

**Chava Hudson**

348 Rantoul, #304

Beverly, MA 01915

978-969-1910

[chava@chavahudsondesign.com](mailto:chava@chavahudsondesign.com)

Reprinted from the Beverly Citizen

**Gringo Blues**

After a long flight into Leon, Mexico, I pick up my baggage and clear customs, but my friend who's to pick me up is no where to be seen. Evidently he hadn't received my emailed flight updates, and although I'd managed to pack a 58 lb. Suitcase (which racked up an unexpected \$25 overweight fee at Logan), I'd somehow forgotten to pack his phone number. He is to drive my travel buddy and me the hour and a half to our casita in San Miguel de Allende, which we've rented for a month. He'd already picked up our keys from the realtor and everything was all set except that there was no sign of him. I would simply find someone to help me call information, get his number and call him. Ha!

The first twenty or so people I asked didn't speak English. Although I'd been diligently studying "*Spanish for Gringos*" from a CD in my car, it was hopeless. Finally I am directed to a young woman who speaks a little English, but doesn't understand the concept of "calling information." Ten people later and with a team translation effort, I am able to get the number with the help of a cashier in the airport shop. Finally ready to call, I realize that I don't know how to use the phones.

This part is more straightforward and much easier. Without knowing a word of English, a young Mexican man shows me how to buy a phone card with some pesos I'd luckily saved from last year. I have a proud moment when I read the phone number off to him in Spanish. He smiles with approval and dials. No one is home, but just as I hang up, my friend appears laughing at the scene.

In the hour that I spent trying to reach him, I've had an immersion experience. I remember that I must never assume that the rest of the world speaks English and how smug we Americans are, thinking that the rest of world is going to accommodate us by requiring English in school. Many countries do, but as I quickly learned, Mexico isn't one of them. How I wish I'd taken Spanish instead of my now practically forgotten French, and that it had been required, as now I think it should be. The next morning after downing some wonderful huevos rancheros, the first thing I do is enroll in a class in conversational Spanish at the Institutoto De Allende.

Besides learning to use a phone card in Mexico, I learn was how kind people in another culture can be to a stranger who needs help. I wonder if the situation was reversed and a lone, non-English speaking Mexican arrived at Logan, if he would have had ten or more strangers take the time to help him. The people here are sweet and the pace is slower. It is a place where people take time for each other. The experience gave me a new appreciation for my grandparents who arrived at Ellis Island in 1907 and the people who are still struggling with language in our country today.