

Mike'l Delfon Gregory
Puebla Immersion Trip Journals
March 2019

A Weeks Memories

Journal 1: Monday

"Many people doing important little actions makes big impact." — Woman from Community Shelter

Hitting the ground running, the Puebla team successfully completed their first day at the migrant shelter. Students participated in the set up for 100+ guests to come in and be welcomed by the volunteer group. Unfortunately after the break down of classroom and social spaces and set up for dorming, the team and other volunteers were informed that migrants decided to continue the journey as they still had sufficient time before sundown. Although it seemed like it was a waste of time, the Puebla team enjoyed every moment as they had the opportunity to learn the history of the shelter and some of the remarkable people in it. The shelter is a group of unpaid volunteers who stop their day jobs at call to break down and set up a somewhat comfortable space for guests. "It was so powerful to see working people take off work at any given moment to come and set this shelter up" - Mike'l Gregory These selfless acts are what keeps the community afloat but also furthers the support needed.

Journal 2: Tuesday

"The power of hearing one's narrative straight from their mouths beats any TV show or podcast" — Mike'l D. Gregory

Casa Ibero, a community center for the locals of Puebla exposed the USF Puebla team to what a community that stands together can create. After spending a full day with the team, it became apparent that smaller communities within Puebla have been subject to territorial segregation, denied access to clean water, marginalized, and left to fin on little resources. However, the resilience in this community exemplified the Maya Angelou poem: Still I rise.

Casa Ibero exposes the community to self irrigation methods, how to read and write, the process in creating traditional herb medicines, how to make traditional meals, even a woman's group that cultivates woman leadership through food and dance.

Students split into groups and learned some of the many traditional dishes and upon finish, they all dined together. “The meal was not only healthy but truly fostered a sense of relationship between the students and the community. We shared laughs, stories, asked questions, ultimately enjoyed each other’s company.” — Mike’l D. Gregory. Being able to commune for a full day developed relationships which was the initial goal of the trip. Days as such are the main recommended.

Journal 3: Wednesday

“Keep the Faith. The most amazing things in life tend to happen right at the moment you’re about to give up hope” — Unknown

About 8 years ago 4 foot cement blocks were added on both sides of railroad tracks to prevent people from jumping on and off trains. In order for people to reach the border, trains become their main means of passage. The addition of these blocks have increased this already deadly voyage to an even more fatal experience. The Puebla immersion team visited a shelter which hosted migrants providing them with necessary care to continue on the journey such as food, water, clothing, psychological care and more. The shelter is about 50 feet from the railroad track. Seemingly accessible the cement blocks cause injury that heightens the shelters skills. Many come in with broken feet, fractured bones, even open wounds from the jump.

To make things worse, cement blocks aren’t the only obstacle — other voyagers are as well. This trip to a better life comes at the cost of one’s own life. Train riders push sometimes even shoot others on the basis of whether they like you or not - this is a true fight for survival. If only our government leaders understood the voyage and the impact this journey has on the people - I’m sure things would be different.

The Puebla team partook in conversation with several gentlemen that explained their stories and showcased their scars as a reminder of what they endure for the American Dream. The team had the opportunity to experience the challenging stories of leaving their families behind, how men had to left their children dead to continue the journey, even a story that brought many to tears on how one man was betrayed by a group he was close to too who shot him in the lung resulting in his lung collapsing.

Some may ask why continue? Surprisingly enough this journey is far less dangerous compared to their homes. Many come from places like Guadalajara and Honduras which are heavily impacted with violence. If nations stop judging and approach foreigners with a desire to understand, mindsets and systems could change.

Journal 4: Thursday

“Home is where the heart is” — Unknown

The Puebla team had the opportunity to meet a gentlemen who migrated to the US and soon came back and you'll be shocked as to why. No deportation but his own free will. In keeping this gentleman's personal information enclosed, he will be referred to as X. X migrated from a small town just outside of Puebla, called Cholula to seek the American Dream. X found himself in South Philadelphia surrounded by family and friends who migrated before him. His experience was typical, he migrated found work and began to enjoy his new life. It wasn't until 2 years and 4 months later that he realized this idea of the American Dream wasn't for him.

X realized that he could be making more of an impact to his community by being there showing them it was better to stay than to leave - especially because his heart was where the majority of his family was. This sudden change of thought came into play as a result of seeing the hardship of attaining a job and being satisfied in it. Although he enjoyed his job in the restaurant business, which is fairly popular for immigrants in South Philadelphia, it was missing the aspect of community uplift. Yes the money was good but he knew he was missing out on the valuable parts of his community: the events in which they shared.

X quickly packed his bags and returned home: Puebla, Mexico. In asking X about the transition back, he quickly responded with gladness that he is now able to be back with his family and show them that life here is just as good and that migration is unnecessary. He now works in a family owned restaurant that specializes in the production of maize in its traditional sense. Dishes range from tostada's to ice cream all made from their special maize's (azul maize y blanco maize).

Journal 5: Friday

“Endings only mean another beginning” — Unknown

This past week the Puebla immersion team have immersed themselves in a variety of native Mexican culture. From food, culture, even dance. This time has been spent wisely, seeking to understand migration challenges while hearing the heart wrenching stories directly from the source. Many tears were shed but a great understanding is being taken back to the USF community. “I am so grateful for this experience as it has made it real, aside from what's on the media that these people face” — Chy'enne

Their last day has been full of reflection especially on what's next in making sure USF students are aware and promoting change to create a better community presence in the help of these migrants.

Identity created both an uplift and detriment as this immersion trip advanced for the students. There is a constant battle between both selves as to who they are. Student deeply reflected on this and shed tears amongst one another. Humans are complex and filled with many pieces that sometimes can't trace an origin. As the USF Puebla immersion team heads back they take this constant battle with them but with a new tool, exploration. Students plan to not only explore their place in the world without excuses but also use that exploration to create a small change for the betterment of American society.

The journey to the complete self is never easy, in fact bumpy, messy and sometimes discouraging but in tackling this challenge head on with the belief that you can still make a difference in the process is what these students seek to do.

Personal Reflection:

“Life is never easy but it can be more manageable if one allows challenging events to occur without giving into the emotions that arise.”

A better sense of the journey upward from both Central America and parts of Mexico has been gained. Every stereotype, negative connotation, and uninformed opinion towards immigrants has been broken. To be in the presence of migrants and visually be exposed to the jumping on and off trains has impacted me in ways that are unexplainable. The power of these peoples stories are unimaginable. We are exposed to this picture in the media that migrants are only here to steal, kill, and destroy when in reality they come by force as a result of USA impact on their communities.

Violence in these countries are one of the primary reasons as to why citizens leave. Drug cartels force men, women and children to leave the comfort of their daily lives to be workers or choose death. This week I saw the pain and trauma in which they are enduring.

We can no longer neglect what they are going through, it's killing them and in turn affects us. We are humans first, above all and we need to remember that as other humans.

In order for us to create a more uplifting and better environment for these people as it is our human duty, we must help. Not in a large way but in one's given capacity. As a result of my experience I'm starting with me: my perceptions, the things I say, the things I allow others to say around me, but also in spreading awareness of the experiences I lived during this past week.

It's easy for me to think on the grand scheme and of huge ways to spark change but I'm starting with the most challenging and essential part — me. If we can all start with us and our thoughts that's enough to begin a radical work. I believe that if we as a community participate in this, we could be unstoppable.