

What Mexicans Think About ...

[NOTE TO CELIA: When Luis Miguel López Alanís speaks, he uses Méjico. Since this is his way of talking in the book, I think we should leave it so].

This chapter is like a sneak peek into the lives of the people who populate this book. Think of it as the Cliff Notes. There is one major difference, though. On some subjects, most people say essentially the same thing. On others, there are distinct differences and conflicting opinions. That's because, like in any country, most people share many common beliefs that shape the culture, but not everyone thinks the same about everything. If we are to understand another culture, we are more likely to do so by seeing beyond the stereotypes and into the individual differences. When we hear a symphony, we are most aware of the blending of the harmonies that create the overall effect. As we listen more carefully, we become aware of the individual instruments that each adds a slightly different voice to the complete work.

Why You Will Hear Conflicting Versions of What Living In Mexico Is Like

If someone asks how the fair was, you will tell them according to how well you did. If you won a lot of prizes at the games, you will say the fair was a wonderful place. If you spent your money and didn't win any prizes, you will not recommend it to anyone.

“Cada Quien Habla Como le va en la Feria” es decir, si te diviertes en la feria y ganas premios , vas a regresar contento y hablaras bien de la feria, pero si por lo contrario, te mareaste en los juegos, no ganaste nada y perdiste dinero, hablaras pésimo de la feria y no se la vas a recomendar a nadie. – Mexican proverb.

Hope

There is a saying in Spanish, *la esperanza muere la ultimo* (hope is the last to die). That kind of gives you an idea that Mexican people are hopeful to start with. They hope for the best. They hope for the situation to change. They hope, they hope, they hope all the time. It's kind of based on religion too. They never lose hope. I think Mexican people as a whole are hopeful people – Walter Bishop Velarde, Durango, Tour Guide/Entrepreneur

Now they have social programs for the children instead of adults. These are programs to help the children get an education. That is how the modern generation thinks. We don't have to make an investment in the adults. We have to make an investment in the children, because they are going to be the Mexico of tomorrow. We have to make an investment in

them. That is why the government makes programs for schools. *Beca* is a scholarship. This is a federal program. There is a program in every part of Mexico, but it is administered by the state government. So it is different in each state, but it is in every state. – Gustavo Arenas, Physician, Tampico, Tamaulipas.

Generational Differences

Yeah, I think we are really optimistic and we always try to make things better – the modern generation. We are always thinking about new markets. People used to be more *conservador* (conservative) or afraid of change. They worked individually. It sounds kind of selfish, but that was the way it was. The modern generation thinks differently. They open to suggestions; they have to listen to ideas from people from other countries. They are willing to learn about the mistakes of our fathers. We have to learn from the mistakes of everybody. I think that is a good thing for us. We are not perfect people. And American people don't think we are perfect (laughs). – Gustavo Arenas M., physician. Tampico, Tamaulipas.

What are the greatest misconceptions that Americans have about Mexicans?

When host families start working with us they are very surprised at how nice the American students are. They are amazed at how the Americans go out of their way to be nice to them. They hear how bad the American people treat the immigrants and think the whole country is anti-Mexican. They say they are shocked that their perception of Americans was so wrong. They (Americans) are such nice people. A lot of people confuse government with people. – Antonio Prado, school director, Puebla, Puebla.

I think that many people think of Mexico and see them as the people dressed up like these musicians (*mariachis*) with the big sombrero and the man on the fields with the donkey and the tequila bottle on one hand. – Joanne Lopez, teacher, Morelia, Michoacán

Hmm. They think we are like those people who cross the border [illegal immigrants]. They think all Mexicans are like that. That is the biggest one. Another one is that they think we are a violent people. We are not. Except in some places.

Sometimes they define us like really poor people. [His voice got very sad when he said this, like his feelings were hurt]. We aren't. We actually have expectations and aspirations. We are really good businesspeople. There are a lot of wealthy people in Mexico. Of course we have more poor people than really rich people or even middle-

class people, but that doesn't mean that Mexicans are all poor, or that Mexico is a really poor country. – Gustavo Arenas M., physician. Tampico, Tamaulipas.

Let me tell you something about this communal way of life. Méjico has approximately 12% indigenous population. And there among the indigenous population you still find a lot of communal living. What I think about US citizens is that they usually come with the idea that all of Méjico is indigenous. They want to come to the most indigenous areas. And that is good. That is not bad. But maybe they are losing the other 88% of the population, the *mestizo* people. Over 70% of the people are *mestizos*; we have a bit of blood of the indigenous and a bit of the blood of the Spanish. And that is precisely the other Méjico. It seems not to be the exotic ones, but that is the majority of Méjico. These common people have a belief, ways of being, loyalties, friendships that are expressed in many different ways.

What I would say to your readers is, “Don't forget that other part of Méjico.” I am sure that if they share time with these other Méjicanos, they will find out many things to enrich their spirit. There is much more to Méjico than you know if you have not been here. There is a sun in Méjico. There are not only beaches. There are a people who are working who have the same feeling of becoming more fair to have a better life. The social conditions don't allow us, but there is a feeling and sometimes that feeling is more important than the touristic attractions. – Luis Miguel López Alanís – Tour operator Morelia, Michoacán.

I think one of the stereotypes of the Mexicans that people in the United States have is that they are lazy people. I find the opposite to be true. The Mexicans are very hard-working people. – Monica McGloin, teacher, Morelia, Michoacán.

A lot of Americans think we still wear sombreros and sleep in hammocks. We are modern people. We are near to the United States. We are influenced by your styles and ways of doing things. We have a lot of goods and we are not all poor. – Ciro Gonzalez, TV station owner, Cd. Victoria, Tamaulipas

General – Understanding Mexicans

To understand the Mexicans, you have to understand the way we act according to the events in our lives. To me, for example, there is a difference in language like this. – Teresa, Executive, Papantla, Veracruz/McAllen, TX.

I will insist that the Mexican citizen is very hospitable and very affectionate. I think that is the most important thing from here. – Rolando López Monroy, Musician, Morelia, Michoacán.

Tomás - It's not the language itself. We traveled to quite a few countries. We spent weeks in China. We could not communicate with people. We noticed the people tried to understand our hand signs, or from a phrase book, looking up the phrases in English. It's not the language itself, it's the willingness to get involved and show interest in the person or the culture.

Anita- We always made the effort to at least learn the words to say 'good morning', hello', 'thank you', 'please'. These little words make a big difference- I think so. And we notice if you don't speak any Spanish at all but you come in the morning and say *hola* or *buenos dias* or you ask for something and she gives it to you and you say *gracias* or *por favor*, even if you say it wrong it doesn't matter, but show that you're giving an effort. Even if you only know those 2 or 3 words, it makes a big difference. – Anita and Tomas, owners of a holistic retreat, Jungapeo, Michoacán.

Why do you like living in Mexico versus another country?

Every time I go out of Mexico, go to Europe or the United States, I come back and almost kiss the ground. I express a sigh of relief, "Ah, I'm back in Mexico." One of the reasons I enjoy Mexico a lot is I think you're really freer, as a person, to do your own personal thing than anywhere else. Time really enslaves you to a routine. I think that freedom is the one word that sums it up. You are freer in Mexico than in a lot of other places. – Walter Bishop Velarde, Entrepreneur, Durango, Durango.

[Gloria is moving back from the United States to Mexico]. I love my culture and my people. I love my country. I love my country because we have very warm people we have a very strong family. All my people are with you when you need it. We have a lot of culture. We have very deep roots. We have very strong family. Social change comes more slowly. – Gloria Estrada, physician, Guadalajara, Jalisco.

What did I like? The warmth of the people and the centeredness in the family. That is something I have always admired and loved about the Mexican people. That's not to say that it doesn't exist in American society, but the way I was received and accepted by people non-judgmentally. – Monica McGloin, School Administrator, Morelia, Michoacán

[When asked where she would like to live, she answered emphatically]. Mexico. Definitely. I like to visit the United States and to shop there, but for me and my family there is a better quality of life here in Mexico. – Laura Escobar, single mother, realtor, Querétaro, Querétaro.

This is a country with much tranquility. We have our problems. But we don't have a life that is very hard and we have many liberties. The society helps to maintain certain values and family values. – Jose Ibarola, Insurance Salesman, Morelia, Michoacán.

Is Mexico Safe?

Most of our students are surprised at how safe they feel in Mexico compared to how they thought they would. I have been at this school for ten years. In that time we have had about 5,000 students. The worst thing that happened to any of them was that two had their pockets picked. I feel very safe and in twelve years of living in Mexico, I have never had an incident. In the USA I was broken into, my car was stolen. Here the worst that happened to me was that the mirrors from my car were stolen. – Antonio Prado, school director, Puebla, Puebla.

I don't think that Morelia is an overly-safe city. Like any city, there have been instances of crime. We have the influence of *narcotraficante* executions, et cetera. But it all seems to be centered on people who are involved in that sort of activity. We average people don't feel that it affects us, but our friends from the States see all this in the news and don't come to visit. Even the American ambassador said sometimes said Michoacán is not safe for travel. This really hurts. We don't feel it, we really don't.

I don't think that we as normal citizens fear for our lives or our homes or our well-being, but we know from reading the newspapers that it happens, it exists – this element of insecurity. And I know that the foreigners feel it, but it's not the same as it was twenty or thirty years ago. – Monica McGloin, School Administrator, Morelia, Michoacán

This is my philosophy: if you don't have anything to do with drugs, police or politics in Mexico and are not a millionaire you are pretty much safe. – Dr. Mark Reeves, Physician, Cd. Juarez, Chihuahua.

One kidnapping becomes one hundred in the stories that follow. We are a nation of *corridos* (folk songs generally glorifying the outrageous or extraordinary). Yes, there are problems, but our media is even more outrageous than yours. We glorify gruesome aspects of accidents with pictures of blood and dead bodies. Sure there is street crime, burglaries, corruption and murder in Mexico City, but that is true of any big city in the world, except perhaps Tokyo. Personally, I felt more fear of attack in some cities in the United States, but I do not want to insult you. It is just what I felt. I was never attacked. Not even in Mexico [City]. – Arnoldo, executive, Monterrey, Nuevo Leon.

In Mexico City you are always aware. I feel better in Guadalajara. – Gloria Estrada, physician. Guadalajara, Jalisco.

There are some spots (Mexico City, Tijuana, Cd. Juarez, Culiacan) where the crime is very high, but it is only spots. It is because the narco-dealers are making a mess of Mexico. In some places, yes, they are violent. They don't know how to treat people from other countries. But if you go to Tampico, or most of Mexico, that won't happen. We have crime, as does every city in the world. People really respect others. This happens in Mexico City because there are a lot of people who don't have an education, people who want to make some easy money. So they rob. But that doesn't happen in Tampico, or the rest of the county.

Children can play [on the streets] at night and in the parks and nothing ever happens. But there are some *colonias* where there they have a little bit of crime. That's where things like kidnappings happen. It's like in the United States; I think you have the same problem, like in the rest of the world. – Gustavo Arenas M., physician. Tampico, Tamaulipas

I left Mexico City because of the crime, pollution, and traffic. I have to work because I don't have a husband. I have two daughters, 19 and 13. I love to live in a place like Querétaro [A city of a 1,500,000 or more] with a lot of services, yet tranquil, a university and so on, yet with the life of a little town. If my daughters go out to the *Centro* or to a bar, everything is all right. And it is easy to drive, unlike Mexico City. I am 15 minutes from work and work here in the state of Guanajuato, which is many miles away.

There is a lot of fear of kidnapping in Mexico City. My daughters don't worry about me here. Here you can feel very comfortable. You feel okay. – Laura Escobar, single mother, realtor, Querétaro, Querétaro.

No, I would feel the same [safer in Mexico than in the USA] if I returned to San Francisco. But when I go to Canada I don't feel that. I feel more safe in Canada, even more so than here in Morelia. My daughter does too. That's why my daughter is so glad to be out of Mexico City. – Monica McGloin, University Professor, Morelia, Michoacán.

Let's say there are some political issues associated with that. One year it is said that Mexico City is dangerous and then for three years it is not. This is the political cycle. I think it has to do with the politics. Like when the old politicians, the dinosaurs, were in power. The police corruption made that happen. Now, since the time of Vicente Fox, the change of the old government for the new one, it changed a lot. – Roberto Vences, Sales Manager, Cozumel, Quintana Roo.

Regional Differences

We [in the North] are more educated. We have more influences from the USA. In the south the people do not work. They expect the government to pay for everything. In the north we work, we make money, we pay taxes. All the money goes to Mexico City and it goes to the south. If we give the government one thousand pesos, they return five hundred in projects or services. If the south gives five hundred pesos in taxes, they get back one thousand pesos in benefits. The people in the south don't want to work. They are lazy. – Ciro Gonzalez Bernal, TV station manager, Cd. Victoria, Tamaulipas.

In Monterrey, people are really materialistic. They are, how you say, *ostentoso* (ostentatious). They really like to show off what they have. You always want people to see what you've got. Your car, your house. That's the kind of people in Monterrey. I do not like the people in Monterrey. Maybe some people from Mexico City are the same way. But the rest, I think they are not like that.

You may know the all the people here on the border, but you really need to know the real people from Mexico (the interior). We are very different than the people on the border. – Gustavo Arenas M., physician. Tampico, Tamaulipas

Look, here in Mexico we have the problem that even though the distribution of resources by the federal government is very equitable, there are still difficulties. I know the whole Mexican Republic. I respect the ideas and habits of others in different parts of the country, as well as they respect mine, but the there is a very real saying that expresses the truth as I know it. "While the south sleeps, the center yawns and the north works." – Miguel Angel, Rancher, Miner, Contractor, Muzquiz, Coahuila.

Macho Mentality

One of the reasons I asked for a divorce was that I can't stand many things about men like my ex-husband. He is typical of a lot of Mexican men. He was *acostumbrado* (meaning he was accustomed to the *macho* way of thinking that the woman should do what her man says). If he quit his job, he said, "*Sorry Laura, it doesn't matter. You have a job.*" His attitude was that it didn't matter if he didn't have money for his wife, for my girls, because his wife has money.

The American mentality that men and women must each give part of the money for your home is better. In Mexico, women love to work, but not to maintain a selfish, lazy husband – an irresponsible husband. If I gave him a hundred pesos, he gave it to his girlfriend. Infidelity and not working are no longer acceptable. Now, Mexican women no longer stand for that kind of behavior. – Laura Escobar, single mother, realtor, Querétaro, Querétaro.

Middle-class defined

[He thought long about this.] Let's see ... OK, if you have a degree, you can't be poor in Mexico. It is impossible. – Rene Flores, Businessman, Monclova, Coahuila.

In Mexico you cannot determine middle class by the amount of money you make. It is the social as well as the economical. Middle class in Mexico always is going to have some kind of help in the house. A maid, cook or gardener. – Antonio Prado, school director, Puebla.

Poor people cannot have their children go to University. – Rene Flores, Businessman, Monclova.

The way I see it, the people in the middle-class have an education. The really low-class are the people who cross the border and they suddenly became middle-class by your definition because they have a car and a house and money. But they don't have any education. So I would not call them middle-class. They don't have any title that says they are physician, lawyer or a degree. You need first an education. When you are in the middle-class you can jump to a higher class. – Gustavo Arenas M., physician. Tampico, Tamaulipas.

The people who don't have economic problems, they can make a good living; they are the middle-class. A long time ago we called people middle-class those who were

professionals. They did not have economic problems. But today, even people who have professions have economic problems. They are between middle and poor class, because they have a lot of credit to pay and inflation that we have never seen before. – Jose Luis V. Garza, newspaperman, Hidalgo, TX/Reynosa, Tamaulipas.

Middle class is a mentality. A big component of being middle-class is having education. More people are getting schooled in Mexico today. Middle class is also growing because there is a leniency of credit. – Orlando Hidalgo, Hotelier, Cuernavaca, Morelos.

Middle-class – Is it expanding or shrinking?

Ten years ago there was an increase. I think now that it is starting to go down again. I think that in the last year (2008) things have been especially hard. – Antonio Prado, school director, Puebla.

The middle class is not shrinking. It is a struggling middle-class.

When I moved to Mexico from Cuba twenty years ago, only the rich people had credit cards. Now most people have them. In 1987 I moved from Miami and other places. I left Cuba when I was three years old. I am Mexican resident. I have seen the country evolve and change.

In 1968, there were 300,000 cars. Today there are 3.8 million cars in Mexico City alone.

Ten years ago most cars were all *bochos*, [Volkswagen Beetles] or junkers. Everybody got rid them. You do not see old cars in Mexico anymore. In the last ten years the middle class has had the opportunity to buy a home. Today the standard loan is 20 years with 20% to 25% down – with a 12% to 14% interest rate. This again lends to stability. You don't get a subprime mess like in the United States. You can see this growth in home building by going to the outskirts of any city. You will see lots of cookie-cutter homes of 800 square feet. – Orlando Hidalgo, Hotelier, Cuernavaca, Morelos.

Awareness of the Indian and Spanish culture.

We Mexicans have a strange relationship with Spain. You would think we would still be pissed off at them for what they did to our country. After all, our Revolution was about breaking free. But no, we still feel inferior to the Spanish. Our racial memories are still strong and the Spaniards convinced us that the *mestizo* was below the white-skin on the evolutionary scale. You don't see any Indians selling products on TV. When I was a kid, you only saw white-skinned, blue-eyed Criollo families depicted on TV or in print ads. Today, there are some *mestizos*, but we still equate the products from the white-skins

with quality, whether it is toothpaste or Bimbo bread. – Arnoldo, executive, Monterrey, Nuevo Leon.

[Although Bimbo is now a brand with different kinds of bread, Bimbo bread was originally the white, processed bread sold in supermarkets, as opposed to more traditional loaves cooked in *panaderias* or bakeries. It was a symbol of the modernization of Mexico. At one time it was considered a mark of sophistication to serve Bimbo instead of tortillas or rough loaves from *panaderias*. In today's society, while it is still popular, many people prefer *pan integral* or whole grain breads, because of white bread's lack of nutritional value, just as they do in the United States. Bimbo, the brand, has caught up and also offers a *pan integral* variety.

To understand Mexico you have to understand our beginnings. Here, you didn't have the fusion with the Indians. While in Mexico the two cultures merged, a fusion. In the United States you didn't have that. The Indians and the Europeans didn't mix.

The Spaniards came and the Indians saw them as gods, because we believed in so many gods. When they saw the Spaniards on horses, the Indians saw them as gods with four legs. From that moment on, the conquest was easier because we saw the Spaniards as superior. The Indians were servile, and easily dominated. – Teresa Rodriguez, executive, Papantla, Veracruz/McAllen, TX

It is all about the individual. Some people are more aware than others. For instance in my family, my mother's family came from Oaxaca. We have an interesting story. The last name of my mother's family was Ramirez-Coso. He was a pirate. He made a mess with the Indian girls and you know, [laughs soundly] well that is how my family was born. So when they tell me about this, they wake up an interest. So I travel to those places and try to get a feeling for it. Some people do that and others don't. Some people just don't care. I think that there are more people who don't care about the culture than those who do. – Gustavo Arenas, physician, Tampico. Tamaulipas.

Our roots are in the Indian culture. We are losing them. But nobody is doing anything about that. Those are our real roots. The *mestizo* is the way of living right now. – Gloria Estrada, physician, Guadalajara, Jalisco.

I think that we have the idiosyncrasies that don't let us forget, for example, political things, historical things that happened too many years ago. People are tied to those things. We have to get rid of that and grow as a nation, as a people. We have to stop looking backward. It is like we have a ships anchor holding us to the past. – Jose Ibarola, Insurance Salesman, Morelia, Michoacán.

Well, maybe it is very hard to say that it is done on purpose but the fact is the teachers in the schools, according to the programs, the official programs of the ministry of education, they are giving less and less and less lessons of history. For example, there was a counter-reform maybe 3 or 4 years ago when the ministry of education said because of the lack of time in the schools we can't teach pre-Hispanic history.

Imagine. I am a tour guide. I take people to archeological sites. I find out how important it is – the prehistoric history of the area, of my country. You can imagine how much I suffer when I find out officially that the authorities don't want to teach the children pre-Hispanic history.

Obviously when you don't know your past you don't have roots, you lose your identity, and yes, that is a big danger. If you combine this with the growing individualism for example with the growing commercialism, with the talk shows and TV's and the TV theater. Novellas. There are a lot of attacks to the identity of ours. Yes, that is a big danger. It is happening. – Luis Miguel López Alanís – Tour operator Morelia, Michoacán.

Is there discrimination against darker-skinned people?

Sure. In every part of Mexico. It is like we are a racist people. For in Mexico or Monterrey, if you are dark-skinned, they give you a look. You think, why do you have to give me a look? We are both Mexicans. You weren't born in a pool full of gold. But, yes, some people are really racist against dark-skinned people. – Gustavo Arenas, physician, Tampico. Tamaulipas.

Tomás- Mexicans are very class sensitive, even more so than racist - Anita and Tomás, owners of a holistic retreat, Jungapeo, Michoacán.

Illegal immigrants to the United States

[AUTHOR'S NOTE: This is a very touchy issue and not everyone was willing to share his or her thoughts on the issue. One gentleman nearly ended the interview upon being asked for his views on this. Those who did were generally critical of immigrants. What is interesting is that most Americans probably don't realize that some Mexicans would prefer immigrants not come to the United States either.

In fairness, had I been interviewing mainly people who had come to work as immigrants, or their families, I would have gotten a different perspective. I have indeed talked to many people like that in my years of trying to understand Mexico, but excluded them mainly because they have been this segment of Mexican society has been written about extensively and my focus was more on the middle-class. I believe that this contra-view should offer a new insight to American readers.].

I understand when people, – you can say they run out of Mexico – because they want to have a job, and they come to the US to find a job. They work illegally. I think that is worse than what they could do in Mexico. If you really want to work, if you really want to make some money, get to work! You don't have to go to the United States so you can get a job and the pay is better. If you really want to work, you can work. You just have to find it and you have to do a good effort.

They want to go the easy way. They are mediocre people. That is the way I see it. That's why they cross the border and try to find a job in the U.S. That's the people that the American people know the most. All the skills these people have are not the same skills that the rest of the Mexican people have. That's why American people only see the things that these people have to show and they don't see what the rest of Mexican people have to show. – Gustavo Arenas M., physician. Tampico, Tamaulipas.

[She got really animated while telling this story because it is something she believe in]. This was before I had come to the United States, but I remember telling him [a man who worked for her family and wanted to go to the USA to work] 'I don't think it is going to be all that easy.' 'Oh, yes, I am going north and I am going to work very hard and buy some land and buy a truck to come back. I have some friend who did that and bought this land for their mom, so I'm gonna go there.' Finally he went.

After a year he came back. He was working for my family again. I asked him how it was. Sadly he said, 'It was nothing like I expected. My friends told me how much money they were making and came back with the car and the big boom box. For me it was different. First of all from the moment I tried to cross the border, they stole my money. Then we had to cross at night and be bitten by snakes. I saw people dying. Finally we make it to the other side. There were eleven or twelve of us sleeping in one little room. [Teresa got a sad look in her eyes as she related the rest of the story]. And then we had to work all day and all night to be able send some money to my family. The first time I tried to send it, a friend stole it from me. He told me I couldn't send it because I couldn't speak English, so he said to give it to him and he would send it. I finally started saving some money just to go back home. You know what; I don't want to go back any more.'

This isn't everyone's story. But my point is that the ones who have this kind of experience don't talk about it and the ones who do all right talk loudly. They don't tell the others how hard they have to work and how much they suffer. The ones at home just

see the big boom box or the car or the land and don't think ahead to how much they must sacrifice to get them. – Teresa, Executive, Papantla, Veracruz/McAllen, TX.

They come because they don't find work in Mexico. Second, the conception or idea of the migrant [from Mexico] is different from the migrant who is coming to the United States from other countries, like Viet Nam, Cambodia etc. Those people are saying goodbye forever to their countries. The Mexican is coming and he is thinking that one day he will go back with a big truck and nice clothes and money. Or he is thinking he will go back with a high university degree and increase his social class. But they are always thinking they will go back and see their country – because we are neighbors [laughs]. – Jose Luis V. Garza, Newspaperman, Hidalgo, TX/Reynosa, Tamaulipas.

I think that the government hasn't done the right thing to make the lower class people have more chances here. Not in giving them free things, but in offering or providing education, or opportunities to start a business, to tell them you don't have to go to the United States. – Jose Ibarola, Insurance Salesman, Morelia, Michoacán.

When one Méjicano lives in the US we feel that the birds sing in English. Everything is strange and even when people live in the US for years and years it is yet a strange land. You transport that and it is expressed more freely. If, for many people in the US some Méjicanos are admirable because of their capability to work, then we are more admirable when we are in our own land. With a feeling that we are free. But finally it is our own land and I would invite your readers to prove that the Méjicanos you see in the US are only 10% and the rest are here with their families. I mean in the spirit of their families. The rest is here and they shouldn't judge the country only because of the illegal workers. – Luis Miguel López Alanís – Tour operator Morelia, Michoacán.

Corruption

We Mexicans all love our country, love our culture. But in certain ways we are hurting our country, too, if we act in certain ways. For example, you are familiar with the *mordida*, no?

[*Mordida is slang for small bribes paid to police or government officials to expedite things. Mordida literally means, "little bite."*]

Here [in the United States], you would never offer a policeman a bribe. You'd be in trouble if you did that. But over there [in Mexico], because it takes more time to do things the right way, you might offer a *mordida* if you are in a rush. For example, if you get a ticket, the police officer takes your driver's license. You are supposed to go to the

police station to pay the fine and get your license back. But the police officer might say, “But if you pay me right here, you can be on your way.”

Even though you don't want to help corruption, because that is corruption, you have to think how valuable is your time? Both sides are responsible. The police won't stop asking you for money if they know people will pay. But if the police are getting paid such low salaries, they will keep asking for more money. – Teresa Rodriguez, Executive, McAllen, TX.

What we need, I think, is changes in the structure of the society and the government. There is still much corruption in Mexico. For example we have corruption in many sectors of the economy. This is a society with many factors. We have much potential. – Jose Ibarola, Insurance Salesman, Morelia, Michoacán.

Police are changing. We used to be able to pay a *mordida* (bribe) and get away with most small infractions, for example in driving. I was stopped by a cop in Mexico City not too long ago and he made it clear that I could not get out of my ticket. There were cameras to record the event. I have mixed feelings about this. While the old way was easier in some ways, there are fewer chances of a cop stopping you just to shake you down. Paying a fine when you did something wrong is often cheaper than the bribe would have been. I paid the fine at a bank and it was all over. – Victor Manuel Urbieto Garcia, Insurance Executive, Tijuana, Baja California

Begging

I know the people who beg for money here in town, I know where they come from. I know their villages. I have been to their villages and I ask why people beg and they say they're too lazy to work. They have a piece of land that they got the government payment to work it [a program called] *comunidad*. They have their piece of land but they won't work it. They'd rather come downtown and beg for money to live on because they believe they make more money begging than working their land.

I have talked to them. I say to them, “Hey, I have been to your village and I know you have a nice piece of land.” They say, “Yes, but I make more money begging than working my land.” Rodolfo Jongitud Reyes, Philanthropist, Tamazunchale, San Luis Potosí.

I try to hire people to work for me- like cleaning the yard or other things- who need to work. I ask the people who are begging. They do not want to work. They say they make

more money begging. I ask really poor people in the villages. They tell me that they don't want to leave their villages. I think that if anyone wants to work, they can work. I think that some people are just lazy. That is strong, but that is the way I think. – Julieta Diaz, Cd. Valles, accountant, San Luis Potosí

Education

In Mexico (and the United States too) there are politicians in education positions. They are not educators. I understand that the people who are in education leadership need to understand about politics, but I don't think that the politicians should handle the education. – Jose Luis V. Garza, newspaperman, Hidalgo, TX/Reynosa. Tamaulipas.

I would rather raise children in Mexico. We have really good schools. But education in the rural areas is lacking. The 'Distance Learning' or *telescundaria* program is a very small project. It is not enough. – Gloria Estrada, physician, Guadalajara, Jalisco.

Children

It is more difficult to raise children in the United States; children are more independent. In Mexico, life is more tranquil in this aspect. There is more "liberation" of teenagers in the United States than in Mexico – liberation in sexual matters, for example. In Mexico there are brakes on this from the extended family.

A teacher still has respect in this society, more than in the United States. I have heard some terrible things about respect for teachers in the United States. A friend of mine went to California and he returned very surprised. He went to visit relatives who lived there. He visited a school and all the pupils were shouting at the teachers and principals. I don't know if that is the general society, but that is what he saw and it was in the Spanish sector. – Jose Ibarola, Insurance Salesman, Morelia, Michoacán.

Differences Between Mexican and Other Societies

There is more civility in society here – Antonio Prado, Teacher, Puebla.

In the middle-classes, we think that there are problems in the United States. We think that life there [if we lived there] would not be so easy, particularly in the beginning. – Jose Ibarola, Insurance Salesman, Morelia, Michoacán.

I think they [our children] realized Mexico is a country of great opportunities. One thing is that they felt welcomed; they felt at home right off the bat. The warmth and the friendliness of their peers, neighbors and it made it so much easier for them to integrate and they loved that [after living in the United States, Europe and Panama].

Tomás- Compare it with a New Yorker. Good at heart but not necessarily too polite. Also compared with their neighbors, Colombia and Cosa Rica, we are much more warm and friendlier. [CELIA – I THINK THIS QUOTE IS WRONG IN THE TEXT – “ ... which SHOULD BE CHANGED TO **we**”]

Anita- Whenever we came back we realized how much friendlier people are here, at least in their ways. It's not that they were bad, we liked the Panamanians very much, but you have to get used to their abruptness and their way of speaking. You call somewhere and you ask for someone, if you're lucky, they say '*un momento*'. Here they say, "*un momentito, por favor,*" you know, it's so much nicer here. You have to get used to that. They are so much more open and friendly here. - Anita and Tomas, owners of a holistic retreat, Jungapeo, Michoacán.

Families

The important thing is that time shared together is the most important. I'll give you the example of my family. My wife and I have gone thousands of times to the market. If I am not on a tour and I have the time, I stay with her. When we are home, we turn off the TV and we talk at the table. I have two children and the oldest is sixteen years old. He spends a lot of time with his friends, but it is time with his friends, not time on the computer. They go for walks a lot and climb mountains near Morelia, outdoor activities.

We live on a street where there is not much traffic, so it is safe for them to be outside with their friends. We know they are within a couple of blocks around the house. They have a lot of friends. They are not in their rooms; their time is spent in sharing with others. – Luis Miguel López Alanís – Tour operator Morelia, Michoacán.

The difference that I see is that the American family can live far apart and get together just on Thanksgiving Day or Christmas and they are still a family. But in Mexico family is always, always together. Even though they live in different towns, they get together and have lunch with the family. They are making phone calls every day. For example, my mother lives in Cuernavaca. I call her every day. My daughters are the only grandchildren

my father has, so every time we are on the computer with the web cam, so he can see them. We are more physically united than American families. – Roberto Vences, hotel executive, Cozumel, Quintana Roo.

I have a great relationship with my family. Every Monday all my family goes to my father's house to have lunch. But there are also people who don't see each other. If you live around good people, you are going to have good people around you. – Ciro Gonzalez, businessman, Cd. Victoria, Tamaulipas.

Would you put your parents into a nursing home?

It would be a disgrace. They would take it as an insult. The only people who go into a nursing home if there is not family. The one with the worst job will quit and take care of them. – Antonio Prado, school director, Puebla, Puebla.

In fact, I have family member with Alzheimer's. We don't put them in a special hospital or asylum [this word is used more commonly than nursing home or 'long-term care' facility, but means the same thing]. We just keep them with the family. – Roberto Vences, Sales Manager, Cozumel, Quintana Roo.

[She got really sad at the thought]. No, no, no, no, no. We would not do that. It is socially, at any level, it is a very bad thing that you take the father, mother, grandfather, grandmother to a nursing home. You are seen as a heartless person. You learn that you have to take care of your own, especially the elder ones. Because what you do to the elder ones, your children will do to you. It's not something you have to say, they just watch you. So if you take your father or mother to a nursing home, you will probably end up there yourself. – Patricia Jones Lopez, Art dealer, Oaxaca, Oaxaca.

How are people with disabilities treated?

Descapitado is the word I use. Yes, you [in the United States] respect them very well. We don't. We get these kinds of problems very much. Again, it is all about the values, the education. Maybe this guy doesn't have legs and has to walk five blocks to the hospital because somebody else parked right by the door. There are a lot of people like that. They don't care.

In the United States, there are special classes and schools for some of these kids, although many times we try to integrate them into regular classes. How is it done in Mexico?

There are some places where there are special schools, but, no, it is not like here. The family would take care of the child. – Gustavo Arenas, physician, Tampico, Tamaulipas.

I want to emphasize that Mexicans are always ready to assist someone who is disabled. It is amazing how when you need to go up some steps, two Mexicans come to help you and that attracts others. Soon, you are being carried up the steps by eight strong Mexicans and everyone is laughing and having a good time. They will also tell you that when you want to go down the steps they will be there to help you. When you are baptized in that kind of humanity it is extremely difficult to go anywhere else.

Although changes have been made in the past 42 years here in Mexico, there is still such a long way to go. I am amazed by the tenacity of the handicapped community in this country. They have to put up with so much and they have so little. Yet, they don't complain about their situation they just try to adapt to it and change that which they can change. – William L. Bussear, quadriplegic hotelier, Isla Aguada, Campeche.

In Mexico, not very long ago, they used to conceal them [the children]. You see the families of five or ten years ago, they started founding special schools for special children. You see that it is not something to be ashamed of anymore. The Catholic Church taught that having a child with a disability was punishment for some kind of sin, because somebody in the family, generations ago did something wrong. Now they know it is a genetic thing. We formed a lot of schools and everybody gives money for that. It is changing. – Patricia Jones Lopez, Art Dealer, Oaxaca, Oaxaca.

How do you think the economic downturn (2008 – 20??) will affect Mexicans?

We Mexicans are resilient people. We have learned to live on less, and if things change, it will not be hard for us to go back to living on less. We have our families to depend on. When Americans face an economic crisis, it seems to us that they face it individually. We see the news stories about individual families and how they lose their homes and their jobs. They don't know what to do. Mexicans in the same situations know that it is a time of retrenchment, a time of going back to our families, of helping others in our families.

We are more fortunate, because we are never alone. – Arnoldo, executive, Monterrey, NL.

People don't see the crisis until they get into the crisis. That is one of the problems Mexicans have. They don't see the future. They just see the next month. They work one day to the next day. The workers, if I give them one thousand pesos, they spend it. They don't save. That is one of the problems with our society. – Ciro Gonzalez, TV station owner, Cd. Victoria, Tamaulipas

The Drug War

The bad is that previous governments left us a very bad heritage. Instead of fighting crimes and drug dealers and all that, they made an underground deal with them. On the surface life looked peaceful, but for that illusion, the government gave them our country.

Now the new government has arrived with a mentality of not making deals with that kind of people. They think about fighting the drug dealers, but with some lack of intelligence or an adequate strategy to be able to fight the *narcotraficantes*. That is what I consider bad, like in other countries that have already had that experience, like Colombia. So it's going to take us maybe a whole decade of very expensive war and many deaths, many lives taken. But now there is no going back.

Something that has changed is that before, we maybe made an agreement with the drug dealers, that the drugs would not stay in Mexico. Unfortunately that is not the case today. Before, México had a lot of drug trafficking but not much drug use, because Mexico was only a road to get to the US. And now a lot of it stays here and the rest leaves, and now it is contaminating our children, our grandkids and all of our family. Now it is not just a fight that belongs to the government.

Now we as conscious citizens need to collaborate and fight this evil, because if we stay with our arms crossed, we will lose our kids and our country. So that's what I think is bad about México. – Miguel Angel, Contractor / Rancher, Muzquiz, Coahuila

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