

TEN DAYS IN MEXICO

Misadventures While Driving The Short Bus South Of The Border

SCOT MCKAY



Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Chapter One	4
Chapter Two	9
Chapter Three	13
Chapter Four	19
Chapter Five	24
About The Author	31
About X & Y Communications	32

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to a somewhat strange and at times hilarious account chronicling the hijinks, escapades and even life-shaking epiphanies experienced on our recent adventure driving into the heart of Mexico. Everything you are about to read was originally published to my blog at www.edumckaytion.com/blog in May and June of 2008.

Fair warning...this e-book isn't completely focused on the dating and seduction advice you are used to from me, but if you read on you're sure to find plenty of highly applicable information nonetheless.

Most of all, I hope you enjoy this series as a quick break from your busy day and from the serious business of life...Cheers.

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

CHAPTER ONE



“Quieres whisky?”

The tuxedo-clad Mexican waiter catches me off guard.

“Absolutamente,” I answer solemnly but resolutely.

We’re now at the reception after Emily’s cousin’s wedding that, in the unforgettable words of Yogi Berra, “made this day necessary”.

Actually, it’s what inspired the entire trip.

And since we were already through what we had imagined to be the most brutal part of the journey by the time we made it to *Ciudad Juarez* anyway, we figured we’d do the “deep dive” and say *hola* to Emily’s relatives further south.

And believe me, the whisky was sounding really good by the time it was offered up.

You see, the previous thirty hours or so had been something else.

For starters, the drive from where we live in San Antonio, Texas to El Paso, Texas is notorious. Let’s just say that the first thing you see when you hit I-10 West in San Antonio is a sign that says “El Paso — 538”.

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

When I say there is nothing in between that sign and the one that says “Welcome To El Paso, Home Of Some Pretty Good *Carnitas* Tacos”, I’m including the town of Fort Stockton, TX.

The only real distraction is a field of high-tech windmills at Sonora, TX rivaled only by a similar spectacle out near Palm Springs, CA—ironically also on I-10.

We actually ended up having to blow right through El Paso upon arrival and continue yet another thirty-five miles or so to Anthony, NM where Emily’s octogenarian grandfather lives.

Emily hadn’t the heart to tell me this until we got to El Paso. What can I say, she’s a true sweetheart.

True to form, in line with every other time I can remember driving into El Paso, it was at night when we got there.

El Paso is unique among larger US cities in that not only is it directly across the *Rio Grande* from a major Mexican city, but you can usually see the Mexican side pretty up-close and personal at all times while driving along the border.

It’s as if you could tee up a golf ball and use *Ciudad Juarez* as the green, having cleared a minor “water hazard”. Well, that and a gargantuan fence rimmed in razor wire...

This means that there is a massively lit extravaganza to be seen from the driver’s side for at least 30 miles headed into the city. It’s a fascinating thing to behold, and vividly memorable.

We had arrived at Grandpa’s house at roughly 3am.

The house is pink. And it’s the first house on the corner after the exit, meaning he’s got an Interstate running through the front yard. It was like a John Cougar Mellencamp song reached out and whacked me in the head with a 2×4. In fact, by the time we woke up later that morning there were even women in the kitchen cooking stuff.

But then it got weirder.

I looked out the back window, and I was immediately reminded of George Lopez’ “Why You Crying?” stand-up bit on The Comedy Channel. The house behind Emily’s grandfather’s had tires and car fenders stored on the roof.

None of that was particularly problematic. It is what it is.

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

The real issue was that Junior (aka “Micky-Mac”), our six-month old son, didn’t seem to understand that his ‘rents were worn out and needed some shuteye before taking on the wedding in Juarez that evening.

Pretty much bright-eyed and bushy-tailed from crashing out in a car seat for the whole trip, Junior was all about being awake...right when everyone else was *bien cansado*.

Nonetheless, we got our act together and crossed the International Bridge into Juarez later that morning, with Emily desperately haggling with GMAC for a blessed fax necessary to take the “Short Bus” (aka Emily’s canary-yellow H3) more than thirty miles south of the border. This would be necessary to continue the rest of the journey after the wedding.

Entering Mexico in and of itself was painless enough, though, as is typical.

You get to the Mexican border station and awkwardly park yourself between two speed bumps waiting for a green “*pase*” light to appear, which it thankfully usually does.

Emily’s aunt and uncle, parents of the groom, lived less than a mile from the border. We did our darnedest to be upbeat and all, despite zero sleep.

Let me tell you...getting your brain switched over to *Espanol*-mode is enough of a challenge when you are fully awake, let alone when your brain is playing “paper, rock, scissors” with you (in lieu of a full-scale civil war) for the right to shut down immediately.

So when Emily introduced me, and they said “*Bienvenidos, Oscar!*” in return, I didn’t even flinch. After all, I had seen this before elsewhere in the Spanish-speaking world. “Scot” is just one of those names that doesn’t translate well. So I put aside images of trash cans and Odd Couples. “Oscar” it was for the time being.

Worse, by default that made my kid “*Oscarito*”.

But the wedding was nice, as far as weddings go.

By now every woman should know that we guys mostly tolerate lavish wedding celebrations for the sake of the women involved. This is especially true when the wedding stuff is “traditional”. Consider there to be a positive correlation between “traditional” and “toleration”.

So with all of the above added up, yes...*quiero whisky*.

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

I began to ruminate upon the fact that even in Mexico the wedding must have cost the equivalent of 30-40K US dollars. And it couldn't have been more "traditional". For my money, I would have mixed in something different. Something interesting. Something that reflected the personality of the bride and groom.

But as we found out the next morning while watching the newlywed couple open gifts, the bride was very much in charge here, so...you know.

At one point during the gift opening ritual, someone noted that all the gifts were decidedly feminine. The groom half-joked that he had put things like a toolkit and a power drill on the wedding register, but the bride had removed them.

At that point I half-joked in return that the next time the bride wants the faucet fixed, she can do it herself...using her new 18/8 kitchen gadgets. Emily laughed. The bride didn't.

This guy's in for a rough life, I could tell already.

The wedding itself and the reception had gone off without incident, for the most part.

Never mind what was going on outside in the parking lot.

At one point Micky-Mac and I decided to go outside the hotel ballroom where the reception was being held to get some much-needed oxygen.

We were just in time to watch the hotel's Toyota Hiace mini-bus wedge itself between a late-model Chrysler 600, a Jeep Wrangler—both parked—and a sawhorse in the drive area that had apparently gone unnoticed.

A parking lot attendant unceremoniously yanked the sawhorse from the picture with a particularly disturbing screeching noise, one paralleled only by the noise created when the whole mess happened. I saw no indication that the respective owners of the other vehicles were notified as to what had transpired.

After the wedding reception—around 2.30 in the morning—the entire *familia* went back to the groom's parents' house where we were staying.

The house smelled like Mexico, which I've since determined is a scent crafted from a carefully choreographed program of cooking meat by-products and using *Fabuloso*-brand cleaning potions to clean up afterwards.

And true to long-standing tradition, there was a MASSIVE pot of *menudo* waiting.

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

At this point it would be useful to explain Mexican food.

If you live in the U.S. or Canada and have been to “Chi Chi’s” or “*El Torito*” you only really have half the story. And if you’ve been to “Taco Bell”, by the way, you have NONE of the story.

All of this is to say that half of Mexican food is REALLY, REALLY good. In fact, it’s pretty much as addictive as it is prohibited from your current weight-loss plan.

The other half? Well, you might like it too, for all I know.

But probably not.

It’s a moral imperative to ask LOTS of questions before eating anything you are unsure of...especially when you’ve never seen anything with a similar name on that “*El Torito*” menu.

So as far as *menudo* is concerned, you therefore ask questions. The answers would include “hominy” and “intestines”.

I went to bed hungry—without complaint. Emily joined me. Micky-Mac, being on a more predictable diet plan, had a full-course meal and miraculously slept soundly.

The next day, it would be off to *Ciudad Chihuahua*, or so we thought...

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

CHAPTER TWO



Hanging out a mile or two from *la frontera* (the border) is one thing.

Descending past about 30 miles into the “interior” of Mexico is something else completely. And I’m talking both figuratively *and* literally.

Yeah, in many ways it feels like the “wild, wild west” once you’re beyond the *gringo*-rich border town atmosphere.

But then there’s *la aduana*, or “customs” as it’s best translated into English.

Now clearly Mexico would rather you not bring your U.S.-registered vehicle into their precious country. In fact, they apparently have more of a phobia of your car for some reason than the State Of Texas, Farmer’s Insurance and GMAC do combined.

Whatever their hang-up, it’s obviously an untold calamity worse than your kick-ass symbol of American gas-guzzling extreme being pilfered under cover of the night (or by *banditos* during broad daylight?) and whisked off to some “chop shop” never to be recovered.

Then again, what does Farmer’s care, really? Once you’re past *la aduana* you’re pretty much on your own as far as they’re concerned. This means that a subtle form of low-grade extortion known as “Mexican Auto Insurance” is a must. The cost? Only roughly 8-10 times the cost of equivalent US insurance for a similar coverage period.

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

Sooner than later, you realize that's a bargain. After all, one of the most bizarre fundamentals of Mexican culture is that people just flat-out have distinctively less respect for the value of their own lives than I've ever seen in any country in the world.

Emily claims that this has a lot to do with the ubiquitous Catholic Church's teaching that God will take you when he feels like it, and that there's not much we humans can do about it when "our time" comes.

I think that explanation carries a certain amount of verisimilitude based on what I've seen. And if such a philosophy indeed rules the day then it obviously applies to animals also. *Mexicano* drivers appear to have a shocking propensity for mowing down any vertebrate (human or otherwise) that crosses their asphalt path without so much as a tap on the brakes.

But back to the story.

Emily's aunt had explained to us, rather convincingly, that the faxed version of GMAC's "permission slip" to take the "Short Bus" into Mexico was not going to be adequate. They were going to demand an original.

But having come this far, we were undaunted. We hit *la aduana* the morning after the wedding with the kind of "bulletproof confidence" I've talked about before under separate cover.

And sure enough, after wading through about six lines—covering one minor detail at a time—we made it to a window where a young, apparently demure woman of about 4'10" and 85 lbs. took a freakin' bazooka to our "bulletproof confidence".

Only it wasn't about the fax. Ironically, we never heard so much as a *pio-pio* about that.

Unbeknownst to any of us was a certain clause that required we had a "receipt" for our vehicle's Texas registration. The sticker and the documentation of proof wasn't enough for these turkeys. They wanted a form that we'd later find out isn't even routinely supplied to Texas vehicle registrants. Inexplicably, no guideline we ever found prior to the trip ever mentioned such a document as necessary to the process.

Whatever!

After high-tailing it back to *Juarez*, scrambling to get a receipt via Internet connection at some hotel, and finally backtracking to where the customs office was, our frustration was made complete: "Internet" forms didn't count. Only the office-issued version was "valid".

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

The date was Monday, May 26th. Memorial Day. The nearest Texas Department Of Motor Vehicles Office, in El Paso, was closed for the holiday.

Now, if this little chick had been Jonesing for a *mordida* (make that “bribe”), she was more subtle than a slow gas leak about it. Emily and I both concluded that she was dead serious. The form was a must.

No worries...sort of. We kicked back at a pretty blasted good *cantina* in *Juarez* for the night, drained *Carta Blancas* and watched the Celtics dismantle the Pistons on American television.

The next morning it was off to El Paso, where Emily quickly dispatched of the documentation problem at the D.O.T. Meanwhile, I was rudely awakened to a major server error at my Web Host, which I fortunately was able to call and rant about toll free. So all told, this impromptu backtracking expedition into El Paso was fortuitous.

We jetted to *la aduana*, where Emily was given even more unexpected hassles. After breezing by D.O.T-girl this time, the guy at the next window began harping on Emily about having a different last name on her passport than her driver’s license.

But after carefully explaining that it was due to something called “marriage” back in the states, and overwhelming the probable *mordida*-seeker with an onslaught of supporting paperwork, the guy relented.

From there it was open road...finally.

We were a day and a half behind schedule, but headed to *Chihuahua*.

And perhaps not coincidentally, we would see exactly two other Texas license plates from that point until *Nuevo Laredo* nearly 1200 miles later. Clearly you have to have a special personality type to even attempt this “road trip through Mexico in your own car” stuff.

Despite common-wisdom that Northern Mexico is pretty much barren desert for miles and miles, we were pleasantly surprised to find that the scenery changes rather profoundly and quite often, varying between low-desert and high-desert environments with corresponding changes in flora and elevation.

That’s not to say the road was not a long one. It was nearly 300 miles to *Ciudad Chihuahua*, where Emily’s uncle Augusto and his way cool *familia* were awaiting our arrival.

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

One thing we couldn't help but notice is how even though Mexico's main highway infrastructure was generally of good quality, there were several blatant reminders that you were in a whole 'nother country (only *not* Texas this time).

First, there are no shoulders on the highways. If your ride coughs up a lung you'd better hope the traffic behind you is looking alive out there...especially at night. Sheesh.

Second, there are no guardrails. This means YOU had better look alive out there also...again, especially at night.

There are plenty of little flower-draped crosses lining the road in remembrance of those who apparently fell victim to one or the other of the scenarios described above.

Third, and arguably most imminently meaningful, the speed limits are both RANDOM and SLOWER THAN RUST. And the locals really don't give a rip about observing them.

But on the other hand, *Los Federales* (sporting shiny new Dodge Chargers in pearlescent navy blue) do indeed give a rip. Especially if you happen to be driving a "pull me over and fine me"-yellow H3 with *gringo* tags.

So abide by the speed limits we did, neurotically checking the rear-view every thirty seconds to make sure we weren't about to get "DINA" tattooed on the back of our heads by a screaming 34-wheeler "road train". Not that it mattered, seeing as how there was no shoulder to pull over to in such an event anyway.

But fortune smiled upon us, and we made it to *Chihuahua*. The first thing we saw was an industrial park lined with spanking-new *maquiladoras*, or "twin plants"...mostly owned by international companies taking full advantage of cheap labor and other NAFTA-oriented benefits. Interestingly, these companies also tend to build entire neighborhoods of low-cost housing for their workers, presumably as part of a "benefits package". Either that, or the workers end up owing their proverbial souls to the company store. You can't really be sure.

Getting to uncle Augusto's house was apparently complicated, so we parked at a local *Soriana* to rendezvous with Emily's cousin.

Now *Soriana* is sort of like a Mexican version of Super Wal-Mart, only with a more devastating array of high-quality (but decidedly bizarre) snack items.

Well that, and there's this curious Mexican custom that *Soriana* champions of making concrete, curb-like structures that extend vertically precisely not enough to be visible from the driver's seat while simultaneously yet equally precisely

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

enough to seriously muff up your bumper, passenger door, front differential or anything else that so much as grazes them. Nice.

So it goes with many things in Mexico, as duly noted in the first installment of this series, nobody knows why they are there...even Mexicans.

I've always thought it would be funny to write a comedy skit in Spanish featuring a lead female character named "*Soriana*" who liked to spend too much money shopping. Maybe she could have an ugly sidekick named "*Fea*".

Then again I have a warped sense of humor.

Emily's cousin indeed met us after a short time and that's where the true adventures started, which we'll talk about in the next chapter...

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

CHAPTER THREE



No sooner than I had crossed the intersection I was compelled to slam on the brakes and throw the “Short Bus” into reverse.

Honestly, I had simply proceeded forward from the stop sign normally, as any red-blooded driver would have in a similar situation. Really.

But as it turns out, the Mexican Department Of Transportation (or whatever they call it) has an even more warped sense of humor than mine.

And there is no question of that. Most traffic patterns in Mexico tend to assume that every vehicle that passes through is piloted by a local citizen who knows better by now than to assume anything...like, for example, that the street in front of you is NOT a “one way” street–headed in the OPPOSITE direction.

Well you know what happens when you assume. Some guy from Texas hits town and causes mayhem in the streets.

Sure enough, I was about to have “SEAT” tattooed on my forehead and Emily a “Chevy” symbol tattooed on hers had my reflexes not kicked in.

Who knew? Certainly there weren’t any SIGNS to inform us that what seemed perfectly logical was flat-out ridiculous to suppose.

Fortunately, there was a guy standing on the street corner to whistle at us...after I was already burning rubber in reverse.

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

Perhaps he thought that he could “whistle” a “one way” sign into existence by his actions.

But no worries, all told. Nobody was directly behind us...this time.

Indeed, despite the initial frustration of such moments, part of what makes Mexico so irrepressibly intriguing is the fact that one cannot depend on logic as a guide...EVER. Every single mundane move that we take for granted can become an adventure at any given time in Mexico.

And never is this MORE apparent than in traffic. In fact, I would go so far as to say that if something strikes you as particularly LOGICAL, go ahead and do the EXACT OPPOSITE. Your “reverse logic” will probably pay off.

At a stop light? Divided highway (probably with a two-foot high bright-yellow curb in the middle of the road)? Logic would tell you to make sure traffic is clear to the left and turn right.

In real life, what happened was the SECOND of FOUR incidences in a five day period of: 1) Slamming on the brakes... 2) ...throwing the tranny into “reverse”, and... 3) ...having some guy on the corner whistle at me.

A divided ONE WAY street...BOTH SIDES going the SAME WAY? Of course.

I won't bore you with the other two infractions. Let's just say that in the first 24 years I had a drivers license I had stared down the barrel of a loaded one way street fewer times than I did during just over a week in Mexico.

Worse, it never fails that at any given stop sign or red light there's a cab behind you leaning on the horn trying to get you to move it or lose it...even when an onslaught of traffic is rushing by.

You know, thinking about it, Mexico is the only country on Earth of the dozens I've visited where drivers routinely honk at you in order to GET you to DO something stupid instead of BECAUSE you DID something stupid.

It's also the only country I know of that feels the need to install speed bumps suddenly—and again, with zero warning—in the most random places conceivable. By the end of this trip I was seriously showing symptoms of PTSD, or “Post Traumatic Speedbump Disorder”. The flashbacks were relentless and I began fully expecting them to spring forth even on the major highways.

Humorously, during one ride to the store a short way from Emily's aunt's house, said aunt and her daughter both began to softly announce and then boldly

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

exclaim “*Hay bordo. Hay BORDO!*” from the back seat as I barreled down the street.

Ba-BUMP!

“[sigh] ...*Hay bordo.*”

As it turned out, my vocabulary word of the day was “*bordo*”. Local slang for “speedbump”.

A cursory check online later revealed that it wasn’t in the “Spanish to English” dictionary. That assuaged my apparent ignorance.

So clearly I have a rant about Mexican traffic up my sleeve here. Onward.

Where we were actually going that fateful morning in *Ciudad Chihuahua*, before being so rudely interrupted by oncoming traffic, was the *Gruta Nombre De Dios*.

A little known phenomenon in *Chihuahua* is the existence of MASSIVE crystals in underground caverns (or *grutas*). Most of these are closed to the public, mostly because the temperature down there can rise to nearly 150 degrees Fahrenheit.

Well, as fortune would have it there was one exceptional site that was open to tourists. Since it was about 150 degrees outside anyway, why not roll the dice?

We got there, climbed the stairs to the entrance, paid the ridiculously-low ticket price and entered at our own risk.

Emily and I, now that we were well into Mexico, had made a pact with each other to speak only Spanish that entire day. After all, we were going to take a crack at Spanish-language video blogs and needed to get warmed up.

As is typical of us, Emily and I had a dollar (or was that ten *pesos*?) bet on who could utter the most impressive word in Spanish. This was but the latest iteration of one-dollar betting which had involved naming which band sang “Love Hurts” when it came on the classic rock station, whether “*papalote*” was really the Spanish word for “windmill” or not, or even who could SPOT the most “*papalotes*” later in the trip.

So having a tour-guide leading us as we descended into the cave turned out to be a great opportunity to flex our *Espanol*, which even in it’s rarest form could be roundly compared to Jimmie “J.J.” Walker from the old *Good Times* sitcom flexing his biceps.

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

It was also a great opportunity to walk around in a dark and humid grotto with “*Oscarito*”, who is easily the sweatiest six-month old baby of all time, asleep on my shoulder.

It wasn't even close to 150 degrees, of course, but humid it was. Unimpressive it was, also. The giant 20-foot-long crystals apparently only hung out where the 150-degree temperatures were.

“*Hay murcielagos?*” I blurted out to the tour guide, who casually retorted in Spanish that bats didn't much like caverns this well sealed off from the outside. In fact the *Grutoa Nombre De Dios* was not the natural habitat of any known animals.

I looked over and smirked at Emily...in Spanish of course. She gave me that raised-eyebrow-followed-by-the-batted-eyelashes thing that she does, which is actually a lot cuter in person than it sounds in print.

I had just won ten pesos.

I didn't have the heart to tell her that pulling ‘*murcielago*’ out of nowhere was less a result of my formidable Spanish lexicon than my simple knowledge of the current Lamborghini model line. This of course, is something any self-respecting car guy would have on tap.

Score one for the male persuasion.

We recorded several video-blogs before leaving, with the beautiful *Chihuahua* sierra as a backdrop. I was grateful for having practiced Spanish all morning.

We then returned to Emily's aunt's house for a late lunch that was so ridiculously tasty that Emily and I have cooked it up for ourselves since returning home.

“*Discada*” is prepared of nothing more than top-round beef, *chorizo* sausage and—get this—“*winis*”. Basically, *chorizo* makes everything alright by it's greasy, slovenly and distinctively spicy perfection...as long as you don't ask about the ingredients.

“*Winis*” are hot dogs, for those of you keeping score at home.

The irony here is obvious. There we've been all our lives back in San Antonio, every self-respecting guy eschewing the “*gringo*” stereotype of burgers and hot dogs on the grill in favor of full-on *pachangas* featuring *fajitas*, pork loin, grilled *poblano* peppers, etc....along with the Texas-bred *machismo*-driven staples of sausage, brisket and so forth.

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

Meanwhile, down in Mexico they are cooking hot dogs on the grill.

But there we were, pounding back *discada* tacos until we had essentially “discaded” our own dignity.

When pressed, Emily’s uncle swore up and down that the three main ingredients as advertised were all that was really in there.

We would learn just how true this was when we put the recipe to the test upon returning home.

We made two batches of *discada*, one by the book and the other with some lime, mushrooms and a splash of *cerveza* thrown in for good measure. The second batch sucked.

And yes, you cook it on the grill...but in a special cast-iron “disc” that lends the look and feel of cowboys rustling up some grub on the range.

Emily’s uncle Agosto was my kind of guy. He fortified my assessment of him by cracking a *Tecate* Light and handing it to me.

I was all about making this experience my own.

That evening, we would drive on to *Delicias*, Mexico—where Emily spent part of her childhood—about two hours away.

We had done our darnedest to clear out of *Chihuahua* during the afternoon, but...you know.

So as it turned out, we got our first crack at driving Mexico by night.

You’ll notice I made no promises NOT to talk about Mexican traffic ever again.

So having NOT promised exactly that, let me tell you this: ANY road at ANY given time can go from a four-lane riot of WWE proportions to a constricted, deserted alleyway in a matter of two blocks or so.

And it’s precisely then that one must abide by that all-abiding general rule of Mexico: If it makes SENSE, do the OPPOSITE.

So when the “highway” to *Delicias* turned into a secluded driveway headed into the wilderness...in the OPPOSITE direction as intended...I remained steadfast and continued on the straight and (very) narrow.

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

Ten miles later, we were back in civilization...although somehow barely two miles outside of *Ciudad Chihuahua*.

We stopped for gas while the gettin' was good. It was then we encountered our first predictably unpredictable adventure with *Pemex*, the nationally-operated chain of gas stations in Mexico which feature actual attendants that actually pump your gas. For a second you'd actually think you were in New Jersey or something. Make that a split second.

It seems our credit card—a black Visa with no limit—was “*declinada*”. Calmly, I handed over the backup. “*Declinada*”, *tambien*.

After an emergency call to our bank back in the States, everything actually checked out. No “fraud alerts”, no funny stuff. It would take us three similar instances to figure out that *Pemex* credit card machines were just the Spawn Of Satan, that's all.

So I happened into a fortuitously-located grocery store next to the *Pemex* to use the ATM. Got some cash, and noticed that kids no older than my eight-year-old daughter were bagging groceries—each dressed for the task in company attire.

After fueling up the “Short Bus”, and fueling Emily up with one of her beloved “Gansito” snack cakes (procured from a shelf festooned with the ubiquitous “*Bimbo*” brand snacks), we soldiered forth.

As for me, my 2,394th Coca-Cola Light of the trip was sufficient to keep me wired. The Mexican version of Diet Coke, or of any soda really, is so far superior in taste to anything in the U.S. that it really makes you wonder. So I “tanked up” every chance I got.

Emily mentioned that when we hit “Milky” we'd almost be there. I'd long since stopped asking silly questions. Roughly two hours later, we passed the sign that said “*Bienvenidos a Meoqui*”.

Minutes later we arrived at Emily's other aunt's house to a warm welcome, well spent and happy to be there.

The next day would be something else...

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

CHAPTER FOUR



Emily's uncle Manuel lives in the urban equivalent of the Batcave—or is that “*Gruta De Murcielagos*”?

Either way, it's impressive.

All that's visible from the city street (if *Delicias* classifies as a “city”) is a simple garage door. Once it opens automatically, you drive down a hallway paved with Mexican tile that's at least as long as a football field.

At the end is a massive sanctuary with walls on all sides of at least 75 feet high, and naturally lit from above. You feel as if you've entered into the domain of some villain from an upcoming James Bond flick.

Finding the “secret entrance” to the home itself, we were met by Emily's aunt Petra, who had decorated the decidedly unique home traditionally. She fed us well and showed us our room, which was easily the most comfortable and well-equipped guest room either of us had seen since...ever.

None of us remember hitting the pillow that night.

The next morning, daylight revealed swing sets, a trampoline and enough high-end barbecue gear to make Bobby Flay jealous.

So if Manuel had designs on taking over the world as the next Bond villain, at least he was going to do so in a “family friendly” manner.

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

Actually, Manuel was in the metal working business. His home was pretty much the left half of the massive shop that was originally designed to house his company's operations. Suddenly everything made sense.

The next morning we took a tour of Manuel's shop. The highlight was when he presented me with a special gift—my very own “disc”. You know, custom-made to kick up a whole mess of “*discada*”.

I nearly welled up.

If Emily held any fleeting doubt I'd actually schlep the massive, simultaneously round *and* pointy metal thing back to Texas with us, that was put to bed the moment I pronounced it my “prized possession”.

And no kidding, the “disc” is now parked in my garage between a two-stroke Aprilia and a Yamaha roadracer even as we speak. That's elite and priceless company in the McKay household.

Then it was time to pack up and go to *Las Boquillas De Camargo*. What we're talking about here is a natural hot spring that bubbles up from the ground.

And you swim in it. And it supposedly heals you of all your illnesses.

So just in case that's true, they sell plenty of pork products and *cerveza* there.

Emily was enjoying herself immensely, until I spotted a water snake in her general vicinity. Whether the thing was minding it's own business or not was immaterial. I've never seen the chick move so fast. In one decidedly feline leap from the *boquilla* she was done swimming for the day.

I told her she was sexy when she was mortified. She told me she felt better. Whatever works.

The next morning it was off to *Monterrey, Nuevo Leon*.

Getting there involved traveling what was easily the longest leg of the trip, through what could only be described as the “Mexican Outback”.

Heading south from *Delicias* you finally leave the massive state of *Chihuahua* only to find yourself in *Durango*.

You immediately realize that Dodge probably named their SUV after this place rather than some quaint little mining/lettuce-growing hamlet in southwestern Colorado.

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

After all, they have other vehicles out there with names like “Tundra”, “Yukon” and, well, “Outback”. Suddenly everything made sense as far as SUV naming conventions go.

Had the “short bus” broken down in *Durango*, Mexico, we would probably have been *chupacabra* fodder. When we finally found a gas station I was fully expecting Jawas to show up and try to sell us droids and stuff.

Except nobody was there...except a young, very sweet girl behind the counter. I resisted the urge to ask how long her commute was.

Finally, after miles and miles of nothing but miles and miles (and coyotes), we were about to roll into *Torreon, Coahuila*.

Los Santos Del Torreon had just won the Mexican national soccer championship. That must have been what was on TV in the *cantina* back in *Delicias* the night before, come to think of it.

Everyone’s car had “*Viva Santos*” scrawled on the back window in white shoe polish. I wondered why the kids on the corner were still selling gum instead of white shoe polish.

As I wondered, two kids who appeared about 9 or 10 years old appeared out of nowhere to perform the established ritual of attempting to clean our windshield despite 62 lanes of random traffic and impending nightfall. They ended up climbing on the hood of the “short bus” to get the job done.

It was a brazen display of hard selling that bordered on downright arrogance. As such, I immediately rolled down the window and rewarded the two kids with folding money.

After *Torreon*, we took a deep breath and soldiered onward to *Saltillo*, about 250 miles further into the wild. By then it was pitch dark.

The road seemed good, so we had gone for it. With no radio reception to speak of, we popped in a CD from a dating guru for the women’s market who has been hammering us lately to pitch his advanced series as an affiliate.

After 18 minutes the guy had yet to say anything other than how important it was to listen to what he was about to say. We turned off the CD and instead decided to listen to what each other was about to say.

Emily and I got to talking, and the time passed painlessly. So much so, in fact, that I had neglected to look at the gas gauge.

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

To my temporary relief, it looked like we had about 80 or 90 miles worth of Pemex's finest yet to burn.

It was then I looked up, only to be confronted with a sign on the side of the road that read "*Servicios 160km*".

I did the math. Oh &\$%@.

All five stages of the grieving process swept through me at world-record breaking speed. Denial. Anger. Bargaining. Depression. Acceptance. Especially anger, though. I mean, who on Earth \$#@&% builds a &#@%* major highway between two huge Mexican cities with ZERO gas stations for 100 miles?

Uh...Mexico, that's who. Refer to Rule Of Mexico #1: "If something makes sense, do the opposite". Or even Rule #2, which follows closely: "Expect even mundane stuff you typically take for granted to turn into a full-scale adventure".

Once "acceptance" set in, I realized I was the brain-dead guy who was about to offer his entire family up to *chupacabras*, rattlesnakes, *brujas*, packs of gypsies, vultures and whatever other *banditos* were out there.

Rolling into *Saltillo* on fumes about 100 miles later, I'd never been so happy to see a "*Pemex*" sign lighting the landscape.

Even if it was roughly 100 yards beyond a roadblock hosted by your friendly neighborhood *Federales*.

Fine. Search the car, find what you want. Arrest me. Whatever.

Mexican jail sounded better than what had launched the grieving process that had suddenly been lifted from my shoulders.

But the *Federales* couldn't have been friendlier. They were looking for *borrachos* on this Saturday night, and we were decidedly not.

After being waved onward, Emily fed the thirsty beast.

And after Junior was finished, I filled the truck up with gas too.

We would see 15 more *Pemex* stations within the next five miles. I promise I am not making this up.

Saltillo, Coahuila is a disarmingly nice place. Seeing as how the directions on how to proceed to nearby *Monterrey* took us from four-lane highway to a back alley, as usual, we were able to see more of the place than we bargained for.

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

All told, given the style of the place and the type of nightlife that was going on, we decided that *Saltillo* was like the *Mexicano* version of Austin, TX.

Except this time the road to *Monterrey* actually did turn into the road to nowhere. Somewhere along that path, inside the city limits, we actually ran into another “sobriety checkpoint” set up by local police.

Again, the guy was super friendly. After having me breathe on him (seriously), he was kind enough to direct us to the main road...accurately.

So we were finally on the last 40-mile section of road between *Saltillo* and *Monterrey*. There were bizarre little strobe lights marking the lanes in the road for at least twenty miles. Somebody’s brother-in-law must have been the strobe-light guy.

The mountains started getting higher, and we knew we were getting close.

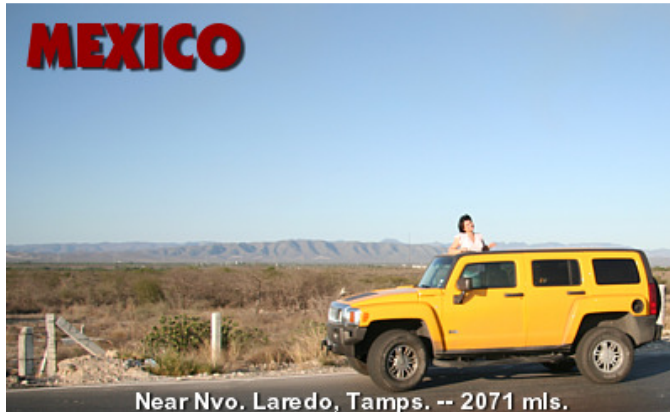
We’d soon find out that “getting there” and “arriving” are two completely separate concepts...

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

CHAPTER FIVE



We rolled into *Monterrey, Nuevo Leon* around 1:30 am. We didn't get to sleep until 6:00.

Wild partying? Hardly.

It simply took that long to get a hotel.

The first two places we checked were packed to the gills. It turned out that the largest IT convention of the entire year happened to be taking place that weekend, and every hotel in the southern part of town was booked solid.

Suffice it to say the IT company hadn't reserved my room in advance. This made perfect sense since I don't work for any of them anymore.

Logically speaking, we decided to head to the northern part of town for more options.

Now, if you'll recall, we've already discussed how "logic" and "Mexico" are two concepts that don't mesh particularly well.

So true to form, instead of finding ANY motels, we only kept ending up at the same sign proudly announcing "*Bienvenidos A Apodaca*", or "Welcome To Apodaca", the town to the northeast of *Monterrey* where apparently nobody lives and even fewer want to stay for the night.

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

It was creepy, really. We'd get to the sign, turn around, and the compass on the rear view mirror of the "short bus" would tell us that we'd been heading back towards the south for, oh, at least five minutes or so. And then we'd see the same sign.

Obviously, the movie "Groundhog Day" came to mind. But considering how tired and wrung-out we were after what all had transpired during the trip, a more suitable cinematic comparison would be "The Shining" where Danny kept running into those two bloody twin chicks at the end of the hallway.

We ultimately succeeded at getting back to the downtown area after considerably greater hassle.

For example, there had been a major accident on the one road that surely led back to town. All lanes were blocked. With no exits for literally miles, traffic backed up to an absolute standstill—at 3 am on a Saturday morning.

Apparently, some unfortunate souls ahead were having a considerably rougher go of it tonight than we were.

We ended up precariously following similarly equipped "off road" SUVs like...um...ours through the median and back the other way. We somehow prevailed over this ill-advised gambit. Thinking back on it now, of course we did. It was "ill-advised", and this was Mexico.

Logic + Opposite = Cool

You're probably wondering at this point why I didn't stop and ask for directions.

The first answer is because I'm a guy.

The second, and arguably better answer is that we DID stop for directions...and got BAD ones. From a cab driver, no less. And visits to four or five OXXO and/or 7-Eleven stores turned up no city maps...go figure. So much for "convenience".

Determined, I found then next exit that would theoretically head us back south again, since we were again headed to the dreaded northern suburbs of Monterrey—right back where we came from.

Propelled by a false sense of security, five minutes later we were once again "welcomed" to *Apodaca*. Sheesh.

You see, *Monterrey* has this curious issue. You cannot friggin' see the downtown skyline from *anywhere* in the entire metro area except, well, downtown. It's really,

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

really bizarre. Chalk it up to the mountains...which we wouldn't really be able to gauge the size and extent of until daylight.

They're breathtaking, by the way. Much higher and more picturesque than I had figured. After all, the US border at either McAllen or Laredo, both only about 125 miles away, is flat as a *tortilla*.

Finally, after ultimately finding downtown and taking an unplanned tour of every US-based hotel that had managed to completely book itself for the weekend, we found one blessed decent hotel—of private ownership—that had a room. We snagged it.

We only had a weekend in *Monterrey* to spend, so we slept just enough to take the edge off our crankiness.

At this point I need to make a major modification to a bit of dating advice I've cited in several places over the last couple of years.

To be sure, I've been a strong advocate of taking a road trip with someone you're dating for a long weekend or so to make sure that the two of you are compatible.

Usually, this is a great idea.

But NOT in Mexico. Especially in *Monterrey*.

NO relationship could possibly withstand driving around in *Monterrey* for any length of time.

In fact, you should only drive around *Monterrey* with someone you are romantically involved with if you're distinctly looking for an ESCAPE HATCH from the relationship.

I'm serious. Stop laughing.

Sample interaction from Emily and I while driving in *Monterrey*:

Emily: *Will you stop and ask for directions?*

Me: *We tried that.*

Emily: *But you've been driving around in circles for two hours now...six total since we've arrived here.*

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

Me: You've been counting?

Emily: I couldn't help it. It passed the time while you were driving around in circles.

Me: OK, look...nothing makes sense in this city. Plus, at the same time I'm busy dodging traffic from other drivers trying to make sense outta something that makes zero sense.

Emily: Stop...I have to change Micky-Mac.

Me: There's nowhere to stop.

Emily: Pull over here.

Me: There's no shoulder.

Emily: Take the next left.

Me: They're all rights.

Her: That's impossible.

Me: Well, if that's the case how come every left has a "do not enter" sign.

Her: How about THAT one [pointing to the only street we've seen in twenty blocks that was a one-way in the proper direction]

Me: [whizzing ahead] Well, were it not for the two-foot yellow curb in the middle of the road dividing the highway, I could have taken it.

Her: Let's go back to the hotel.

Me: Do you think that hasn't crossed my mind?

Her: Quick! Take that left!

Me: [Having taken the left, forced into throwing the "short bus" into reverse ASAP due to an onslaught of oncoming traffic] Aw, man. Again???

Her: I want to navigate this trip from now on. You have no idea where you're going!

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

Me: OK, go for it. This I want to see.

Suffice it to say that about ten minutes later even she admitted the city was incorrigible.

At least there were guys juggling fire or midgets dressed in clown suits to entertain us at the stop lights. That was interesting.

“But I still got us there faster than you would have”, she added...falsely.

“There” was the curiously-named “*Cola De Caballo*“, just outside of town.

Getting there involves a very scenic and decidedly less nerve-wracking drive for a bit through the mountains once you get out of town, leading to a state park wherein lies a really cool waterfall. We actually did some Spanish-language video blogs from there.

“*Cola De Caballo*” translates to “Horse’s Tail”, which is what the waterfall supposedly looks like. Humorously, “*cola*” is sometimes rendered as “ass” in Spanish.

The shtick with this place, though, is that you can rent a horse for about two bucks. You supposedly ‘ride’ the horse while a guide walks along side, leading it along the short path up to where the falls are.

Emily swore up and down that I could hold Junior while we did this.

So we rented the blasted horses.

I soon realized that we were the only people silly enough to rent the horses out of maybe several hundred visiting the park.

I felt dumb.

Then Micky-Mac, who I was holding onto as opposed to anything directly connected to the horse, decided to start squirming.

I made an executive decision. There was no safe way to hold Micky-Mac and sit on this horse at the same time. I announced that I was going to walk the hill with Junior as opposed to doing the horse thing.

Emily said, “Wait, the guide just said he’ll hold Junior while you ride the horse.”

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

But I didn't want to ride the horse. And I didn't want some guy carrying my son in one hand and guiding a horse with the other.

"Get me off this horse", I said.

Automatically, the guide who had volunteered to hold my son looked at the guide leading the other horse and started laughing. He turned back to me and said sarcastically (and in English), "What's wrong? Are you scared?"

I looked him dead in the eye and coldly retorted, "Yes."

What he didn't know was that I wasn't scared of the horse. I was scared of a guy like him carrying my kid.

I jumped off the horse and grabbed my kid, with the guide still laughing. At that point I laughed with him. What he didn't know didn't hurt him, I suppose.

That night, upon returning to the city, we went to "*El Rey De Cabrito*", or "The King Of Baby Goats Barbecued Up For Your Dining Pleasure" for dinner. Emily was craving *cabrito*, because she's weird. I had *Carta Blanca cerveza* and chips. Micky-Mac had boobies.

Everyone was tired, so we crashed early. The next day we spent shopping in the *mercado* and seeing the other sites around town, including Carl's Jr. and a huge, ridiculous looking cement thing built into a bridge.

It was almost 6pm when we left for the last six-hour dash to the border (which should have taken three hours).

No sooner had we found the main road to *Nuevo Laredo* then it happened.

We got pulled over for "speeding". I had been crawling at barely 30 mph.

The local police officer explained that since it was Sunday, he was going to have to hold our vehicle overnight since there was no judge available to hear our "case" until morning.

I calmly explained to the guy that our Mexico Insurance was about to expire at midnight.

He shrugged.

I pointed out the baby in the back seat *vis-a-vis* being put out of our "vehicle".

Again, he shrugged.

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

Better late than never, I suppose, I realized what was actually transpiring here before my very eyes. My worst nightmare was coming true. Yet, I was oddly curious and amused by the reality of it.

“OK, so why can’t I just pay the ticket here? How much is it? Can’t you just give the money to the judge in the morning?”

“How much have you got?”, came the reply.

I opened up my wallet. The “police officer” and his *compadre* hastened to make sure I kept the wallet out of view of passing cars.

Those turds. I unloaded the equivalent of about sixty US dollars in cash. Thankfully, I had just topped off the tank with the other forty.

They deliberated briefly. One nodded to the other, took my money and casually waved, “*Pase*”.

Sixty dollars was apparently on the borderline of acceptability as far as “*mordidas*” go, but the whole thing still pissed me off. But at least I have a story to tell—about supposed “policemen” robbing me at gunpoint, basically.

No matter what, it was a “walk of shame” up to the ATM machine at the next stop.

It took me a bit of time to come down from that one. Nonetheless, we got on the main road pretty much ready to go home.

The road was one of the best we’d seen in Mexico. Emily and I played “count the *papalotes*” again, which turned out to be a blast, actually. He or she who spots a windmill (*papalote*) first, claims it.

The beauty of our newly-invented sport was twofold. 1) *Papalotes* can be either beside the road or far off in the distance, and 2) they tend to sprout up rapid-fire (even in groups) after ten miles or so without any. All of this greatly contributes to the overall fun level. Things can change very quickly during the course of the game, so you’ve got to look alive out there.

I won, 41-29.

“We both scored our age!” Emily remarked.

Nice.

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

We got to *Nuevo Laredo* much later than expected. This was partially because we had received a “tip” that the lines that International Bridge #1 were notoriously long. We could apparently avoid them by heading twenty miles or so out of the way to “International Bridge #3”.

We did this, only to encounter an eerily desolate “International Bridge #3”. It was closed.

There was no sign to alert us to said fact even after we got there, let alone ahead of time. After all, that would have been logical. The last thing we were heard uttering before figuring out what was really going on there was, “Wow! There really AREN’T any lines here.”

After weaving our way through *Nuevo Laredo’s* decidedly less tourist-friendly portions, which would have been avoided had we simply stayed on the highway, we crossed back into the US around midnight.

The U.S. customs agent had asked me what was in the cooler in the back. I told her I didn’t remember. She didn’t check.

Now, bear in mind that *Nuevo Laredo* is notorious for cartel violence, including one particularly dark event where a new police chief who promised a “crackdown on drug traffic” was gunned down in a hail of bullets all of six hours after assuming the post.

So let’s just say that I was glad things had gone well, overall.

It was good to be on I-35 headed home to San Antonio. We listened to the 80’s/90’s/2000’s station, which I almost never do.

And I drove the speed limit.

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

ABOUT WING-IT WORLDWIDE



Scot and Emily McKay have been dating and relationship coaches since 2005. Having gotten married, built a location-independent lifestyle and had a couple (more) kids; their adventure travels have taken them to over 100 countries worldwide.

After three years of research and development, Wing-It Worldwide was launched in 2012 with resources on adventure travel, family travel, RV exploring and worldschooling. The Wing-It Worldwide Podcast came along in 2016.

Visit their website at www.wingitworldwide.com for all the goodies, including the blog, podcast show notes and two free reports that will revolutionize your travels.

Sign up for the free newsletter at:

<http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Find the podcast here:

<http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>

Find Scot and Emily's dating and relationship advice here:

<http://www.deservewhatyouwant.com>

Contact Scot and Emily McKay: scotandemily@wingitworldwide.com

Web: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com>

Podcast: <http://www.wingitworldwide.com/podcast>