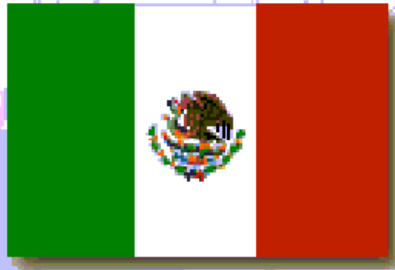


Dear friends,

These days I am reviving all our exciting adventures during the 12 months family-trip to North America in 1997/98.

In my Spanish class we have this autumn been reading a book written by a Danish teacher, who made a visit to Mexico some 10 years ago. She found an interesting spot called Playa Ventanilla and wrote about the widow Hilario and his daughter Eufemia. Hilario made a living from climbing the palm trees and picking coconuts, which he sold in the nearby village at 0,50 kroner = less than a dime each. He lived in the simple campesino manner and even had enough to pay for Eufemias lodging in the nearest town, where she was studying at a commercial school – her favourite class was typewriting...



Playa Ventanilla is a remote area on the Pacific Coast about 300 km south of Acapulco, and we happened to stay 3 weeks in exactly that vicinity. That puts life into the grinding homework and gives some extra strength to continue the attempts to learn some of the incredibly complicated system of Spanish verbs. It also gave me the honour of being nominated to do the entertainment at our Christmas class – which quickly was extended to include also the supervision of the cooking of tortillas and all the more or less hot Mexican accessories.

As our photos from the trip are all on paper, I have chosen to scan the selected photos into the Power Point presentation program, copy the file on a CD and then just insert it into the computer on the school, where they have a projector blowing the pictures onto the wall. It was my first try with Power Point, and gradually I found out about some of the many features possible. I have f. i. recorded original Mexican music to be played with the pictures from the carnival in Mérida, from the discothèque in San Blas and the band playing at a very ingenious market in the highlands.

Back to the future we are enjoying life in the forest

now that the house is finished. Benthe is still working in the local Grundfos pump company, although 'her' department where they make electrical motors has been moved to a new factory in Hungary, where wages are one fifth of the Danish level. They are still producing a buffer stock here, but early next spring the equipment will be finally dismantled and she is going to make a round in the factory with 5.000 employees to find her new favourite job.

Camilla is now doing practical work in her social welfare education and presently working at the local nursing home. It is hard work because the general national policy is to support as many people as possible to remain in their homes, so that only the very weak and retarded persons have a chance to be accommodated at a nursing home. At present she is not quite sure if she wants to follow this line of work, but at least she will complete the first grade by June next year. Camilla now has a steady boyfriend, who actually was and still is her salsa-dancing teacher.

Anja started on the same education last August and has now reached the childcare part. The first day from the practice in a local kindergarten she came home and stated that she would definitely not be a nursery teacher. Gradually she has realized however that they also do a difficult job in trying to cope with all the more and (mainly) less well-mannered kids. She is still sticking to her long time wish of becoming a physiotherapist.

We have also done a bit of travelling this year. It started in February, when I was in Thailand for 3 weeks. For a resident in this climate February is just the right time to travel to the tropics.



Søren on an elephant back in the remote jungle of UmPhang near the Burmese border

My imagination was just about running away with me when I was sitting here looking up maps with The Golden Triangle, remote settlements inhabited by ex-soldiers from the KMT army loosing the battle against Mao, the Burmese border points, the Mekong river – all of it names which made my fantasy go wild.

It was a fine trip with the highlight being a 4 days jungle trek with bamboo rafting, elephant ride and I even visited a very remote village without electricity and TV!

After the trek I continued by local transport, which usually was in the back of a pick-up truck, up north along the Burmese border to the northern tip of Thailand where the Thai, Burmese and Laotian borders meet in the so-called Golden Triangle. I did not see any narcotics and some villages, which were said to be old poppy-centers, were now growing tea and strawberries, which were abundant on the local markets.

When I crossed into Burma for one day it was obvious that even the remote Thai village border town appeared wealthy compared to the poverty at the other side. Being close to the Mekong River I found an old riverboat, which in 2 days took me into Laos where I stayed in a very small and very primitive village on the riverbank at the edge of the jungle before continuing to the capital Vientiane.

In July Anja and I took a plane to Istanbul and spent 2 weeks touring Turkey. You have already received our account of that trip.



Anja in front of the Trojan Horse

After having visited Troy, where Homer wrote his "Iliad", I have now ordered the new re-creation of that famous book by the Danish author Bent Haller. I hope it is better than the replica of the wooden Trojan Horse.

Benthe had chosen to take her vacation in August, and our good friend Mogens had lent us the keys to his house in Malaga, Spain, as well as his car parked in the airport. That definitely extended the summer because we came just at the height of a record-breaking heat wave. Unlike our usual habit we had to stay put a lot in the shadow on the balcony, which however was not so bad as long as the fridge could cope with cooling the drinks - and we could not get enough of the wonderful view.



View from Mogens' balcony

We took the opportunity to make a trip south through the so-called Costa del Golf area, which still does not attract us, to the port from where the ferries go to Morocco. We choose the MS Casablanca, which took us to Tanger – the old centre for smuggling and many other shady transactions. We went straight into the old medina with its narrow winding alleys, leaning clay buildings and colourful markets reeking of atmosphere. We stayed at a very local hotel in the middle of all this, and at 5 o'clock the following morning I woke up to heavy drumming which I firstly mistook for a military coup or maybe a prelude to a hanging. When eventually I found a way out of the hotel it appeared to be a wedding party accompanying the couple to their new home, supported by 3 groups of musicians and dancers which made it quite an event to witness with the early rays of sunshine just hitting the top of the white houses.

In November I had an assignment to make a market report about Austria. I found out that it

was much cheaper to take a weekend flight than do my normal driving (nearly 2.000 km), and thus I had a long-time wish come true: To spend a weekend in Vienna and go to the theatres. On the first night I saw the Don Giovanni opera and later during the week I went to the Schönbrunn Castle Orangerie, where Mozart is said to have been playing for the Emperor. That was a real tourist program with all the best of Mozart and Strauss along with dancers and singers.

One week earlier I attended for the first time an opera (Il Barbiere di Sevilia) in the local Århus House of Music. I like to hear classical music and opera on my CD player, while reading or working, but must admit that I am still not so hooked on it that I can keep my interest fixed on a live performance for some hours. I did not exactly fall asleep but simply cannot concentrate myself when sitting inactive in a concert hall.

Otherwise I am also a bit occupied by political activities since I became the chairman of the local club. Next year we have local elections and naturally we hope to increase our influence in the county and city councils. However it is not easy to make people run for such non-paying positions, as everybody already has too much to do.

Fortunately some change their minds when they get a taste of the influence, which could become the result. Although I am very interested in political questions I do not want to run myself, as the political process is far too complicated for me, especially at the local level with more and more decisions being taken by the national or European parliaments leaving us only tons of paper, administration and petty decisions.

In the daily life I still am visiting my 87 years old mother every day - she is living only 5 minutes from here - and Anja and Camilla is living in the first floor of her house so I see them regularly too. Otherwise they are frequent weekend guests when we cook some good food and they can do their laundry. My



My mother

mother can still walk to the local grocery and do her shopping, but occasionally she likes me to take her to the centre to see the bigger shops and look at the life in the walking street.

My other daily must-do is the morning jogging. Even now during the winter when it is cold and still gloomy outside I usually do not have



My office with the corner windows overlooking the forest and the feedingsite for the birds and animals.

difficulties getting out of the warm bed and then taking my round in the forest. The major reason is that it is a fantastic way to really wake up and get a lot of energy for the day.

Although it is now a daily habit I still remember to look up at the forest, the animals and to enjoy the quiet fresh air. It is a blessing to live in such surroundings and to have the good health enabling me to continue an active life.

We hope that you are also sound and healthy and wish you all the best

Søren Padkjær

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