

1985 - McAllen, Texas - - HIKING, AND SPELUNKING IN MEXICO

Sitting on an old school bus bumping along a highway, twenty miles west of Reynosa, Mexico, heading to explore an abandoned Ruby mine. *“What the h... am I, a sixty-two-year-old woman, doing exploring mines in Mexico with a bunch of young, experienced hikers.”*

It all began when the Director of the McAllen, Texas, School District’s new Elementary School Gifted Class Program called me into her office.

“Jackie, Science teachers from our part of the Rio Grande Valley has extended an invite to our District’s Science Teachers, to join their Spelunking trip to a couple mines between Reynosa and Matamoros, Mexico. They will leave Saturday morning on a school bus from McAllen High School and drive to explore an abandoned ruby mine forty miles west of Reynosa, Mexico. That night they will stay in a motel in that area. On Sunday a

couple more caves will be explored then return Sunday afternoon. I'd like you to go and represent us as Science Coordinator of the elementary section of our new Gifted Program."

Squinting my eyes, wrinkling my eyebrows inward, I interrupted, "Anne, uh, a what? Spelunk ah, sounds familiar, but I'm drawing a blank."

"Spelunking. Exploring caves. But that is where people lived thousands of years ago."

"Oh yeah, sure I remember that time well." with mouth gaping, I sank into the chair in front of her desk. "Really now, can you see me, sixty plus, climbing into caves, and in Mexico. Do I really look 12,000 years old?"

"Yeah, to your first question, you know, I really can. You seem to be an adventurous type of person. That's why I chose you to direct our Program's Science division. No! to your second question about looking 12,000 years old."

This is how this adventure began. I joined an experienced group of scientists, exploring an old, abandoned Ruby Mine cave, one hidden in a forest and a cave high up a mountainous area. Climbing up to the top of a high rock-type formation, for two days in an area west of Reynosa, Mexico, and approximately 40 miles south, southwest of McAllen in the country of Mexico.

Background: The McAllen, Texas, Public School, had received a Federal Grant to set up Self-Contained Gifted Classes for second through fifth grades. I was originally hired as a Reading Specialist. The Administrator in charge of implementing the new Gifted Program knew I had an undergraduate degree in Zoology and invited me to be in charge of the Science Division of this Program. She was the person suggesting I join this group of Science Teachers

On a Saturday morning, 8 a.m. to be exact, we met at the McAllen High School parking lot, where one of the big yellow McAllen School buses waited to take us to the first of our caves, forty plus miles into Mexico.

My first disheartening shock was the obvious well experienced group I was joining. All except, let's call him Joel, a thirty-year-old five-foot, nine inch, grossly overweight, like 200 pounds overweight, gentleman, were well equipped and experienced hikers. Joel, in tight fitting faded blue jeans, a matching jacket, baseball hat, old, scuffed boots had no miner's hat, but did have a flashlight and a rope which I later found out was good for climbing up mountainous terrains.

As I was walking towards the school bus where the group of khaki and camouflaged clad humans, male and female, in high topped leather heavy duty footwear made me realize I was way out of my league. They had minimally packed backpacks with attached water bottles, flashlights, AND oh yes, miner hats with lights. I had an overnight bag and in

my hand was the Miner's Hat with attached light my husband had purchased, as a joke. All but Joel, and I, seemed to know one another, thus posing another obvious, -- Joel and I were doomed to be hiking partners.

Our first stop was to the abandoned ruby mine. It was quite fascinating. There were no visible rubies, but the beautiful solid icicle-like drippings, stalactites, coming down from the ceiling and similar object extruding from the floor of the cave, the stalactites were fascinating. I especially loved touching them.

The finale: Picture Joel and I boosting and pulling each other to the cave entrance atop a mountain. Yes, that's exactly what happened. The others effortlessly had climbed up the mountain to the cave at the top. By the time we got to the top, the others had completed their exploration. We merely had time to quickly look inside and leave.