills" that is spread out over most of the two years and that teaches not only writing, but also speaking skills and things like presentation graphics. That strikes me as an excellent idea for our Masters program.

It was about 2:00 PM by the time we were done with that interview. I had already been warned, fortunately, that Mexicans don't eat lunch until at least 2:00, and then it is the main meal of the day. Georgina, Chung, and I went out to a Mexican restaurant that she thought highly of, and we had a decent lunch. I found a dark beer, Negro Modelo, that I liked and have been drinking since. There was a tortilla soup that was delicious – it had strips of fried tortilla in it that were inexplicably still crisp. My main course was Mole (pronounced "Molay") con Pollo ("Poyo") which was a breast of chicken in a special mole sauce. This kind of sauce is one of the specialties here, and it is apparently very hard to make. Georgina remembered helping her grandmother to make it. It took two days and lots of work shelling nuts and so forth. The dish itself, with the boned chicken breast surrounding by a pool of the almost black sauce, looked like a dolphin surfacing through an oil slick. It tasted OK, but I wouldn't have it again.

The lunch, together with the drive to and from the restaurant in Mexico-city traffic, took up most of three hours. This is apparently not unusual here. Both work and classes pretty much stop from 2 to 5, and some people go home for a siesta during that time. But then they work later than we do, and classes, at least, also start early. Cesar mentioned Tuesday that he had a class from 7 to 10 AM.

Our next stop was to visit Santiago Levy, a young former Boston University professor who had returned to Mexico in 1991 to be the government's coordinator of deregulation. This is clearly an important job, both from what he told us he has done, and from the fact that he has a corner office. He also kept us waiting a good half hour, which is also impressive. Once I met him, he was a decent young guy with only a modest dose of self-importance. He has in fact in the space of a year and a half written six new laws changing the regulations for several sectors of the Mexican economy, and I would guess that he has done a lot of good.

He talked with us for surprisingly long, but eventually let us go. The three of us then drove to the "Pink Zone" – a part of the city not far from my hotel that has lots of restaurants and night spots. There is nothing pink about it. The name comes from some famous artist who painted lots of pictures there and called it that.

We walked through this zone, Georgina trying to lead us to one place after another that she remembered liking: an artifact store, a pastry shop, etc. All had disappeared, testimony to how fast Mexico is changing, or perhaps to how busy Georgina has been for several years.

As we walked, and before this as we drove, Georgina several times took a tiny cellular phone out of her purse and made calls. She explained that only a year before she was extremely critical of these things, and she had complained about people who used them in public places. After her car once broke down between home and work, however, in a bad neighborhood, her brother had



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given her this one. Now she found she used it all the time. Indeed, she did. She got several calls while I was with her, in addition to all the calls she made. Once I turned to her and started speaking to her, only to realize that the responses she was making were into the phone, not to



Pink Zone, from Web, 2023

me. But the thing was useful. That afternoon we realized belatedly, as we were walking, that we hadn't made arrangements for me to be picked up the next day. She immediately pulled out the phone, called Cesar, and set it up.

We eventually settled on a pastry-and-coffee shop that we had already passed several times, and went in for a drink. I had the closest I could find to cafe latte, and it was pretty good. They both had "American coffee," which was just regular coffee brewed rather weak but served in a good-sized cup. What I liked best about the place was its atmosphere. I can't describe it, except to say I felt I was in a French painting.

The three of us talked there about a variety of things. One that interested me was the extent of racial discrimination in Mexico. The Mexican people, who are all descended from both the natives who originally inhabited the continent and the Spanish who conquered them, range pretty much continuously from light skin to dark, and from western features to eastern. (The natives were in turn descended from the Mongols of Asia, who crossed over through Alaska.) There are therefore not any separate "races" as we have, and supposedly no discrimination against one end of the spectrum or the other. On the other hand, they agreed that one systematically finds the lighted skinned people with the better jobs, greater educations, and higher incomes. Whether

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that is just because they are more closely descended from the conquering Spanish and therefore have inherited more wealth, or because of discrimination, I don't know. Chung however, who is Korean, affirmed that he feels no discrimination himself here, whereas he does in America.

After we left, they drove me back here to my hotel, and I went to bed soon after. No wait – I first watched Larry King on CNN, followed by Northern Exposure, which I stumbled into on some other channel. Anyhow, I was tired, even though all I had done all day was have largely meaningless conversations with a handful of people. From that day, as I said, I felt they were doing their best to fill my time but without much idea of how to do it.

Tuesday morning, I once again had the buffet. Georgina had said that it was included with the price that ITAM was paying for the room. That turned out to be false, but I felt obliged to get their money's worth. And besides, I wouldn't eat again until at least 2.

Cesar was to pick me up at 10:30 to take me to the anthropology museum. Before that I did a little work, and I also stepped outside to see the city. I had a slight headache, though, which became worse in the bright sunlight. Since I'd left my sunglasses conveniently in my winter coat in Michigan, I went into a Woolworth's that I found happily next to the hotel and bought some new ones. Then I went back to my room and took a Tylenol.

Cesar did pick me up and drove me to the museum. This was along the part of the Avenue de Reforma that he had mistakenly taken me to first on Sunday night, so it should have been easy to get to. He made two wrong turns, however, before he eventually found it on the opposite side of the street from where he expected it. As we drove into the grounds, we passed under a bridge where his friend Mauro was waiting for us. We soon had parked and gotten together, and we would have gone right in had we not heard a flute playing across the way.

The flute was being played by one of five costumed men who were dancing around a tall wooden pole. On top of it was some sort of apparatus of wood and rope. We went and watched. After the playing and dancing had attracted a large enough crowd, four of the five men climbed the pole and sat themselves on the wooden thing at the top. The fifth man, after first fetching a pail of water that I never did find out the need for, circulated through the crowd collecting money. When he'd had enough, he too climbed the pole. After one of the men had done more flute playing, as well as drumming and dancing on the top of the pole, the other four tied the ropes around themselves and pitched backwards off in four different directions from the pole. Hanging upside down, their weight caused the ropes to unwind from around the pole and their bodies to spin around and out from the pole in a graceful circle. It was an impressive sight. Eventually they reached the ground and took their bows. Cesar, by the way, disappointed. The better performers of this sort never touch the ground, he says, but instead manage to keep spinning and wind themselves back up to the top. I'd like to see that.

The show over, we went into the museum, where we spent probably two hours looking at rooms full of artifacts from Mayan, Aztec, and earlier cultures. Cesar did his best to translate some of the information from the signs that accompanied the exhibits, but this was hard for him and not

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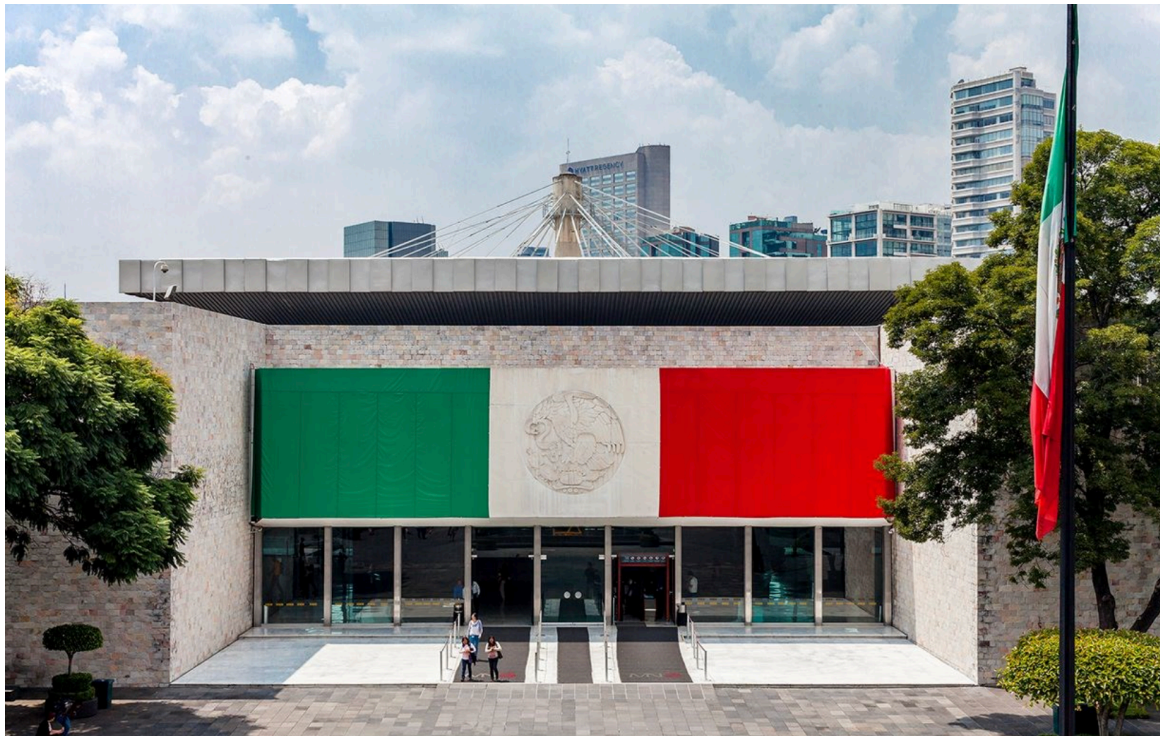
always very stimulating for me. The most interesting fact I learned was that the Mayans (or was it the Aztecs?) put their children's heads in a wooden press from birth to elongate the shapes of their skulls. The effects were obvious in some of the skulls that were on display. Only the very upper class did this, by the way.



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Pole Swinging, from Web, 2023



National Museum of Anthropology, from Web, 2023

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I had been instructed by Georgina to tell Cesar that he should drive me to ITAM to meet her for lunch at 2:00 PM. By the time I remembered to do this it was after one, and we had seen less than half of the museum. So we left without seeing it all. I didn't mind.

We reached ITAM only a few minutes after two and found Georgina, Chung, and another student already seated for lunch in a private dining room of the school's cafeteria. Lunch was potato soup (clear, with strips of potato) and chicken rellenos. To drink we had watermelon juice. Not a lot of food, but decent for a school cafeteria.



ITAM, from Web 2023

After lunch I asked Georgina to park me somewhere so that I could look at my notes. I was to be giving a talk to the undergraduates at 5:30. I did not, in fact, look at my notes, but instead read the Wall Street Journals that I found there and wrote some in this journal. (OK, I lie sometimes about when I do these entries. Sorry.)

At 5:00 Georgina turned me back over to Chung to drive me to the undergraduate campus for the talk, and she said she would be there shortly. In fact, she never made it, but showed up only afterwards. That was fine, though. All the seats were filled, and people were sitting in the aisles. I tell you, NAFTA (which was my topic) is of great interest here. Their interest in what I was saying made it easy to talk to them, and the talk went very well.

Afterwards, we did find Georgina and the group of us went out for tacos. This was a treat! Bob Stern had told me about the taco place Georgina had taken him to, and this was the same one. It

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was big and bright, with Formica tables, lots of white-clad waiters and cooks, and not a tourist in sight. And the food was out of this world.

First, forget Taco Bell. A taco is a tortilla with stuff inside, yes. But the tortilla is not crisp, it is smaller than we are used to (naturally), and the stuff inside can be anything but the stuff we use. The menu at this place must have included at least 40 kinds of tacos, and from the ones we ordered, they are not just minor variations on a theme. They are quite different from one another.

The most basic and popular taco has pork in it, together with some sort of sauce and not too much else. However, the pork isn't just any pork. It is sliced thin from a large cone-shaped mass of meat that rotates vertically in front of a burner, exactly the way gyros are cooked. But this mass of meat is made up of slices of pork laid horizontally and interleaved with onions, sauce, and perhaps more. To top it off, literally, there is a pineapple perched at the top of this affair, and its juices run down and around the meat the whole time it is cooking. One more thing: the taco itself has a sliver of pineapple in it that gives you one or two bites with a completely different flavor than the rest. The tacos are served flat on the plate with the filling piled on top, and you fold them as you pick them up to eat them.

I ate two of these pork tacos, plus another with beef, cheese, and peppers, and half of yet another with sausage and cheese. The latter was a bit different, since the filling was between two tortillas (flour tortillas, this time), that were held together by the melted cheese. The cheese and sausage were both Mexican, I'm sure, but they tasted almost like Italian sausage and mozzarella cheese. It was like a pizza sandwich. Georgina asked which of these tacos I liked best, and I first told her the sausage one, which I was eating at the time. Later I changed my mind, though, because it was too much like what I've eaten before. The pork one was a totally new and wonderful taste, so I ate another.

Back at the hotel, after all this eating, I vowed I would not have the breakfast buffet today, and I'm glad to report that I held to my resolve. I had the continental breakfast, which included a plate full of five kinds of fruit. It was perfect.

#### **Friday, February 26, 6:30 PM**

These people have not given me much time to myself, and this has been my next chance to write. I'm waiting now, after Chung dropped me off, for him to pick me up again to go out for an evening of mariachi with him and the students. The last guest to visit here, Rod Ludema, apparently got so drunk on such an outing on his last night here that they wondered how he ever got home. I'll have to ask him about that.

Anyhow.... On Wednesday morning Chung picked me up to take me to the pyramids. A fellow from the Trade Negotiations Office, Enrique Barraza, had lent us his car and chauffeur for the trip, and he was with Chung when he picked me up. Enrique noted that he and I would be spending Thursday working together. This was the first I'd heard that my scheduled meeting



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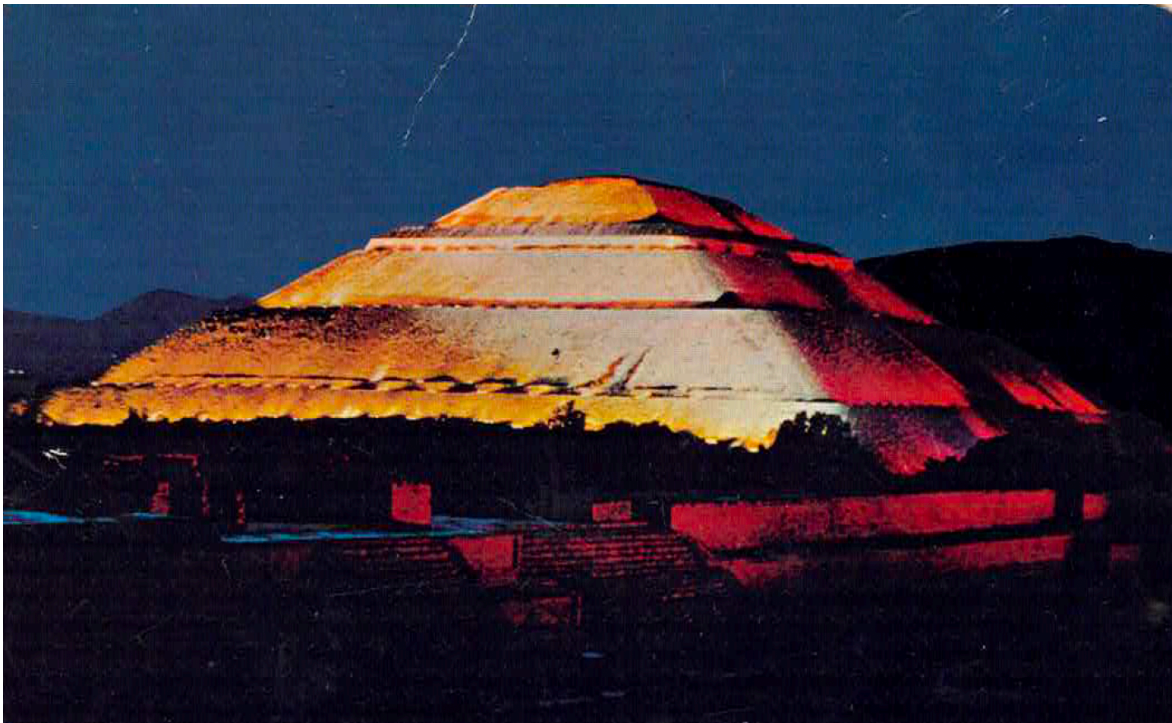
with him was to be more than the usual hour of conversation. He wanted my advice on a CGE model that he and his staff are building. Suddenly Thursday did not look like the largely free day that I had expected.

We dropped Enrique off at his office, then headed out of town. Mexico City is huge, and it took a while to get out. Eventually we were on a divided highway, though, passing through the countryside. It was mostly a barren landscape, with some sign of people living there in poverty, but not much sign of what they might do to survive, even of agriculture. It is winter though, and perhaps there would be more signs of life in the summer. The place looks like a desert, but it apparently is not. It rains every day for five months during the summer.

I was intrigued that there were frequent overpasses over this highway, but not much sign of crossroads. The overpasses typically connected on either side only to dirt paths, and one appeared to be connected to nothing at all. Nor were there ever any entrances to the highway itself. I gather that the overpasses were mostly for the local population to use on foot, and for animals. I saw one group of cows being herded over one.

Signs along the highway all pointed to the pyramids, and I gather that the highway may have gone only to them. When we reached them, they were not hard to spot, of course. But they were much smaller than the mountain right behind them, and this diminished their impact. If I'd been Mayan, I'd have put them further out on the plain.

Off the highway, the road to the pyramids was made of carefully laid rocks. The pattern of the rocks was attractive, but they were so uneven that our chauffeur, Guillermo, could only creep along. It therefore took a while to cover the last little distance to the parking lot at the base of the largest pyramid – the Pyramid of the Sun.



Pyramid of the Sun, postcard

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The three of us got out and walked toward the thing. It was very imposing, and I couldn't see how we would ever climb it, even though there were people at various places on its side. Up close, I saw a sign and asked Chung about it. It said, "No climbing." Apparently the people I saw were all workmen doing maintenance, and the stairs to climb were around the corner. It is amazing how many workers are needed to "maintain" a pyramid that has already lasted 1500 years.

Around the corner we did find the stairs, as well as a lot of sightseers like us, going up and down. We started up without pause, but soon did stop for breath at the first landing. I began to realize not only that this was going to be hard work, but also that we were ascending to an ever-greater height with nothing to hold onto. The stairs, so far, were only slightly steeper than ordinary ones, but it was starting to get to me.

About two thirds of the way up we reached another landing. But now, for some reason, the next set of stairs was much steeper. People were turning sideways to go up and down. That was it for me. I let Chung and Guillermo go on without me, and I stayed on that landing contemplating the trip back down. That probably wasn't a good idea, since I began to convince myself that I would spend the rest of my life there. Eventually, though, Chung returned, and he and I walked down without difficulty. I just had to concentrate my attention on the stairs at my feet, and not look further down. We had to wait a while longer at the bottom for Guillermo, and it surprised me that a chauffeur would keep us waiting.

We then all walked. And walked. First to the Pyramid of the Moon, passing those of the nine planets. (How come the Mayas knew about the ninth planet before we did?) Then to the temple



Pyramid of the Moon, from Web 2023



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of the jaguar. (The jaguar is the king of the beasts around here, I'm told, and I was looking forward to its temple. But there was no sign of one in it – not even a painting.) Then to a collection of shops where I bought postcards. And finally, to a museum. This last lap turned out to be the longest. Guillermo left us to walk it alone, and said he'd get the car and meet us there. We assumed from this that it wouldn't be far, but I think he must have miscalculated. I am sure that he walked less than we did.

The museum was small and new. Aside from various artifacts, nicely displayed, the best part was a large model of all these pyramids that gave us a better perspective on the whole layout. I was warned off by a guard, however, when I put my foot up on the side of the model, trying to get a better look.

From the museum we drove – thank God – to a restaurant. This was completely inside a large cave and was called The Grotto. It was an unusual atmosphere, made even more striking by the fact that the straight-back wooden chairs at all the tables were painted many different bright colors. I had a Mexican combination plate that was very good, together with another couple of bottles of Negra Modelo. This was enough to do me slightly in, and after lunch, on the drive back, I dozed off.

Our next stop, apparently on the outskirts of Mexico City (How do I know? I was asleep.) was a giant warehouse-like department store of artisan handicrafts. Chung had told me not to buy any of the items various people were selling at the pyramids because I could get them all cheaper here. Sure enough, I found most of what I'd seen before right away, and much more besides. I bought T-shirts for the kids, each with the picture of the Mexican god for the month they were born. I got the largest size available (except for Joshua) – marked XXXL – but I'm betting that they will still be too small. These are not large people, though they will be if they keep eating the way they have fed me.

Once I had selected my purchases, Chung took me over to a man who was apparently in charge and got him to give me a fifteen percent discount. Chung is a Chicago-trained Korean economist who has been here only a couple of years. Still, he seems to have connections. He had told me earlier that most of his Korean friends in Mexico were in the business of buying and selling (and often smuggling), so I guess this has something to do with it.

From the store we went downtown to the old center of the Mexico City, a large plaza on which there happened to be bleachers and a crowd of thousands celebrating the Mexican Flag Day. That was unfortunate, since the people got in the way of seeing things, and the celebration, whatever it had been, was just ending.

Still, we looked at more ruins, at several government buildings that wouldn't – perhaps fortunately – let us in because it was too late in the day, and at a huge cathedral that we did go into. The cathedral was impressive in size and ornamentation, much like ones in Europe. But what was most memorable was the scaffolding. It seems that after the 1985 earthquake they

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were afraid it would collapse, so they built this scaffolding throughout the cathedral, all the way to the top, and supporting every arch. Now they are going through and x-raying every block of stone in the place. This mass of green iron scaffolding fills the building and makes it pretty much useless. When we were there, a priest was holding a small mass just in the cathedral's



Metropolitan Cathedral, from Web 2023

entryway. The main part of it can't be used at all. I hope they finish x-raying before the next earthquake.

Our final stop of the day, just a block from the cathedral, was an exhibit of art titled Thirty Centuries of Splendor, displaying artifacts and art from ancient times to the present. The exhibit is housed in a former Jesuit college that has been wonderfully restored. I was much more interested in the building than in the art. It had courtyards with rows of balconies overlooking them, each bordered all the way along with arches. On one wall, behind these arches all the way to the third story, was a giant mural painted by various artists, including Diego Rivera – the only one I'd heard of. And in the courtyard are trees and benches, the whole thing tastefully lit with discreetly placed lights. I told Chung I'd like to come back some day when the exhibit is gone and just sit quietly in the courtyard.

That was the last stop of the day. They brought me back to the hotel, where I again crashed for the night. First, though, I discovered that what I had thought was a rash on the back of my hand was a sunburn that I'd picked up at the pyramids. My nose, ears, forehead, and a V on my chest were all bright red. Obvious, of course, but it had never occurred to me that this might happen,

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even as I followed a little old lady carrying an umbrella to shield herself from the sun. I saw Chung today and he hadn't burned. Is it possible for a Korean?

That reminds me of one thing that I learned. The theory is that the Mongol race migrated long ago across Alaska to the Americas and eventually became the natives of North and South America. Therefore, there is a racial similarity between the Asians of China and Korea and these people. Since the Spaniards assimilated with the natives rather than killing them off, as we did, today's Mexican's embody this Mongol heritage, as well as the European. Once it is pointed out, it is easy to see that some Mexicans look Asian. Chung has since reminded me that the Spaniards themselves also include Turkish or Arab blood, since Spain was once conquered by them. So the Mexicans really mix a multitude of races.

Another sign of their kinship with Asians, and part of the proof of the theory of migration, is that both Mexican and Asian babies sometimes have a dark spot in the middle of the small of their backs. It is called a Mongolian Spot. It normally fades after a few months or years, but Chung said his daughter has one that has lasted for years. It is occasionally a problem, because it looks like a bruise and may cause suspicions of child abuse.

Before turning in Wednesday night, I also made one last attempt to find out why my room was so cold. I haven't mentioned this before, but starting Monday night I had been cold in the room. There was a box on the wall that looked like a thermostat, but the only controls were for a fan, and a switch that could be set either to "vent" or "cool/heat." I'd put the switch on the heat end and turned on the fan, but I got only cold air. Tuesday morning, I asked about this at the desk, and they told me I evidently didn't understand how to use the thermostat, but they said they'd check it. Tuesday evening it was still cold, so I called and asked about it. They said that whole wing of the hotel was cold and that a maintenance man was working on it. I left the fan on that night, so that it would do some good if they got the heat going. They didn't, and it was still blowing cold in the morning. Fortunately, I'd found an extra blanket in the closet and had used that to keep warm. Wednesday morning, I asked again at the desk, and was told that they would send somebody up that day to set the thermostat for me. Finally, on Wednesday evening, the man I spoke to told me that my wing of the hotel doesn't have the capability of heat at all in this season. They can only do hot or cold for a whole wing, and the weather was warm enough that most of the wing needs air conditioning. I ranted a bit about their failure to tell me this in the first place, went back to my room, and turned the thing off.

Thursday morning Enrique and Guillermo picked me up at 10:00 (OK, at least they haven't started me working too early) and took me to Enrique's office. This was on the 18th floor, in a corner with vast windows overlooking the city. I could even see a snow-capped volcano in the distance. since the pollution wasn't too bad.

Enrique introduced me to his two assistants, Claudia and Graciella. They were both beautiful and quite smart. I later told Mauro, who had had Enrique as a professor and hadn't gotten along with him, that he would probably have done better had he been a beautiful woman.

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The three of them had prepared a list of questions for me, and we spent until almost 2:00 on those questions and discussing the model they were building. Eventually Enrique seemed primarily interested in hearing whether I thought the model was good or not. I told him it looked fine, and he was pleased.

Throughout the conversation, Enrique did most of the talking. But Claudia kept talking as well, saying many of the things Enrique said just before he did. I never did figure out whether she was prompting him or showing off for the boss. He acted as though he was unaware that she was doing this.

We finished about 2:00 and went for lunch. They were all pleased that I had liked the model, and so was I. I realized that if I hadn't, we'd have all gone back to the office after lunch to work some more.

Lunch was at a hacienda that had been made into a very luxurious restaurant. The food was good, but I can't now even remember what I had. More and more, I think, when you are abroad, the cheaper the restaurant the better. The fancy places don't want to stoop to providing the simple local cuisine that you went there for.

Regardless of where you go, however, meals in Mexico are leisurely. We ate for a good while, but we sat there even longer talking. We talked about women's rights, among other things. I tried to incite Claudia and Graciella to revolt, and Enrique looked a bit uncomfortable. By the time we left it was after 5:00.

They seemed concerned that I would have nothing to do, but I insisted that I wanted the chance to wander the city alone. So they dropped me at my hotel and that is what I did. I got a map from the bellman and directions to the Pink Zone. It did not turn out to be much of an adventure, but it was pleasant, and I did enjoy getting out by myself.

I stopped for coffee at a pastry shop across the street from where Georgina had taken me earlier. I ordered a Cafe Viennese, which turned out to be too sweet to drink. That may be worth remembering this summer in Vienna.

I stayed long enough to write some postcards, then went to the cashier and paid for my un-drunk coffee. Realizing that I hadn't left a tip, I took some coins from my pocket, turned to go back to my table, and tripped on a step that I must have just gone down without noticing. I lost my balance, but fortunately I started to fall in the direction of my table. As I struggled to regain my balance, I staggered all the way across the shop, stopping my fall only when I reached my table and fell against it with the hand that held the tip. Trying to look like this had all been intentional, I left the tip on the table and walked more or less calmly out of the shop.

Back at the hotel I read for a while, not having the energy to write in this journal. At one point the phone rang, and I picked it up hoping it would be Pat. Instead it was Cesar calling to say he

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would pick me up today at 8:45. So much for the late mornings. I reset my alarm for half an hour earlier.

Pat did call a little later, and she sounded much better than the two other times we'd talked, when I'd caught her first in the bath and second in bed asleep. We talked longer than we should have, probably, but it felt good.

Today, Friday, Cesar picked me up as planned and drove me the usual long distance from the hotel to just about anything else. The hotel was centrally located, but nothing else seemed to be. As usual we had an enjoyable conversation along the way. Once, however, sailing along at full speed, I looked ahead and saw a red car in front of us on the freeway almost stopped, with us speeding toward it. I made some sort of noise, and Cesar saw it and slammed on the brakes. We avoided an accident, and for the rest of the day he enjoyed telling about how I had kept us from a wreck by "mentioning" the car. "Mentioning" my foot – I'm sure I screamed.

He delivered me at 9:30 to the office of Luis Ackle ("Ackley"), a director of Bancomext, which is a government development bank for Mexican trade. I didn't know what he wanted to see me about, or for how long, so I told Cesar he should come up with me to find out when to pick me up. I was to give my seminar at ITAM at noon, and I hoped this would be short and I'd have time before the seminar to prepare. Cesar did talk to Luis, but in Spanish, and then left without telling me when he'd be back. I started the conversation with Luis, therefore, with no idea what to expect.

As it turned out, we talked through two hours and several cups of coffee, but I don't think either of us ever understood the other. He said he wanted advice on how to decide what loans his bank should make. But the reasons he gave for making the loans in the first place either didn't make sense or led me to make suggestions that he obviously thought missed the point. I found this very frustrating and unsatisfying, especially as I would just as soon not have been there at all.

Eventually Cesar did come for me and drove me to ITAM where, after one wrong turn inside the college, he got me to my seminar. This had an audience of only 8 or 10, all faculty. I gave the latest version of my lumpy countries talk. It was received well, if not enthusiastically.

Present at the seminar were both the department chair, whom I'd met before, and another fellow who looked almost exactly like him. The chair had approached me after my earlier talk and said, sourly, that it had been interesting, but he didn't believe in large models. I don't believe in them either, but I still found this a rather unfriendly comment. Today, part way through the seminar, he made an equally offensive comment about how an additional assumption would invalidate my results. He was wrong, as I hope I explained successfully, at least to everyone else.

Meanwhile, his lookalike was sitting in the front row, and he was one of those people who manage to look interested and receptive to everything. I found myself talking to him more than to anyone else in the room. But the fact that he looked just like the evil chair was unsettling.

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And by the way, the two of them also looked like that pair of twin, bald, bearded folk singers that one often sees in Ann Arbor doing children's songs.

After the seminar, eight of us went to lunch at a Mexican barbecue called Arroyo. This gave me the chance to tell them about our department's fire, since the arsonist was named Arroyo.

The restaurant was an amazing place. We walked in past three pits, each round and about four feet across and filled with blazing logs. Next to them were stacks of meat, whole legs of lamb and other things, wrapped in corn husks and waiting to be cooked in these fires. Past this kitchen we went into the largest restaurant room I've ever been in. Not a room, really, but a roof over



Arroyo Restaurant, from Web 2023

dozens (hundreds?) of tables. The beams of the roof were decorated with colorful paper cutouts. That was the extent of the decoration, but there were so many of these, they dominated the eye. We ate several dishes before the barbecue arrived, always putting ingredients inside soft tortillas and adding sauce. It was all wonderful, especially the barbecued pork. The lamb had less taste, I thought.

As we finished eating, suddenly a Mariachi band arrived and started playing and dancing on a platform in the middle of the place. There were eight or ten musicians, plus an equal number of singers and dancers, all colorfully costumed. I'd left my camera in the car, and Chung went and got it for me. I hope I have some good pictures of all this.

When the show was over, we left and Chung brought me back here, where I am now about to leave for my night on the town.

**Saturday, February 27, 1:00 PM**



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I'm on the flight home, and the trip is about over. Before I finish it, let me jot down a few miscellaneous things I've noticed about Mexico that I want to remember:

**The streets:** Though there is lots of traffic and pollution, as I'd heard, it wasn't nearly as bad as I expected. It was about like any big city in Europe. One surprise, though, was the speed bumps. These were routine in the side streets, and they were big. You really had to go slowly over them. Another was the VW bugs. These are still manufactured in Mexico, and they are all over. In addition to private cars, most of the taxis are beetles. Yet another was the traffic and the disregard for rules. When the traffic was bad, we sat through a whole green light as the cross traffic continued past without a let up. Only when our light turned red did our street start to move.

**Phones:** I already mentioned Georgina's cellular phone. Bob says these are very popular here, and the reason is partly that the regular phones don't work. There are pay phones all over the city, but Georgina said that most of them are out of order. Another thing: In several offices I saw desks with more than one phone. Santiago Levy had four on his desk, in a neat row. Why, I don't know. When calls came in, his secretary would buzz him on one of them, and he'd push one button to answer her, then another to talk to whoever called.

**Money:** One reason the pay phones don't work is the money. On January 1 they began a switch from old pesos to new, each new peso being worth 1000 old. There is a whole new set of coins for the new, alongside the old, and I guess people frequently jam the wrong ones into the phones. The symbol for the old peso, by the way, is \$. The new is N\$. And they only now have anything smaller than a peso, called a centavo, even though I thought I'd always known that word.

**Safety:** This doesn't seem to be much of a concern. In addition to living in one of the most polluted cities in the world, most of these people smoke. And nobody wears seatbelts.

**Mexico:** This is the country, of course, but it is also the city--they call it Mexico, not Mexico City. It is also in the center of a state that is also called Mexico. But the city Mexico is not part of the state Mexico. It is set aside, sort of like the District of Columbia.

**Misc.:**

- The police are notoriously corrupt.
- One of the tallest buildings is Hotel Mexico, which was started over 20 years ago and never finished because the developers went bust. Its empty hulk looms over the city.
- All the faucets in the public restrooms are without knobs or levers. Instead, there is a button protruding down from the opening of the faucet. You press up on it and water rushes out, usually spraying up in all directions.

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Now back to the trip:

Both Chung and Cesar came to the hotel at 9:00. Mauro and others were supposed to join us, but communication had gotten screwed up and they didn't. The three of us set out for Garibaldi Square for a night of drinking and Mariachi.

Cesar drove, and he managed once again to take a wrong turn. Twice we had to stop and ask directions, but eventually we got to a place where signs pointing toward Garibaldi led us the rest of the way.

As we got close, we were surrounded by swarms of Mariachi players. Dressed in their typical black costumes – hats, short coats, and tight pants with silver embellishments down the sides of the legs – many of these bands chase the cars here trying to sell their services. According to Cesar, one of the most romantic things one can do for one's love is to hire one of these bands and bring them to one's place to play. It is very expensive, though.

Closer to the square, Cesar found a parking space along the street and pulled into it. A man stood next to it, however, and Cesar spoke to him and then pulled back out into the street. I asked why, and he said he didn't trust the guy to take good care of his car. A little further on we found an attended parking lot and parked there.

Garibaldi Square turns out to be an open city square, with its sides lined by Mariachi establishments. They are large and noisy, and they all have men out front trying to draw in customers. Chung said we could choose between two of the places he knew about: one good for drinking and one with a good show. I chose the latter since I didn't want to meet the fate of Rod Ludema.

The place we went was just off the square. It billed itself as a "Mariachi Theater," and it had no skills pulling in customers. We went in and got a table near the large stage. A look around and at the prices on the menu showed that this was a more upscale place than the ones on the square. We ordered beers and were told that the show would start in 20 minutes. We'd timed it well.

At the back of the stage a band was playing. It wasn't playing mariachi music, but nonetheless it was loud enough to make conversation difficult. I realized then that both the band and the clientele were mostly older than I am, and the band was playing a style of music that sounded like the 40's. I began to regret that we had come there, instead of the drinking place that sounded like it would have been livelier.

I changed my mind, though, when the show started. Instead of being just straight mariachi music and dancing, it included several other interesting and unusual acts. The first, for example, was dancers in ancient costumes that I would guess were Aztec. Another was a man spinning a lasso. He was old enough to have been doing it for at least 30 years, and his ability and taciturn attitude both showed it. He was good. Yet another act was a group of puppeteers. The puppets



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were mostly of women, and they made them act sexier and more provocative than most of the women I have met in Mexico.

At one point the power went out. There were candles on all the tables, so this didn't leave us in the dark. But it killed the spotlights that would have let us see the performers. Instantly all the waiters appeared with tiny flashlights that they pointed at the stage. The show went on, and after about 5 minutes the power came back on.

I asked Chung and Cesar if power outages were frequent in Mexico. Simultaneously Cesar said no and Chung said yes. I guess it depends on what you mean by frequent. Chung – from Korea and the U.S. – thought an outage every day or so was frequent; Cesar – from Acapulco – did not. I asked, though, if they ever had outages that lasted several days, and they agreed that they do not. They were astounded that we have had one that long, and Cesar especially couldn't imagine how we got along without power for that long. They don't have storms here.

Another outage happened a little later, and this time the show did not go on. They took a break waiting for it to come back, and during it the band played, and customers danced on the stage in the dark. The power stayed out for quite a while, so then the mariachi band started circulating among the tables playing songs that people requested and paid for. A noisy older man at the table next to us bought several, which meant we had the band right on top of us for a while. The same man then paid for them to go to another table and play for a woman he had been admiring. Since the woman had a man with her, Cesar thought this was carrying romance too far. He said its best to use the mariachi for a woman who already loves you.

We ordered food at one point. They described a dish that sounded interesting called, I think, fazzolli. It is a soup with some kind of corn and chicken in it, they said. It came, and was as described, except that there were many other things in it too, and the corn was white. They now told me that this was an ancient Aztec dish. And Chung complimented me on my willingness to try different foods. I was flattered and tried not to let him see when I stopped eating the soup. It was very good at the top, but near the bottom were some slimy bits that I couldn't take.

The lights came back up, the show started up again with dancers plus a man singing whom I didn't care for, and I glanced at my watch and saw it was 12:30. Since I had figured out that I would need to get up at 6:00, I apologized and suggested that we leave. Even then it was 1:30 before we got back to the hotel.

Today has been routine travel: taxi to the airport, wait for the flight, flight delayed, and wait some more. The only thing that is perhaps worth mentioning is that the plane seemed awfully slow to take off, once we started down the runway. Maybe I was just paying more attention than usual, but I began to think we were having trouble getting up to speed and would crash. We didn't.

#### 4. Mexico City 1993