**The Yucatan — What do I remember most?**

Racing across town in a taxi on our first night to find Mexico away from the tourists of Cancun. Mercado 28. Children and their parents out for an evening stroll. Musicians playing. A fine dinner in a family restaurant with every table filled.

Escape to a cool cabana under trees in Akumal, with tile floors and cement walls. Birds singing at dusk and dawn. Truly white beaches and talcum-like sand. Turquoise water and fish of all colors. A barricuda, a three-foot parrot fish, and small brilliant ones right out of someone’s aquarium. Laying in a hammock — swinging, drifting, nothing. Later, hot, hot, hot ceviche and cerveza at the beach bar.

Driving through jungle with nothing but two lanes of road and the density of forest. Then, big vultures above us in the trees — 20 or 30 of them. A toucan crossing ahead of us. Coming into a village, houses made of sticks and thatch, surrounded by rough rock walls to keep in a pig or goat. Then ruins. Crumbling stone. Hundreds of columns still standing. Strange images.

A night in Merida. Music on every street, in every bar and restaurant. From Mexico, sure — mariachi, marimba, folklorica, flamenco, salsa. But also from Peru, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay. And jazz, disco, blues and pop. Then, Fiesta Los Ninos. Hanging out with fifty kids in the plaza, who loved the zoom lens of our camera and Chuck’s dreads.

Attempts to talk with everyone we meet, engaging in conversation with our few words of Spanish and their better English. People from many places. Mexico City, Veracruz, Acapulco, Tabasco, Durango. And then the local Yucatan and Mayan residents with no Spanish and no English. So, sign language. And smiles.

Driving the northern coast road along the Gulf. Beautiful summer homes in the dunes for families from Merida. But no trees — all lost to Hurricane Gilbert. A stop in Progresso. Decimated houses with ugly jagged broken glass around the hacienda walls. Too many idle men, rough looking, drunk. No work. Then on to Dzilam Bravo, a fishing village with hundreds of birds flying overhead and nesting in the inland lagoons. Chickens and turkeys crowing at 4 AM outside our hotel. Dogs barking. Then at 6 AM, fishermen heading out and happy music from the breakfast restaurant underneath our window.

A day-long trip in a small boat, ten miles out through the twisting estuary full of mangrove trees. At first, we see just a slim pink stripe across the horizon, dividing sky and water. As we draw closer, that stripe becomes a thousand flamingos. Wading in the shallow water, then filling the sky.

Finally, a last hotel on the beach before heading home. Four rooms, one on each floor. Ours on top. No electricity, just candles in a can of sand. Water delivered by truck to the large cistern. A long, empty stretch of beach. A rocky reef, perfect for snorkeling. A storm at night. Then quiet.