

Cancun Journal #2: Wednesday, 8/27/03

"And I still have to write a daily update," I say mournfully at about 11:30 at night. Tim, bless his heart, doesn't say a word, just walks over and starts rubbing my back. Already in a day we've learned each others' sore spots. There are seven of us crowded around the table, deep in design work for our proposal to the city, clarifying the details of our conception of gray-water systems for sinks and showers, water flow and plumbing details, then drawing careful diagrams. Some of us are drawing and some are looking up words in the Spanish/English dictionary. "How do you say 'pipe'? 'Tubo' or 'Caño'?" "What's the best way to say 'Ecovillage'?" It's like being transported back to junior high school, working on some hellish homework project--design your entry for the science fair and translate it into Spanish. Spelling counts. Neatness counts. Or the Gryffindor common room at Hogwarts Cancun--"Is it 'SEH-milla?'" "No, 'Se MEE yah'"--if the pronunciation is off the spell won't work.

But progress is being made. We met this morning with a representative of the municipality, after a scramble to get our proposal printed up in Spanish, which involved one of those hellish complications of computers with no printers, and email connections that could only be made from phone lines to send things to other computers, and all of us exhausted, Mike trying to translate while he shaved and Juniper drew up schematic diagrams, Erik and I taking off for the Puente house to try to get on-line and getting stuck, unable to find a taxi. Just as I was about to have a frantic meltdown, a man drove up and offered us a ride downtown. He seemed to know why we were here and began talking about how the world is deeply out of balance. Thousands of people have died in France because of the heat wave and he believes the US is manipulating the weather in revenge for France not supporting the war in Iraq.

Just in time, we arrive at the Palacio Municipal who doesn't show up, but we dash off to the meeting. Juniper is already there, with the printed proposal. Cesar has come with us but

there is no one to translate. I take a deep breath, jump in, and start speaking Spanish. It's a bit like riding a bicycle--if you go as fast as possible you don't fall off. But what seems like fast to me is slow to everyone else.

Halfway through, Maria Elena arrives. She is a beautiful, dark-haired Mexican woman who lives in California and is working with the campesinos. Dolores, a photographer with UNORCA, the campesino organization, is with her and they are both dressed in traditional shirts and embroidered blouses and bright woven sashes. I pull out my photos of permaculture projects and compost toilets and beautiful, mosaic-rubble cob constructions and gardens. All the women in the room seem deeply interested, especially as I explain the rationale for the compost toilet, which is essentially a barrel with screening and seating. After each person makes their deposit, you add some dry material with a lot of carbon and when it is full, let it sit for a year or so and then use it for fertilizer. The woman from the city thinks it's a great solution for the countryside but wants us to talk to the minister of ecology and go do a program in an outlying community somewhere. But we explain that it is important for us to do this project at the camp.

"It's political," I say. "We want to show what we are for, not just what we are protesting against. And we need to do it in the center of the city, where it will be seen."

"Campesinos will be here from all over the country," Maria Elena supports us. "It will be like a school. Educational."

"And for the students and the internationals who will come, too." I add. "We want them to see the solutions."

In the end we have a tentative agreement--that they will set up their infrastructure of porta-potties and city water, etc., and we will set up a demonstration unit catching rainwater and re-using it for dishes and showers. We can set up a model compost toilet--as long as we don't actually use it. And we will get her a map and a complete description of what we want to do and a materials list immediately. Hence the homework project.

Progress is being made on other fronts as well. We have a convergence center and a media center, all on Margaritas street within a block of the Parque de Palapas. The landlord is still clearing out the convergence space, but we hope to get in on Thursday. It's a tall, three-story building that should provide spaces for meetings and trainings and art making. The puppetistas are already deep into a massive and impressive

replica of an ancient Mayan God and will move over tomorrow.
The media center is right next door.

At the end of the night, our household gathers in the front room for a short ritual. It's the new moon, and Mars is as close as he's been in sixty thousand years. We trance together, trying to look at the situation from below. The energies are powerful but really jangled--but they seem to smooth out as we share visions. We read the Tarot cards. The reading begins with the Devil--but the outcome is Justice.

-- *Starhawk*

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