

## Quimxto Stranded

By Anthony Blossingham

The summer before my first year of college, I was stranded in Los Pena, Mexico with only five pesos to my name. I had gone down to have a wild month with my friends, but three days into the trip we were broke. Now my friend's were loaded, but my family was working class. I had to work for 6 months just to save up enough for my plane fare. Now I was stuck in a dusty bus station, wondering how in the hell I was going to get home. I called the US Embassy, which was more than happy to arrange transport for me on a military flight. The problem was that I was half the country away from the airport.

I went over to a cafe near the depot, spending one peso on a bottle of cola and read a complimentary newspaper. The waiter was angry that I stayed so long and did not tip him. He said something in Spanish and gave me the finger. I grabbed my duffel and headed down to the shore. The embassy staff told me that there was a charter boat out of that town, but it would take a day to get to Quimxto, a small fishing village on the pacific shore, where I would get a horse to ride the rest of the way. One of the interesting points I was told was that there were guerrilla kidnappers in that section, that there was rampant white slavery, resulting from said kidnappings. I paid a peso for a filleting knife at a small knife-sharpening shack, tucking it into my duffel in case I would need it.

There was a distinct smell of fish and salt water once I left the town and was on the pier. At the end of the dock, rocking back and forth in the gentle waves, was the roughest looking catamaran that I had ever seen. I felt safer in a beer barrel, going over Niagara Falls. I reassured myself that it would be all right, though the sight of the first mate made me nervous. He was an extremely skinny man, with dark brown skin and a milky white set of eyes. His capitan, the skipper of the vessel, spoke fluent English and told me that the sailor had been hit in the face with a sailing boom, causing his eyes to cloud. I told him my situation and he empathized. I would have to clean fish during the journey, but one day's worth of seasickness and I'd be in Quimxto.

The first mate kept scowling at me, even four hours into the trip. Maybe he wasn't scowling, it could have just been the unnerving ability his eyes had. I cut the sea bass from neck to tail; soaking the fillets in salt water that sloshed next to me in a bucket. I hadn't felt nauseous yet. I should have appreciated that fact.

Two hours later. I was throwing up. An hour later, more throwing up. One half an hour later, still ~~ralphing~~ **ralphing**. My stomach wrenched at dry bile taste in my mouth. I was going to be sick again.

Once the capitan gave me some fresh water to drink, I felt better. That is until the first mate soaked his T-shirt that he'd been wearing, in the potable water container. He had wanted to wash his shirt out and since he'd only been wearing it since that morning, he guessed it would be all right. I threw up for the next hour.

The sun was finally going down, though I'd been under a blue tarp that was stretched out from the main mast. The capitan was driving south, keeping the shore on our left side, following the edge of the shallows where the blue tinted sand met the deeper black expanses. I have always been afraid of water and the thought of having to swim, for whatever reason, made me nearly dry-heave.

We docked off Quimxto's shore, though we couldn't go in until the local constable came on board to search for contraband weapons. He saw my bag and ordered me, with the capitan translating, to open and spread its contents out on the deck. He had a thumping stick that he tapped against his hip, walking around the mess, sighing to himself.

He told the capitan that taking passengers wasn't a good idea, that he could be held responsible for anything that I did while on board. The capitan agreed just to get rid of him.

The constable gave us a clear passage ticket, finding his way into his rowboat that he had to row himself. That seemed a bit embarrassing. I figured a guy with such a dignified position should at least have had some kid to row him around. I think the constable would appreciate something like that.

"Go on shore, take your bag." The capitan tossed my duffel over to me.

"How do I get to shore?" The capitan made strokes with his arms, inferring that I should dive in, bag, and all.

"Are you kidding? Everything will get soaked."

"Water is wet. What do you want me to say my friend?" I tried to find a plastic bag near the capitan's wheel but by the look on his aged face, I knew I should just get in the water. The sand didn't kick up when I stepped down in it. The water was very warm, like getting into a bath fully dressed. I really didn't mind it so much once I was in. I did have to hold my duffel over my head, which in some small way, took the fun out of it.

Some of the women who were doing laundry at the edge of the water looked up and stared. They held small sections of bar soap against the fabric and then smacked it against a community boulder. They would take turns swinging the slogging pants and shirts, then would rinse them out in a jug of fresh water.

I walked by them, stopping finally at a road that curved near the beach. The town had small houses, made of stucco or rather some smeared mud material. The roofs were covered with drying meat meant for the coming winter months, when the fish would go into deeper waters and the small skiffs they used would be useless.

I was going to dry my duffel out, though there was no place for me to sleep. I had three pesos and the only house that rented rooms, was full. The capitan, who thought he would be free of me once we got there, was now telling a friend of his to give me a bed for the night. The way the capitan spoke, you could tell the man owed him a favor.

I didn't feel right about staying there but the constable would have arrested me for the night, to protect me. The man of the house showed me out to the clothesline and left me to worry about making it to the airstrip. The plane was leaving at sunrise and there was no way to get there in time.

"You look as if you could use a cold drink." I turned around and saw her.

"I'm Savanna. Would you like a sip?" She had a ladle dipped into a bucket of cold freshwater that she had brought down from the village waterfall. Seeing her in that cotton dress, noticing how natural she looked, I forgot to worry about the plane and took a sip.