

## STATE OF GRACE

Words & music by Robert Bloomberg  
(Annotated by Marilyn Freund)

Took a trip around Christmas<sup>1</sup> down Mexico way,  
Me and Molie, Robert and Linda Mae<sup>2</sup>,  
In a customized<sup>3</sup>, oversized, Suburbanized  
Chevrolet...(truck, that is).

Four-wheel drivin' down a bumpy road,  
Cookin' beanie weenies on the manifold,<sup>4</sup>  
Dodgin' dead dogs at a pork in the road,<sup>5</sup>  
Got all the fun that we can hold...today.

Down in Mexico, state of Chiapas<sup>6</sup>.  
It's a state of grace and nothing can stop us.  
Got a full tank of gas and some chicken soup<sup>7</sup>.  
Even got the Virgin of Guadalupe.<sup>8</sup>  
(The V of G...ooo wheel!)<sup>9</sup>

Robert and Molie felt like slugs<sup>10</sup>  
So we took 'em to the doctor to get 'em some drugs.  
You could tell he was doctor...by the plaques on the wall.  
Yes, he was a pro, it was plain to see  
He didn't even have to borrow batteries  
To put in that thing that peeks in your ears and all.<sup>11</sup>

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(The V of G...ooo wheel!)

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<sup>1</sup> December 1993

<sup>2</sup> Robert (Bob) Bloomberg, Marilyn Freund, Robert & Linda Mitchell

<sup>3</sup> The Suburban was "customized" by Robert Mitchell, who built a shelf in back to hold camera gear for easy access, and two plug-in coolers, one for film and one for food and drinks.

<sup>4</sup> There were times on our travels through Mexico when there was nowhere to eat, or nowhere that you would want to eat, and so we sometimes put a can of soup or beanie weenies on the manifold of the car engine. Twenty minutes at 50mph and a hot meal was ready.

<sup>5</sup> For some reason on this trip we saw an inordinate amount of road kill, and for some reason it caused us to pun mercilessly.

<sup>6</sup> Southernmost state in Mexico and one of the poorest economically, although rich in beautiful landscapes, archeological sites, and cultural heritage.

<sup>7</sup> See Footnote 4.

<sup>8</sup> Linda has always had a particular fondness for the Virgin of Guadalupe, the dark-skinned virgin, and so did we all by the end of the trip.

<sup>9</sup> In fact, we liked her so much we gave her the nickname "The V of G".

<sup>10</sup> Various head and chest colds had turned into lingering sinus infections.

<sup>11</sup> Robert and Linda told this tale from a previous trip. The doctor had to borrow the batteries from a handheld calculator to put in his otoscope (That's what it's called.)

Picked up a guy named Joe Penso<sup>12</sup>  
Thought he was the Pope or a po-ta-to.<sup>13</sup>  
"Yo penso papas...therefore I am!"<sup>14</sup>  
He was last seen slidin' down a hill near Yaxchilan.<sup>15</sup>

Yo penso papas, shop til we droppas,<sup>16</sup>  
Brake pads smokin' goin' over the toppas.<sup>17</sup>  
Catchin' the flu and chasin' the sun,  
Dodgin' "bad women"<sup>18</sup> and "Los Guys With Guns"<sup>19</sup>  
In a land where toucans...live as cheap as one.<sup>20</sup>

Bouncin' through the jungle to Yaxchilan,<sup>21</sup>  
Enrique singin' gospel just as sweet as he can,  
And every single song by that Julio man  
But he never heard of Elvis, or CNN...  
(or the Beatles...thought Madonna was a virgin, for Christ sake).<sup>22</sup>

Down in Mexico, state of Chiapas.  
It's a state of grace and nothing can stop us.  
Just laughin' down the road, toucans flyin'...  
Sharin' all we got -- what's yours is Mayan.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Pun on "Yo penso" which means "I think" in Spanish.

<sup>13</sup> We rolled into the small backwater of Pichucalco late enough one evening that no restaurants were open, but we found a small sidewalk operation that still had some food cooking. Bob pointed to some foil-wrapped objects on the grill and intended to say "I think those are potatoes?" However, he said "Yo penso Papa" which would translate roughly as "I think I am the Pope." Or maybe he said "Yo penso papas" which is more or less "I think I am a potato." In either case, it put Robert and Linda on the floor laughing, and Marilyn as well once it was explained to her. Thus was Joe Penso born.

<sup>14</sup> Descartes' famous statement: I think therefore I am.

<sup>15</sup> The descent to the Usumacinta River where we boarded a longboat for Yaxchilan was down a steep hill muddy from the recent rains. We were all trying hard not to slip and fall in the muck, and one of us did not succeed.

<sup>16</sup> If you knew Robert Mitchell, this line does not need any explanation.

<sup>17</sup> "Toppas" is a deliberate mispronunciation of "topes," the random speed bumps that appear on Mexican roads. You can't see them until you're almost on them, so you slam on the brakes, become airborne anyway, and return to the pavement with a bone-crunching thud.

<sup>18</sup> "Mala mujere" ("bad woman") is a plant of the euphorbia family with painful stinging hairs (like a nettle).

<sup>19</sup> New Year's Day 1994 was the start of the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas. The first we heard about it was when we encountered a military roadblock outside of Palenque on the road to San Cristobal de las Casas. During the rest of the trip we saw troop transports on the highways heading south to Chiapas and lots of military presence wherever we went.

<sup>20</sup> You've already been warned about the puns.

<sup>21</sup> Yaxchilan is a remote archaeological site on the banks of the Usumacinta River, which forms an uneasy border between Mexico and Guatemala. To get there from Palenque, you drive about 4 hours on a road that gets progressively rougher, then take a longboat another 2 hours down river. Six hours each way plus two hours at the ruins made for one very long day.

<sup>22</sup> Enrique was our driver to the Usumacinta. He had been raised a Christian and he, Robert, and Linda were able to harmonize on quite a repertoire of Sunday morning standards. Enrique had a beautiful voice, and in addition to the church songs, he knew everything Julio Iglesias had ever recorded. When we tried to come up with more songs we might all know, we discovered that Enrique had, indeed, never heard of Elvis, the Beatles, or Madonna (who was pretty famous back in 1994).

<sup>23</sup> I know, I know. But don't blame me; I didn't write this.

We got hungry, so we stopped at a house.  
They fed us some eggs and an old dormouse.<sup>24</sup>  
Well it might have been a badger...there was some doubt,<sup>25</sup>  
And a bathroom Mollie still won't talk about.<sup>26</sup>

Down in Mexico, state of Chiapas.  
It's a state of grace and nothing can stop us.  
Followin' a pig who's followin' a cow;<sup>27</sup>  
Guess we got ourselves a convoy now.<sup>28</sup>  
Fer sure, fer sure...  
(Breaker! Breaker!<sup>29</sup> This is Huevos Revoltos.<sup>30</sup> Watch out for that  
fowl turn at the dogleg.<sup>31</sup> Buenas figuras,<sup>32</sup> good buddy! 10-4!)

Stopped at a motel, it was pretty bizarre.<sup>33</sup>  
They put a shower curtain over your car.<sup>34</sup>  
Just a big old bed and a tiny tv  
With the friendliest people on channel 3.<sup>35</sup>  
(I think it was "Debbie Does Tlacolula."<sup>36</sup>)

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<sup>24</sup> Along the remote road to the Usumacinta River we stopped at a place where breakfast could be had. (Notice I did not say a "restaurant.") The woman cooking spoke only the local Maya dialect, so Enrique translated. We could order eggs and some meat, he said. What sort of meat, we asked? "Tepesquintle," said the woman. Enrique thought for a moment, and said "Dormouse." Since I did not recall falling down any rabbit holes, I thought that seemed unlikely, and the better part of valor would be to turn vegetarian for the time being.

<sup>25</sup> After our return we all embarked on a mission to find out what "tepesquintle" was. Google did not yet exist and badger was our best guess. If you Google it now, you'll discover that tepesquintle is a cavy or paca, i.e., a large rat, and I am really really glad I didn't eat it.

<sup>26</sup> That's true.

<sup>27</sup> These animals were on the road to the Usumacinta ahead of our vehicle and began to run as we came closer to them. They continued to run down the center of the road for quite a long distance, as if we were chasing them, but never having the sense to simply move out of the way.

<sup>28</sup> One of Robert's favorite songs, which we took to playing every morning when we had a drive ahead of us, was "Convoy" by C.W. McCall.

<sup>29</sup> "Fer sure," "Breaker breaker," "good buddy" and "10-4" are all lyrics from the song.

<sup>30</sup> Bob likes his scrambled eggs well mixed, so he learned to say "huevos revueltos." One morning he ordered "huevos revoltos," literally "unruly eggs" but better translated as "revolting eggs."

<sup>31</sup> Ouch.

<sup>32</sup> Our keenest shopping quest was for finely carved and extravagantly painted wooden animals: figuras de madera. Robert told Bob that in a woodcarving town like San Martin Tilcajete, he could walk down the main street asking "Hay figuras?" and people would know what he meant. Bob must have had the words on his mind, because one morning he greeted a stranger with "Buenas figuras" instead of the usual "Buenas dias."

<sup>33</sup> This was a "love hotel" where rooms could be rented by the hour. The all-night rate was quite reasonable and we discovered that they always had plenty of hot water. (Never a given in Mexico.) We often spotted these hotels on the highway outside an urban area. They were always behind a high wall, so passing traffic could not see any cars parked there.

<sup>34</sup> This particular love hotel was so privacy-conscious that each unit had an attached garage with a door into the room. You could park your car, pull a large plastic curtain across the garage door, and enter the room without being seen.

<sup>35</sup> Channel 3 was all porn, all the time. And what strange porn it was! A frenetic senorita dancing semi-nude in front of a fireplace and men in neoprene frogmen suits with strategic cut-outs.

<sup>36</sup> "Debbie Does Dallas" was a notorious 1978 porn film. Tlacolula is a market town near Oaxaca, famous for its baroque church. It's a lot of fun to say - try it. Tuh-lah-kuh-LOO-luh.

Robert shopped til he dropped, but he saved big bucks.  
Got a wooden `gator and a dog that sucks,  
A two-headed cat, and a devil doll,  
Hafta build a new house just to keep it all.<sup>37</sup>  
(Actually...it was even worse that that...there was six...suckin'...dogs!)<sup>38</sup>

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It's a state of grace, and nothing can stop us.  
Got a full tank of gas and some chicken soup.  
Even got the Virgin of Guadalupe.  
(The V of G...ooo whee!)

Took a trip around Christmas down Mexico way,  
Me and Molie, Robert and Linda Mae,  
In a customized, oversized, Suburbanized  
Chevrolet.

Four-wheel drivin' down a bumpy road,  
Cookin' beanie weenies on the manifold,  
Add a little cheese, just scrape off the mold,  
A snort of Rompopo to keep out the cold,<sup>39</sup>  
Dodgin' dead dogs at a pork in the road,<sup>40</sup>  
Got all the fun that we can hold...today.

Laughin' down the road, singin' some tunes,<sup>41</sup>  
Buyin' lots of shit, and seein' lots of ruins.<sup>42</sup>  
We keep on runnin', don't need no prunes...<sup>43</sup>  
But time runs faster and it's over too soon.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> That would be the barn on the Bandera property.

<sup>38</sup> Count `em yourself behind the stairs at the Mitchell house.

<sup>39</sup> Rompopo is a sort of Mexican eggnog made with rum. It's both strong and sweet, and a bottle of it usually accompanied us on our travels until it was gone.

<sup>40</sup> Last pun, honest.

<sup>41</sup> Convoy, as mentioned in footnote #28, but also selections from The Rocky Horror Picture Show and the entire score of Oklahoma.

<sup>42</sup> On this trip alone: Monte Alban, Mitla, Yagul, Lambityeco, Palenque, and Yaxchilan.

<sup>43</sup> That's not really a pun, is it?

<sup>44</sup> Ain't that the saddest truth you ever heard?