

## Journal Entries—Mexico

March 15, 2008

Finally we are on our way to sunny warm Mexico... or so we thought. Our flights managed to get so mangled up that I don't think we will ever get to Mexico! Our first flight was so delayed that we missed the connecting flight to Merida from Houston. So instead of getting to Merida and meeting up with our group, we are going to have to spend the night in Houston and fly out early tomorrow morning to Cancun and then catch a bus from Cancun to Merida. I am glad that there are three of us traveling together!! Hopefully our traveling day will be much smoother tomorrow and we will manage to catch up with our group in Merida before 5pm (the planned departure time for Tzucacab).

March 16, 2008

As I sit here writing in my journal, the countryside of Mexico is whizzing by in the window of the bus to my right. Looking at the dense almost jungle-like greenery with sporadic thatched huts pass by I am reminded of Thailand and the many similarities in the living styles of the two countries. Already I can see that veterinary outreach in these country towns will be very helpful for both the animals and the humans since they live in such close proximity to each other and not always under ideal conditions. So far today our trip has progressed smoothly... unlike yesterday. We will meet up with Dr. Hernandez at Hotel Caribe in Merida, then hop on another bus to take the three hour bus ride from Merida to Tzucacab tonight! I am so glad to be done traveling and ready to get to work!!

March 17, 2008

What an INCREDIBLE first day!! We arrived at Rancho Hobonil late last night, hung up our hammocks, had a small meal, and crashed hard. This morning we woke up to a wonderful breakfast that included pastries, fresh fruit, and home cooked mayan food! From there we managed to get the entire group together (8 students from University of Florida, 3 from VMRCVM, 1 from Colorado, and about 15 from UADY) and headed to Tzucacab. We were divided into groups of 3 with a student from UADY and two students from the US. It was so useful to have a working knowledge of Spanish!! Turns out that my general knowledge of Spanish caused me to be one of the translator students to work with UADY students who didn't know English, and Florida students that didn't know Spanish!! Today our group went door to door performing rabies vaccinations (about 15 total) and collecting data for the epidemiological survey that included: number and type of animals living in the house, number of people living in the house, and animal deaths in the last year. For lunch we went back to Rancho Hobonil for the traditionally large meal of the day including soup, freshly made corn tortillas, rice, and some type of meat dish. After working all day long, what better way to cool off than to jump into the pool at Rancho Hobonil... which we took full advantage of! After the light dinner we all went back to our cabana and curled up in our hammocks. I think that I am about to fall asleep; we have another long day of work tomorrow!

March 18, 2008

Today was quite similar to yesterday, although I met some truly wonderful people today. Luis was the UADY student that I worked with along with Sarah from UF. Luis did not speak a word of English and Sarah does not speak a word of Spanish... so it was a challenging day communication-wise. Today we vaccinated a few cats, which is a feat in itself! These cats are almost all partially feral so we have to vaccinate them within bags that we affectionately refer to as Cat Bags. Everyone that we have met by going house to house has been very friendly and happy to have their animals vaccinated. By the end of the day we had vaccinated about 20 animals. The entire group vaccinated over 180 animals in the first two days!! Today we had empanadas for breakfast made with Chaya... a special mayan leaf that is mashed up and used to add flavor. It was absolutely amazing!! I love that Mayan food almost always includes lots of spicy green chile. I think that I am starting to get this hammock thing down; it is definitely a challenge to get it right!

March 19, 2008

My group members switched up a little bit today. I worked with Rodrigo and Megan, although still doing door to door vaccinations and surveys. We were welcomed to one house and given ice cold coca cola while we rounded up their 7 dogs for vaccinations. The children of the area we worked in today were absolutely astounded by what we were doing. They would follow us from house to house and run ahead to get their dogs and bring them to us for vaccinations. Todo el dia yo hablo solamente en español! Fue difícil! (Today I only spoke in Spanish! It was hard!) I think that some of the children thought my accent was a little funny... but I was able to talk to them!! They even tried to teach me some Mayan words. Dog – Peek in Mayan and Perro in Spanish.... Needless to say I didn't pick up too many Mayan words. Before lunch the mayor of Tzucacab sent over his beautiful appaloosa stallion for us to take short rides on as a way of thanking us for coming. After lunch we had a meeting with el presidente del municipal de Tzucacab (the mayor) who brought his wife and some of the people of the town to the location where we had performed spays/neuters all week. He made a beautiful speech thanking all of the students from UADY and the US for giving up our time in order to help others. After that most of the UADY students went back to Merida. It was quite an emotional farewell. There were a few students that stayed with us and will go back to Merida with us tomorrow after going to Chichen Itza! Dinner was delicious as normal, and then we played Uno with the remaining UADY students. Now I am thoroughly exhausted, and this hammock is swaying me to sleep. Tomorrow we will be up early and spend the day at Chichen Itza!!!!

March 20, 2008

CHICHEN ITZA!!! What an incredible place! There was so much history there. We arrived at Chichen Itza much later than anticipated, around 1230pm. We met up with an

Archeology student from UADY who took us all around Chichen and showed us the sites, pointing out all the interesting archaeological features as well as stories of Mayan culture. Since we were there on the equinox, we waited to see the shadow of the giant snake appear on the sides of the stairs of the main temple, but since it was cloudy we never got to see it. We also saw the great ball court where Mayans played a dangerous game... the losing team captain was decapitated and his head was given to the Mayan leader. This evening we went to bed early in hopes of watching the equinox pass through the historic temple at Dzibichaltun!!

March 21, 2008

DZIBICHALTUN. There is something awe-inspiring about being out on a hill at about 530am waiting for the sun to come up along with hundreds of other people. The feeling is almost electric and it is easy to understand why Mayans believe that they get power from seeing the sun pass through the windows of the temple. Unfortunately for us, the cloud cover was immense and the entire sky lightened but the sun stayed behind the cover of the clouds. During the rest of the day April and I met with our friend Ricardo, a native of Merida, who showed us around Merida. We saw the beautiful (but abandoned) mansions on the Paseo de Montejo as well as the enormous Monumento de la Bandera. We sampled some interesting fare and had a wonderful day. That evening we all gathered together for a group dinner at a local restaurant where we sampled delicious Mayan cuisine. Sadly, this was our last day in Merida.

March 22, 2008

We flew out of the Merida airport at 630am. The goodbyes were poignant and sad, and we vowed to come back again to participate in the program next year. I have never been so touched by an experience in my entire life. La experiencia fue muy linda.