

Dangerous, Exciting Adventure

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Course: English 101

Instructor: Denelle Cowart

Essay Type: Descriptive

I had just smuggled contraband into Reynosa, Mexico. That was one of the most dangerous experiences of my life. My friends and I were returning north on Hwy. 281 in two vans. We were gridlocked in traffic, bumper to bumper. My mind raced with thoughts of impending doom. Would the border patrol remember our vans from our southward trip hours ago? Could they determine that our vans were several hundred pounds lighter now? I was sitting in the passenger seat as my heart pounded through my yellow, crinkled, gauze shirt.

Walking toward us, several American officers visually inspected the underbelly of vehicles with telescoping mirrors in an effort to combat the cross-border movement of illegal goods. Little did they know that we had just unloaded our stash a few miles back and were now headed back home empty-handed.

At the guard shack, we were asked for our identification. The guard looked suspiciously at us and began to ask questions. Most of his attention was focused on my Guatemalan friends who had gone with us as interpreters; he checked their identification, passports, and working visas. He reviewed the items for several minutes.

After what seemed like an eternity, the guard directed us to a fenced in area and told us to get out of the vehicle. As I sat on a bench nearby, I wondered why we were being detained. How could I have let my friends talk me into taking a trip with them? I tried to reason it out. I knew that they had friends in Mexico who they hadn't seen in a while and that they needed to bring them some "stuff" I remembered that they generally went to Mexico once or twice a year. Then it

hit me. It was Easter break. I decided to venture out and go with them, let my hair down, have a little fun, and do something exciting for a change. Look where it got me!

While the U.S. Border Control passed my van through a Large Vehicle Bomb Detection System, I thought about the day's events. It had begun early that morning, around 6 a.m. I had arrived at my friends' house to find that they were still packing. They had taken the middle seat out of their van, and by placing a blanket and pillow across packages that were stacked a certain way, they made that area look like a bed. One friend asked if she could put a few packages in my van because they didn't have enough room in theirs. I asked her why she was hiding the packages because, until that point, I did not understand the magnitude of what I was about to help them do. She explained that the Mexican police do not want Americans bringing anything except immediate necessities into Mexico. She assured me it wasn't a big deal and told me not to worry.

I followed my friends from Mission, Texas, across the border into Mexico. As we traveled on the bumpy dirt road, I saw shacks, abandoned buses, dilapidated campers, and run-down manufactured homes. Many homes were self-built using sub-standard, recycled materials. There was no running water, no sewer systems, no storm drainage, and no paved roads. Some communities did not even have electricity. When we made it to our destination, we visited for a while and then unloaded and distributed the packages. Then we headed north on our way back home to the U.S., only to get detained.

We were finally released to go. I thanked God because that was a close one! I thought they had something on us. After we were several miles away from the border, I realized that although I do not intend on placing myself in a situation like that again, I'm glad I smuggled contraband into Mexico. One day I will have amazing stories to tell my grandchildren about how I smuggled pinto beans, rice, and everyday supplies to the poverty-stricken people in Mexico.

Dr. Cowart's Comments: *Michelle's assignment was to write a narrative essay about an experience which memorable in some way. Her essay is successful because it conveys this sense of danger very strongly. She gains the attention of the reader with the dramatic beginning: 'I had just smuggled contraband into Reynosa, Mexico.' She then builds tension by detailing the border patrol's unusual attention to the vehicle, and by holding back on the outcome of the border detention until she reaches the conclusion. Her use of detail and description is concrete and vivid and also contributes to the suspense, as in "my heart pounded through my yellow, crinkled, gauze shirt." I also like her use of flashback. Her essay demonstrates a level of skill not usually seen in the first assignment for a 101 class.*