

## **Chapter 24 – Dr. Mark Reeves Guidone – Cross Border Doctor El Paso/TX, Cd. Juárez, Chihuahua**

Dr. Mark Reeves Guidone graduated from medical school in Chihuahua and practices in Cd. Juárez, Chihuahua. He is married to a Mexican woman and lives in El Paso, Texas.

Mark and I met on the Internet. Gee that doesn't sound right. What I mean is that Mark contacted me because of an error (Surprise, surprise, I make mistakes and admit it freely) on one of my web pages. Since I was updating my book, *Live Better South of the Border in Mexico* at the time, Mark helped me with a lot of medical information in that book. We began to work together to develop a medical tourism business, where we provide quality care from Mexican physicians and hospitals for American citizens who can't afford our medical system. So far, it is a good thing Dr. Mark has not left his day job and I haven't had a real job to leave for years.

But we have actually helped a few people and made a few dollars. As I was to find out from my association with this physician in Mexico, it's not all about the money. But, here, let me let him tell you.

*Mark, could you tell a little about your history and your relationship with Mexico?*

My grandfather was Italian, a Harvard medical school graduate, painter, psychiatrist, and a Colonel in the US army when he retired. In 1956-78 he moved to Mexico and studied painting in San Miguel de Allende. He lived in Mexico City. My father owned an advertising agency in Manhattan, Reeves Advertising.

*Can you tell how you ended up in Mexico?*

I studied anthropology in New Hampshire at Franklin Pierce College. I ended up at a hospital in Peterborough, New Hampshire. Dr. Robert Bailey, an orthopedic surgeon at Monadnock [SPELLING CHECKED THIS IS CORRECT] Community Hospital took an interest in me and we became friends. He had been raised in Mexico because his mom had gone there for a divorce. He went to medical school in Mexico and became a surgeon. Back then you only had to present your papers and you were a physician. My friends were physicians. I had graduated as a physical anthropologist. "Why don't you just go to Mexico and start school tomorrow," Robert said to me one day. So I visited UNAM (*Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* in Mexico City), Chihuahua and Guadalajara medical schools. I came back. I did not think I could make it there, so I worked for another year in New Hampshire.

One day I got in my car. I chose Chihuahua because it was closer to the United States. Bailey's mother lived in the building and taught physicians English.

*What can you say about Mexican medical schools?*

I started medical school in 1978 in Chihuahua. At that time you had to go through five years of school, then intern/residency, then one year of social service. You work there for free and pay for medical school at the same time. Gringos paid more for their education. Mexican doctors have to take an English course. They use mostly the same books, printed in English, that American medical schools use.

Mexicans go to preparatory school that prepares them for medical school. More than 50% flunk out in the first year. Most Americans there never got a degree from Mexico. There are five top medical schools in Mexico: Chihuahua, UNAM, Guadalajara, Cd. Juarez and Monterrey.

*I know from my own experience of being treated by Mexican physicians and having been hospitalized in Mexico that there are differences between the way medicine is practiced in Mexico versus the United States. You have practiced in both countries. From a physician's point of view, could you tell us what is different between the two countries?*

I practiced in USA in orthopedic surgery for ten years. I remember that there was another Mexican doctor who worked with me. We were physicians, but not licensed physicians. We worked under the American clinic owner's license. We saw about fifty patients each day between us. The American doctor who was the owner of the clinic only saw them so that he could sign the charts and let them go.

We called it "Maquila Medicine." It wasn't any fun. It was more like a factory job than practicing medicine. When the day was over, you still have three hours of dictation to do. It was not like my practice in Mexico. The physician who owned the clinic made 15 million (yep – I said 15 million) dollars a day and we made \$50,000-\$75,000 a year.

*So what would it be like if I saw you at your practice in Mexico today?*

I try to treat people like they are family.

In the USA you don't have the real doctor-patient bond like you do in Mexico. I do not think that is going to change.

We Mexican physicians spend more time with the patients. An office visit is just that. It is a visit. If you have ten patients waiting you might only give each twenty minutes. If not you spend as much time as it takes.

In the USA a doctor has at least five people working for him. In Mexico you don't. You do all the work.

All the good doctors are concentrated in the cities. In the USA doctors are paid (by insurance companies) based on where they live. Thus a doctor can make thirty to forty percent less if he lives in a smaller town in either country.

*Is there a glut of doctors?*

In a sense. There are too many doctors in the big cities, because the doctors concentrate in the cities, just like in the USA. There are no doctors in the middle of nowhere. Patients have a choice. People are going to get an appointment quickly and see a specialist and for a reasonable amount of money, probably one third to half of USA prices.

*Cd. Juárez is known as a city with lots of murders and drug violence. Do you have any fears about working there?*

No, not at all. 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.

*Is there more prevalence of alcohol abuse in Mexico?*

Yes, I think there is. In Mexican society, any type of party is fueled by booze and beer. It is a part of everyday life. Basically the poorer buy booze as a social thing. They probably spend more on alcohol and drugs per percentage of their income than the same classes in the USA.

Drugs are creeping into the society. When I first went to Mexico if you smoked marijuana it was looked down upon. If you were part of middle or upper middle. It was attributed to bums or street people, *marijuano*.

*Do you feel that the middle class was growing?*

In my opinion, it is growing at least in Cd. Juárez and Chihuahua. This is what I see. I see my wife's brother and sisters. All their children are going to college. University is a pretty big step. If you are in University you are going to have a good crack at a good job. I have not seen salaries decline. People I know are lawyers, doctors, cattlemen, and own restaurants. They seem to me to be getting along and trying to plan the next step and make sure things will be all right. They invest in things that are tangible. Cattle. Trucks. Land. Mexicans are more likely to invest in tangibles than the *Bolsa* (stock market). I don't know anybody who talks about the stock market.

I don't think that the investing in tangibles will affect the downturn. What matters is that the peso has declined. The El Paso economy is driven by Chihuahua.

*On the US side of the border, there are more computer stores than the local population could support, obviously catering to the Mexican shopper. Why? Aren't computers made in Mexico?*

Yes, Mexico does manufacture computers now, but they are for export, it's the same story with cars. So the modern technology isn't for sale in Mexico. When Mexicans buy computers in the USA to bring back to Mexico, they are allowed \$250 per person duty free. So a car with five people in it has a \$1,250 exemption.

*Some have talked of the brain drain or Mexicans with advanced degrees working outside of Mexico. Is this a reality?*

I speak with knowledge of my wife's family and mine. There are over one thousand of us in the extended family, starting with nine brothers and sisters each, spread across both the USA and Mexico. I saw an entire town in Mexico where the economy died, near Cd. Cuauhtémoc, Chihuahua. The entire town was relocated to Kansas. The successful Mexicans would have made it anywhere in the world. That's why they built the trucking companies.

The town I'm talking about was a poor, small town. Its name is *Terreraro* and it has a sister town *Namiquipa*. I still have a brother and sister in law that run the main store in the town but my niece moved to Kansas and she has told me that her town is filled with people who came from *Terreraro*. They are outside, on the road that heads toward "Madera".

The trucking company is part of the cattle importation. Initially my brother-in-law had a Mexican cattle trucking company but he, as so many others have noted, the chance to do well economically is far superior on the American side. He, my brother-in-law, began from scratch a cattle transportation company about two years ago with one truck, one driver and a trailer for the cattle. They now have four trucks and trailers as well as a feed lot on the Mexican side to fatten the cattle before they are imported and they now have the trucks to take the cattle where ever they need to go in the USA.

*What about those who say they hit a glass ceiling here because of not having family connections?*

It's all about your contacts. It's all about who you know. If your family is middle class or upper middle class, you meet people; you get jobs based on those factors.

*Do you consider Mexican fatalistic?*

Mexicans are fatalistic and optimistic. They care about things that really matter and not the superficial things that Americans do.

*Any last thoughts?*

We (in the USA) are the only country in the world that is proud of being monolingual. Mexicans really are our neighbors and we should learn to deal with them.

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