

August 2011

Culture Shock in Southern Texas

We had been making our way south from Upstate New York where the weather had been nearly perfect; a lush layer of green covered every rolling hill and rippling lakes reflected blue skies. At one point during the longest leg of our drive Sarah and I sat in the dark parking lot of a gas station. I had just tanked up and got back in the driver's seat with a steaming extra tall cup of gas station coffee in my hand. My reddened eyes turned to the clock- it read 3 AM. My eyes turned to my very pregnant wife who was sitting in an awkward half-sitting half on her side position. Her eyes were open and she was looking at me. As we stared into one another's eyes a reddish-orange glow pulled our gaze toward a motel. Its flickering sign beckoned us... I think I may have even seen pillows dancing in the lobby. I didn't need to ask Sarah what she was thinking, we both knew. We sat for a moment in silent contemplation. Much like Christian, who was tempted to sleep at the Pleasant Arbor on his journey to the Celestial City, we too were on a sacred journey facing our moment of greatest temptation. Finally I asked, "Do you want to keep going?"

Many of you were praying for this trip back to Language School. Thank you so much. It was clear to us that the Lord's hand of protection was on us. As we pressed on and the sun began to rise behind us, the landscape had changed from lush green to a parched brown. Grass looked more like straw and sparse trees seldom reached above the roof tops; we were passing into Texas which has faced one of its driest years ever. When we stopped again and stepped out of the vehicle the heat radiating off of the pavement dried our skin. We bought a bag of ice to fill the kids travel mugs but didn't dare put them down on the pavement for fear they would melt. Later, after a pleasant visit with my Aunt in Austin, we pressed on until we finally made it to the southernmost point of the continuous 48 states. We had spent over 40 hours driving and if we continued just 10 minutes more we would be in Mexico! It was dinner time when we arrived and decided it would be easiest to grab dinner at McDonalds (our children have grown to love Happy Meals since our Home Assignment).



We knew we were a long way from New York but the realization that we were back in a different culture hit us as we stepped into that restaurant. The first indication was the sprawling 3 story play place- the Latinos know how to keep their kids entertained! As we searched for a table I noticed that many, if not most of the people, were speaking Spanish. When we sat down, Sarah's eyes locked into mine- this time they were wide and intense. In a hushed but clearly stressed voice Sarah said, "*Why is EVERYONE staring at us!?!?*" I wanted to dismiss this comment as over-reactive but sure enough as I casually looked around everyone really did have their eyes on our family and my wife looked like she wanted to climb into one of the plastic tube-slides to hide (which would have been impressive to see at 9 months pregnant). As we ate our meal and our kids played with the Mexican children I realized that people were not only staring at us- they were smiling at us! There was a look of deep endearment in their eyes.



Days later as Spanish classes were beginning, Sarah and I asked one of my professors why the Mexicans at McDonalds acted so differently from what we were used to. He reminded us that in the Latin culture staring at someone is a way to show appreciation. They will also touch that person's hair or face and this is viewed as normal coming from strangers in public settings. I recalled at least one young woman at McDonalds who I think wanted to touch Silas's blond head but could detect enough of our discomfort to refrain. Experiences such as these serve as good reminders that even though we may still be in the U.S., we have left our culture and are preparing to serve a people with different customs and a different language. While entering into another person's world can be quite uncomfortable, and sometimes downright painful, we have begun to recognize the many beautiful qualities of the Latin culture and are glad the Lord has called us to step outside of our own.

Being a Student Again

During the first week of orientation for Language School, we were informed that the school uses an immersion approach to teaching. We all sat there perhaps somewhat like new recruits in the military completely oblivious to what we were about to be subjected to. Now that we are two weeks into classes I have a better idea of what an immersion approach looks like and perhaps the watery background on their logo should have served as a warning. Think of being tossed under a waterfall and told to keep your head above water for about five months. But of course instead of a torrent of water coming at you it's Spanish grammar, conversation, and phonetics. Do you know how many definite articles we have in the English language? One; it's the word 'the'. Do you know how many different kinds of 'the' there are in Spanish? Four! Depending on gender and plurality you have one of four different possibilities. And don't even get me started on pronouns! Seven different kinds of direct object pronouns, five different kinds of indirect object pronouns, and let's not forget the delightful reflexive pronouns. There is even a special way to speak about unplanned occurrences involving inanimate objects in Spanish. Are you getting a sense of the waterfall?



My colleagues and I may be in doggie paddle mode but truthfully it's a great feeling. It's good to be back in classes and learning new things about Spanish. Sarah and I are in a bit of a privileged position in that we have already spent years struggling in Spanish and Guarani in Paraguay. We have come to RGBI knowing we can communicate on a basic level in this language. However, we have all kinds of questions about expressing ourselves on a deeper level. For example, the subjunctive tense is rarely used in English but widely used in Spanish- *especially in prayer and Scripture*. I have prayed in settings where there is great spiritual need and experienced that yearning to be able to express myself better before the Lord and my Latin brothers and sisters in Christ! Even if we come out sputtering several months from now, I know the waterfall will have equipped us to better serve in Paraguay.



It's Almost Time for Hough Five!

As mommy's tummy has been getting bigger our family of six has been preparing to grow too. Our van looks different; Sammie has been bumped back into the third row of seats with her brothers and an empty infant car seat now sets where she used to be. Its very presence represents the anticipation we are all feeling. Our apartment looks different; furniture has been shuffled to make room for a bassinet and Sarah's nesting has kicked into high gear since we've returned to Texas.

It was very hard for her to leave New York where family

and close friends had just had babies. Sarah feels sad that these people won't be able to share in the birth of our fifth child. But then her dear friend Vonni completely surprised her with a baby shower. Women from the Language School and a few from the Seminary rallied together overwhelming us with gifts and loving support. I really don't think we could be better provided for. We've had both our Latin and American neighbors offer us any services at any hour that we might need them.



Shortly before we left New York, Sarah's sister, Jessi, took some amazing pregnancy pictures of her. She is a really gifted photographer although I don't see how you can go wrong with a subject like that (*ique caliente!*). If you're interested in seeing more of Jessi's photos and reading Sarah's account of the baby shower check out the recent posts on our blog: houghslife.blogspot.com.



Praise God...

- For safe travels back to Language School in Texas.
- For a great start to Spanish studies for Dan.
- For a healthy pregnancy for Sarah and baby so far.

Please Pray...

- That we would lay the best foundation possible during these following months as we learn Spanish and about the Latin Culture.
- For the Lord's abundant provision and protection for Sarah and baby as she could go into labor at any time now!

Your Missionaries to Paraguay,

The Hough Family

Daniel & Sarah, Elijah, Tobin, Samantha & Silas
"Discipling youth where teachers are few for the glory of God"

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