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Person to Person in Mexico

Vesta Namiranian

Linfield College, vnamira@linfield.edu

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Vesta Namiranian
March 30, 2014
Oaxaca, Mexico

Field Notes from Abroad: Person to Person in Mexico

For my interview, I asked my mom questions but also have been observing the way family works as well as how people interact in my house and throughout the city of Oaxaca. There are many differences I have noticed that surprise me. The first two things surprised me simply because I did not expect them in coming here. Homosexuality in Mexico is very much accepted. It is difficult to describe...it is not something people are fighting for in the streets nor is it something people are fighting against. It seems like people accept it as the norm and allow people to just live and love the way they feel, therefore it is not a problem in Mexico. With all the politics and the two parties in the states, I was overwhelmed with happiness when I realized how free Mexico was. The second surprising factor was the amount of public displays of affection on the streets. People do not hide their love for others. From the middle school students to parents, you see passion and love just walking down the street to school or walking home from dinner. Something else I talked to my host mom about and notice during many events or interactions is that time does not matter. In the United States, I always feel like being late shows disrespect. We are always so punctual and worried about rushing and staying on schedule. Here, I can go to coffee with my host dad and we can sit for an endless amount of time talking and enjoying life without worrying about the time. I can show up half an hour late and not worry that the person I am meeting will be upset with me. I remember last month we went to a wedding that I was told started at 11am. We showed up at 2pm and we were considered "early." Although some people may look at this as lazy or disrespectful, I remember to stay open-minded and look at the positive factors of this kind of mindset. It is incredible how different culture can be across one border.

As I mentioned above, the lack of emphasis on being "en punto" or "on the dot" is a major difference between me, my host mom, and many people here in Mexico. Another difference is the value of religion. I feel like religion and believing in god is more common here than in the United States. The idea of Atheism is not very common...I have actually not yet met someone who did not consider themselves a religious person or someone who believes in god. Another difference between Mexico and the United States is the consumption of picante! Picante is spicy food. People here almost cannot tell when food is spicy because they eat spicy foods regularly. My host mom is gradually working on getting her grandson used to spicy foods since he is three years old. As children, they learn to eat spicy foods to the point where their stomachs can handle it. I currently have a mild case of gastritis, something that happens when your stomach has had a bit too much spice! It is very interesting the difference between the types of food...authentic Mexican food does not compare to any Mexican restaurant I have ever been to in the states. A similarity I have noticed is how people value education as well as family. Parents and siblings fight for their families to have the best education possible. We constantly watch marches of hundreds of people walking down the streets. They are peaceful but it really shows how powerful numbers are. The cars cannot move and people come out of their houses to see what is going on. Also, my host mom talked to me about how the family comes over every Sunday just to relax

and be home together. Every day after I get home from class, Gabriel (my host mom's grandson) is over at the house. It is a family's duty and honor to take care of their family members. I know my family feels so blessed to have a child around the house—they would do anything to make him happy and make sure he lives the best life possible.

There are two things that stand out to me in response to this prompt: the difference between our cultures in terms of being punctual and being more relaxed. I feel like in the U.S. we value independence and punctuality whereas here I feel like people are more relaxed and depend on one another and their communities. I constantly get this sense of passion and unity in Oaxaca and I love it. I feel like I am safe because the people around me care about me and love me, even before I know their names. Something I have learned about both the United States and Mexico is that there is corruption of the government everywhere. From our readings, watching the news, and talking to my family members, it is clear that in Mexico, corruption is constantly occurring. There is no system of "checks and balances" so the government can get away with it. We hear stories of how the governor suddenly took money from the citizens' taxes and gave it to his friends to buy themselves houses...situations that are just completely out of control and out of our control. I get so infuriated and then realize that corruption happens everywhere. In the United States, it is often balanced out through "checks and balances," yet there is still corruption in the sense that the people are not always treated fairly. Overall I have learned that there are many areas in which Mexico and the United States are similar. From education to environmental issues, we are often fighting for the same right. The difference is that Mexico is a developing country, one that is less advanced or industrialized in a sense.

Interview: Cristina Feregrino, host mom