

The Middle of Nowhere
2/25/09
Barbara L. George

It took me 40 years to understand that ‘the middle of nowhere’ is always ‘somewhere’, often the ‘onlywhere’, to somebody. Having grown up in suburbia in the 60s and 70s, the ‘roadtrip’ is lodged in my psyche. Related to that was an attitude about all those little towns, burgs, farmhouses, etc. that we blew by on those roadtrips: How could ANYone stand to LIVE there? These places always seemed so boring, two-dimensional, colorless, and lacking in motion/action. The boonies, we called it.

BUT, there I sat gazing out the window of a bus, in motion, on a real roadtrip, going to my onlywhere: HOME. I had a sudden flash. David Byrne singing, “Well--- How did I get here?” Then, you know those satellite shots where you control the zoom level? First shot: Earth from space. Second shot: the Western Hemisphere. Third shot: Central America. Next: Honduras. Next: the western ‘departamentos’. Next: the stretch including our departing town, my burg, and the road in between. Next: the bus in motion. Last: me, scrunched up against the window at the back. A chuckle.

There I was on the only and only bus as it wended its way along on the 3-hour journey from the nearest ‘real’ town on the alternately rutted and bumpy (I’m talking 4-wheeling kind) or mudswamped single-lane track that dead-ended right in front of my little casita in the middle of ‘my’ pueblito, Dolores, Intibuca. To no more than a cluster of houses really, no electricity, no phone, plumbing at the level of a hole and gravity—but we DID have telegraph! (yes, the single wire tracked along that road all the way, a message took 4 days to be delivered), wood stoves (my propane tank-powered 2-burner

was quite the novelty compared to the typical wood-burning and smoke broadcasting fogon), spotty radio reception (best from El Salvador), adobe houses with clay-tile roofs (that leaked!!), dirt floors most common (again, my cement floor was high-class).

Me on the bus, crammed shoulder to shoulder with Hondurans of all ages. Mixed in with stacked sacks of fertilizer, cement, seed; with stuffed bags of market purchases for the week, month, or season. The occasional dribble of urine onto my leg from the baby on the lap next to me (because the mom tended to lift the baby and hold him/her out in front of her when she noticed the peeing), and we're not talking Pampers anywhere nearby). Ranchera music blaring out of bad speakers, windows open to the wind and the rain and the dust.

I felt so alive, present, real, and at home there—in the middle of nowhere! As if I was living my most conscious life. Time slowed, sped up, suspended, bending, dripping, folding back on itself—I could literally pass an entire day scanning from my hammock perch watching for ANY motion and maybe perceive five instances in the entire time. Thought uncoupled from sequence, became nonlinear. Continuous altered state of consciousness. All senses honed—the usual five, plus that magical thing we called “Peace Corps synchronicity”. Think it and it would happen—or you'd find out later that it already had! This experience was my best lesson in quantum physics. And those events, Dona Fulana walking down the hill, a dog loping by, that damned rooster strutting up—the one that ‘liked’ to crow at my window at 2 a.m. (yes, I learned that roosters will crow whenever they damned well please, not just a daybreak)—would fill me up. They would actually be sufficient in meeting my need for mental stimulation for days on end. Nothing boring, colorless, or two-dimensional about it.

The irony. Me--United State citizen/gringa (the only one for miles and miles), absurdly highly educated in formal terms (and exactly how far did that get me in a setting like that??), “rich” (by default), high-achiever, professional, urban by that point, with all my teeth, in good health, tall (relative)-- In the midst of my tour as a Peace Corps Volunteer, happily, contentedly, serenely, going HOME, leading my life, in living color, 3-dimensional—yet decidedly ‘in the middle of nowhere’ in the minds of some huge percentage of Americans (I should say NORTH Americans or United States-ians).

This middle of nowhere was stunningly, ruggedly beautiful. That could be said of the people as well. Skin, hair, eyes, no need for the gym. Grace and graciousness that put us (U.S.) to shame. On a daily basis, I’d imagine a Hollywood agent being plunked down here ‘in the middle of nowhere’ and having a field day. Every other young male passing through my line of sight could be the next ‘You Fill In The Blank’ [Okay, clearly it was a different story for the females, that saying that you lose one tooth for every child? Yep. Their bodies undeniably paid the price of back-to-back pregnancies from what would be our mid-adolescence on until...menopause}. But for the males, all it would take would be a different haircut, maybe a few new teeth, a wardrobe consultant. And-discovered! Yet, that has been the history of the place ever since we (European-types) ‘discovered’ this part of the world and its people—to the degradation of both. Their world and sense of self. Our soul.