

### **Life at Hogar de los Angeles**

When I set out to work in Mexico I had a plan of what I intended to accomplish for the History Department and I had my vague plans of what I needed to do in San Miguel Allende. I had varying jobs from working in the kitchen to fundraising to interviewing mothers at the center. Hogar de los Angeles was an amazing environment to learn and work. I was able to create my own schedule of work and to travel. After returning to the United States, I have been more motivated than every to work on my thesis and go to grad school. Mexico had an enormous affect on my life and I believe that it has changed me for the better.

At Hogar de los Angeles I walked in without any idea of what my internship supervisor was expecting of me. The first day included children running around while the founder, Donna, made her way from volunteer to volunteer, problem solving and giving out tasks to mothers and volunteers alike, In the second week I was sat down with my boss to discuss a work plan. I ended up having four requirements at the daycare center. My tasks included writing newspaper articles, putting together grants, organizing fundraisers, and interviewing mothers at the center. After organizing my work plan I began to research everything.

After the first week I had written an article for the local English language paper that was to be published the following week. I found that the work at the center may include a lot of research on the internet and work on the computer. I remember worrying that my entire internship would be spent at the computer desk. When I voiced my

concerns to my supervisor she talked me to write out a schedule of time I would spend at the center and time I would spend in my office. My schedule eventually evolved into working at the center from 9:00am-11:00am and then 1:50pm-3:00pm. From 11:00am-1:50pm I worked on articles and grant writing and research. When I returned to my at-home office at 3:00pm I worked on homework and fundraising projects. Around 6:00pm I would wrap up my work and relax.

As a part of my internship I decided to interview ten women from Hogar de los Angeles. While playing with children and helping in the kitchen I began to get to know the mothers on a personal level. Only after getting to know the mothers would I ask to conduct an interview with them. My interviews included the following questions:

- Have you always lived in San Miguel?
- Has the importance of families changed from when you were growing up to now?
- How did your parents provide for you? How do you provide for your family?
- What brought you to the center?
- Has immigration to the US affected your life in any way?
- Do you have any family that has migrated to the United States? How do you feel about this?

Most of the interviews would take place in a quiet area around the daycare center. Here I was able to use the digital voice recorder while the mothers still felt comfortable in telling me their stories.

Through doing the various interviews with the women around the center, and starting conversations throughout the day, I found myself learning Spanish so much quicker. I was not as nervous of practicing, and if I became frustrated I went home and studied. The most interesting improvement I noticed was my use of filler words or behaviors I had picked up from the mothers. Before I was only “so-so” with my Spanish, but while living and working in Mexico I felt more confident in my reading and speaking skills. This was interesting to me because many of the mothers only had around a sixth

grade education so when I would go out with a Mexican who was educated they would correct me when these quirks would appear in my speaking. They would even comment on how some of my Spanish was translated in to uneducated Spanish. This was such valuable information to me. By studying the differences in language I could better understand who I was interviewing.

As the months passed I traveled to different cities located in central Mexico. Though I started in Mexico City, touring the Museo de Antropología, the Metropolitan Cathedral, the President's Palace, and Teotihuacán, most of my travels were in Michoacán and Guanajuato. In Michoacán I traveled to Morelia, Patzcuaro, Erangaricuaru, and San Francisco Uricho. In Guanajuato (the state) I visited Guanajuato and Dolores Hidalgo. Through my travels I was able to see how other colonial towns were structured and how the cultures differ from place to place. Where Erangaricuaru still focuses on their indigenous past in the quiet pueblo, Morelia has a booming college town feeling, with clangs and clatter throughout the night.

During my travels and while I lived in San Miguel de Allende I kept a daily, very specific journal. This is one of the best things I could have done. Though I feel that I may have not had something to write, I continued to document my lifestyle and discoveries of Mexico. As I look back I am not sure how I was able to pass through a day without writing anything. This culture was so different than my own, yet I almost always felt welcomed and comfortable.

The internship allowed me so many opportunities to get involved in the community and dive into the lives of those who utilized the daycare center. As an intern I could not have asked for a more enchanting experience. My internship environment was

always wonderful to me. In return I worked very hard to make a difference in the lives of the children as well as help with the future of Hogar de los Angeles.

Besides writing articles, researching grants and interviewing women at Hogar, I did community outreach for the center. This included putting together a craft table at the monthly Artisans' Fair in El Instituto Allende. Volunteers and I worked on jewelry to sell as well as some work others associated with the center put together. After two weekends of shaking hands with prospective donors and working the table to sell what we could, the final amount of money raised was close to \$1,450.00. Since I had never done any fundraising before, the results were a bit surprising. The biggest part of having a table organized was that I was able to reach a lot of people who had not already heard about the center. The best results were when people would stop in the following Monday or Tuesday to tour the center, volunteer, and donate.

The internship at Hogar de los Angeles supported my education in many ways. Though it could have been seen as a three month vacation from classes, I would like to see it as one of the best things that have ever happened to me in my college career. I lived in another country, worked within a new culture, practiced my Spanish, learned to fundraise, and met some amazing people along the way. Yes, I had a wonderful time traveling, but I also found how nonprofit organizations were operated outside of the country. I have since then began thinking of going into the nonprofit sector. Though I had always been interested, now it has become a reality.

My future is to include writing a thesis about my experiences in San Miguel de Allende with the women who are often left behind due to immigration. Without this three month adventure, I am not sure what I would have done with my thesis. The experience

abroad made my interests in immigration, real. It is not just readings and lectures. I was able to meet the families that are still without fathers or brothers or uncles. Now I feel confident in researching and writing a thesis on the subject of immigration. I feel more connected to my research.

When I finish my thesis I would like to continue on with my education by attending graduate school or law school. I have always been passionate about helping people, and I feel that I have the drive and interest to continue on with my goal of helping society. Though I feel that Mexico does have many social, political, and economic issues, so does the United States. After studying in Mexico I decided to get involved in Immigration Policy. By working with my professor, Dr. von Germeten, and with Donna at the center, I found that I could start putting ideas together to succeed. My main goal with my thesis is to create a better understanding of the history of the immigration policies between Mexico and the US while also looking at how this has affected the “sending” families.

Mexico was easy to move around in and busses always seemed to be the most logical way of getting around. It is best to carry a little money and nothing else on your person, this way you will not lose much if something is stolen. All in all, Mexico was a wonderful, loving, welcoming country to work. My time in Mexico has given me the opportunity to reflect on what I would like to do with my life. Mexico has changed me in many ways and has given my confusing future a little direction.