

attention!!

Poverty: A culture shock

by Jill Galarneau

Recently I experienced a culture shock.

Coming from a family of big city dwellers, my familiarity with life in a small town was nil. So when my roommate Megan asked me to spend spring break at her house in Harlingen naturally I was excited.

Megan had stayed at my house in upper-middle class North Dallas and was familiar with the bubble I had grown up in. She knew I went to a high school that was entirely white, with the exception of three black students.

She tried to warn me before we left that her hometown in the Rio Grande Valley would be a sharp contrast to my suburban upbringing. But her hint was not nearly enough to prepare me for what would be my first encounter with poverty in its purest form.

Megan decided she would take me to Matamoros, Mexico. Great! I knew I could get inexpensive silver and cheap Corona there. But what I didn't know is what hurt me.

First she drove me through an older part of Harlingen. My eyes were glued to the Sonic on my left.

Old, dirty cars Megan called low riders covered the parking lot. About 50 Mexicans from age 12 to 20 were there hanging out. In the crowd I spotted two young girls in shirts labeled "baby" with an arrow pointing downward.

Megan told me that Mexican girls love to have babies — regardless of whether they are married or

financially able. She told me that at her high school, which is 80 percent Mexican-American, pregnant girls continue to go to school until a few days before delivery.

Further on, I saw unbathed children playing in the weeds in front of their homes. Their tiny decrepit shacks looked as if a gust of wind would blow them over.

Out of Harlingen and on the highway to Brownsville. I felt more worldly and thought I had seen the worst.

But Brownsville was even more educational.

We got there right as the high school was getting out. Swarms of Mexican students, mostly dressed in filthy jeans and ragged T-shirts crossed the street in front of us. I asked Megan if we were still in America. Finally, I spotted one white girl in the crowd.

Their school was a group of stacked, portable buildings that looked like a temporary set-up. But Megan assured me it was permanent.

Mexican boys yelled obscenities at us as they drove passed in their low-riders. Some of the nicer low-riders had a chandelier hanging from their inside dome light.

We finally reached the border. It struck me as very strange that I would enter a culture so dissimilar from our own after just crossing that bridge.

When we stepped off the bridge into Mexico, Megan was accosted by little Mexican boys. They all wanted to touch her blond hair. Her expertise at



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dealing with them amazed me. If she had any doubts about cussing, she left them in America.

Mexican women and children sat along the street with their open hands reached out. Their eyes seemed to search ours for sympathy, care, and money. I felt greedy and spoiled and

found myself on the verge of tears.

I returned wanting to join the missionary field or the Peace Corps. Of course, I have read about poverty, but it just doesn't compare to the impact of seeing it first-hand.

Jill Galarneau is a senior journalism major.

Attention readers

As we have not received any attention!! page submissions so far this semester, we are seriously considering

discontinuing this page. Please help us continue this special page by submitting your original works.