

7/12 [in Tlaxiaco, on the way to Chalcatongo]: So I'm sitting here getting drunk. I'm on my second beer. This one is a warm Tres Xs. Mmm. I had to get drunk because I fell apart again tonight. I cried & cried.

[A man had been harassing me the night before]: So I came home and became hysterical. I wanted someone real to talk to. Same old shit. When I'm like that I can't imagine making it through this. I really am thinking seriously about just going home early. Six weeks just seems insurmountable. I dunno, I just want to have the option. But it scares me to contemplate doing it—face-losing...

[From a brief description of a graduate student's first day in the field]: *And he cannot leave, for his entire career, his prestige ranking within the discipline of anthropology, his professors' respect—and much else—depend on his maintaining a stiff upper lip, on organizing this chaos into a Ph.D. thesis.* (Wengle 1988: 3–4)

7/31: Eighteen more days—it's a lot... When this nightmare is over it'll seem so petty. I'll think, heck, what's six weeks? No one will understand why I was so miserable, and I probably won't either. When I was talking to that Israeli woman in Oaxaca [who was travelling around the world for a year] about being alone I said something about how I didn't know how she could stand it—I was flipping out just from 6 weeks. She said 'yeah, but you're probably more alone than I am.' True, true. This is like the fucking isolation ward... Lost in space. I'll say.

8/7: I keep thinking how long each day is. Eleven [more] of 'em. When I get back will I even remember this feeling of wanting to push time along? Please, time, go by quickly. In the evenings I say to myself 'only two hours till bedtime' because bedtime signifies another day over, signifies another morning to come, where I can cross another day off.

This really is like being in jail. Or in the isolation ward. Or on the moon.

p. 461 I spent six weeks in Chalcatongo that first time, and quickly found two consultants. They were both knowledgeable, careful, and caring, and I was very lucky to find them.

Nonetheless, my bouts of hysterical crying continued. There was no phone in the village, so I wrote incessantly—in my journal, and in my letters home. As my return address, I wrote 'Monica, Hell.' I lived for mail, which only rarely came, and read my few books over and over again. I know now that these are classic signs of culture shock—but at the time I just thought I was going crazy.

*Diaries and letters to and from the field are apt to be excellent sources in aiding the maintenance of one's sense of identity. One of the more important functions of diaries is to translate otherwise chaotic events into some order that makes sense to the individual in terms of his own lived past.* (Wengle 1988: 24.)

Let me describe some of the things I was dealing with.

First, I had trouble finding food. Eventually I was able to establish a routine where I had a noon meal at a restaurant, and otherwise ate bananas and tomato sandwiches. But bananas, tomatoes and bread were all things I could only buy twice a week, on the two market days. If I didn't buy enough, and ran out of food, sometimes I could buy little packaged pastries at one of the stores, but that was about it. I lost a lot of weight.