

Viva Méexico!

Vici Egan

“Dad, your car is at Detroit Airport, I’m going to Mexico.”

Those were my younger brother’s words on our collect call to Canada, at the beginning of our ten-day Mexican Adventure. Paul was meant to be driving my eldest sister, Barb, and me to the airport, before we hijacked him. It had started innocently enough. We’d had lunch at The Fogcutter, in Port Huron, Michigan, just over the border from our home town, with my parents and a few other siblings. Rich Brother Phil, as my eldest brother was affectionately known, had handed both Barb and me small wads of cash while embracing us in farewell hugs. It had been Phil who’d paid for my flight home for the weekend, for Mom and Dad’s 40th-fortieth wedding anniversary. The eldest of ten kids, he is the ideal big brother. At one point, I’d told Barb she should come back with me for a visit. For nine months, I’d been living in Pachuca, Hidalgo State, ~~since September ’85~~, for the last nine ~~months~~. Pachuca was sixty miles from Mexico City and I’d arrived two weeks before the earthquake – it was considered The Big One, before the next big ones that were to follow, around the globe. ~~But that’s another story!~~

I came into the kitchen on the Saturday. I’d just had lunch with some girlfriends from my high school days.

“Did you mean it when you asked if I wanted **to come for a visit?**” Barb queried.

“Of course.”

“Good, because I just bought a ticket.” ~~and~~ She promptly produced it from her bag.

“Excellent!” I said and I rushed to hug her. No one had visited me in my last home, Nigeria, and it would be great to have my sister ~~visit~~ come to my latest country of residence.

My second youngest brother, Paul, a reporter, had a week of holidays coming up. We invited him to accompany us but he’d already made plans for golf plans. However, hee did agree to drive us to Detroit Airport. ~~He and~~ had borrowed Dad’s car as his was temporarily out of commission.

“We’ll share the money Phil gave us,”; we told him, shortly after leaving the restaurant. Phil would want that.

“How often will you have free digs in Mexico?”; I asked.

“AND you have the week off,”; Barb added.

We wore him down. He had no defences left. We were on fleek!

“Get on the bus!”; was my sister’s response to Paul’s revelation to my father that he would either be without wheels for the next week or would have to find a way to reclaim his vehicle.

This was a local, rather dated now, exclamation of incredulity, not a transportation-suggested means of transport. Mary-Jane, another sister, was humorously and justifiably gobsmacked by our audacity. Paul had no luggage, no ticket; and no passport. “*Non problema!*”; I assured him. Manana we’ll be in Mexico and none of this will matter.”

First things first. We attempted to purchase a ticket to Mexico; for Paul; on

my Visa card, without his passport. ~~The year~~It was 19⁸⁶ and everything about air travel was easier more laid-back than today's potential nightmares ~~at check-in~~ nightmares. Paul had to swear an affidavit, for a small fee, that he was a Canadian citizen, and the deal was sealed. Crazy easy! Next was the phone call home. Afterwards, we thought a celebratory drink was in order and found a bar. As we were preparing to head for the gate, Paul realized he was no longer in possession of his ticket or ~~substitute~~ proxy passport! There had been three stops before the bar – the men's room, the phone and a shop for water. Paul went back to the loo and Barb and I set off for the other two locations, with a plan to meet up at the gate. Luckily, Barb found the documents at the payphone. Our first two hurdles had been jumped.

—A few months ~~after that~~ later, two footballers ~~from the Canadian~~ team footballers were turned back during the World Cup for not having Canadian passports. It seems they weren't ~~given~~ offered the affidavit option!

We arrived in Pachuca eight hours later, after a flight to Mexico City and a one-hour bus journey. I had quite a large bedroom but only a single bed. Using cushions ~~off our~~ the couch, we made up a couple of beds on the floor. I had shared the accommodation with two male friends who were also colleagues ~~(No, I shared the apartment with two female colleagues. I worked with Howard and Miguel. ☺).~~ ~~Howard and Miguel were,~~ both Americans. Howard was a big, burly African-American and Miguel was a slightly built Mexican-American. Both guys kindly loaned clothes to Paul, or Pablo, as he ~~became known on that trip~~ would now be known. “Gee, Paul, who are you today?” “Howard or Miguel?”

One day his clothes were swimming on him and the next day they'd be skin tight.

He seemed to **favour the alternating approach.**

My boss, Eric, gave me a few days off to travel with my ~~siblings~~brother and sister. **I can't imagine that happening today!**

We ~~travelled~~set off to the silver town of Taxco, where my parents had been years before, when Mmom was expecting Cortez, our youngest brother. Dad had wanted to name him Cortez, ~~as his first name~~ but Mmom would only agree to using the moniker as a third having it as a middle name. But nevertheless, Christopher William Cortez is to this day commonly known as Cort or Cortez ~~to this day,~~ so Ddad won that one; in the end. I remember Ddad complaining about incessant ~~nightly~~ dog barking at night. These ~~It~~ must've been a third generation of those dogs but the barking tradition ~~prevailed~~had been handed on, much to our dismay.

——— I have a photo of Paul, sitting in our hotel room, cutting off his only pair of jeans, with my nail seissors.

One evening, we wanted to bring some beer back to our room. There was a rather dubious looking bar across the street that looked ~~somewhat dubious.~~ I'd already been warned off as ~~that this was not~~ an establishment that women frequented, so I was priming Paul with my limited, but superior to his, eEspañol. I didn't know how to say, "take away", but improvising was my forte so I settled on "for my home". "Cerveza, para mi casa"; I had Paul repeat after me. Then off he went, through the swinging saloon doors, just like in a Wwestern, while I waited nearby on the pavement.

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I was beginning to wonder what was taking Paul so long; ~~h~~ He only had to order nine beers, when a

———A man approached and asked if he could help me.

“I’m waiting for *mi hermano*,” I managed. Before I could explain that he was on a beer run, the *compadre* had charged into the bar and started shouting, “Pablo!”; Paul, completely oblivious that he was the cause of all the commotion, was still patiently attempting to seal the *cerveza* deal. Being the only gringo in the bar, my new amigo didn’t take long to identify Paul as the deadbeat brother who had left, leaving his sister waiting thirstily outside while he wet his whistle, or at least that’s the take he’d understandably assumed. Paul had no idea why a stranger was pointing, gesticulating and yelling at him! I poked my head in, “*Bueno*, it’s O-K, he’s coming.”; I managed in my best broken Spanish, trying to assure my recently acquired buddy. Eventually, Paul got out carrying with the *cervezas* and our small party got underway in tow.!

~~***Recently, in anticipation of putting this piece together, I e-mailed my sister, Barb. (I meant to get Pablo’s views as well, but didn’t get that far). I told her I’d be writing about their visit and asked what she could remember as I knew there’d been plenty of hilarity.~~

~~Here is what she wrote:~~

~~Some time while later, -Barb and I compared memories of that week and relived the spontaneity of it all. I started off recalling I have a photo of Paul, sitting in our hotel room, cutting off making cut-offs of his only pair of jeans, with my nail scissors, and leaving Paul’s his only one pair of shoes out on the window ledge because they smelled too bad to keep in the room. mHe then had and then him having to run down the road in the morning chasing the gutter sweeper, since they’d fallen off the windowsill in the night.-~~

Barb did even better, saying,

“I remember the desk clerk in Mexico City cracking up that you wanted to make a “loco” phone call and expected him to help you; and then

Leaving Paul's only shoes out on the window ledge because they smelled too bad to keep in the room and then him having to run down the road in the morning chasing the gutter sweeper, since they'd fallen off the windowsill in the night. -

~~I remember visiting your classroom where the kids were climbing the wall in and out of the window except for that one kid who would open his book at whatever page you said. I remember Dirty Harry not being there. (Dirty Harry — another story!)~~

Paul buying up all the baskets from the poor kids, in the market because he didn't want to hurt any of their feelings.-

~~Our last night out, which we couldn't afford, and you telling us not to make eye contact with mariachis or toilet-paper ladies.—~~

~~The fact that we, and then forgetting about the Departure Tax and having to return your uneaten breakfast items to the cafeteria. Lots of greatWhat fun we had!” memories.—~~

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_____ Lots of great memories.

~~Love Babs²~~

~~It was a fun time and I, too, have many great memories of Mexico; and it was a fun place to be. I loved the Latin joie de vivre. Mexico and Nigera, where I'd tackled my first two years of teaching, in a bush village, had much in common. The latter is where I'd tackled my first two years of teaching, in a bush village. In Mexico, I embarked on~~

my third. Both countries were suffering economically but the people were warm and loved to laugh and enjoy themselves. People talked to each other. That is almost a dying art today, I believe. I haven't been back to Mexico since '86 but I hope to get there again, one day soon a revisit is long overdue!

Viva la Méexico!