



**Debbie Mellberg  
Apartado 175  
Tepic, Nayarit  
MEXICO**

**c/o North Village  
Baptist Church  
1010 E. Alice Ave.  
Phoenix, AZ 85020**



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***“Then said Mary unto the angel, ‘How shall this be...?’” Luke 1:34a***

After a year of language school, Kirt and I, along with baby Ben, entered the city of Tepic to begin our missionary work, thirty-five years ago this past December 12. Our years of preparation, education, deputation, internship, and language learning had finally led to that moment. We found a little house to rent from which to begin the task God had given us of making friends, sharing God’s love and truth, and planting a church.

Mary also was given a humanly impossible task as Gabriel announced that she would bear a Son whose name was to be Jesus. To the angel she queried, “How shall this be?” The answer to her question was, “The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee.”

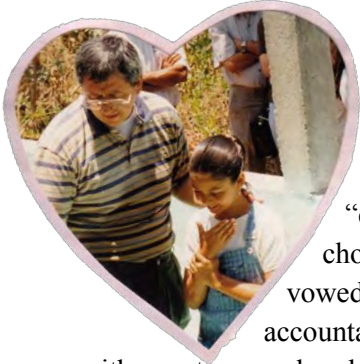
Little did we know what sovereign plans and thoughts God had foreordained for us. As we eagerly anticipate His open doors beginning this new year, I look back over the highlights of the past two months, and it’s not surprising to see one constant factor in this ministry in which seed was sown, watered, and cultivated, not by one, but by many sharecroppers; and God, as He promised, has given and continues to give the increase, not just a little, but a hundredfold.



Beautiful, young Carlita Aldaco’s past two decades and current participation are demonstrative of the fulfillment of that divine promise for Tepic. Carlita was just three years old, when we began laying the foundation for what is now the Iglesia Bíblica Bautista Misericordia – Tepic. She accompanied our family and hers and the young men (Nacho and Martín) who are now pastors of the IBBM-Tepic to the river near the Huichol village of Salvador Allende where her father and mother, José Luis and Lupita, were baptized.

Carlita was born into a family of privilege, but she learned to serve, share and show compassion as a follower of Jesus. She was a Sparky (Chispa) the very first year we began our OANSA club. She invited her friends, learned her Bible verses, attended church faithfully and enthusiastically considered herself as much a member of the “church planting team” as the Mellberg kids. When she was six years old, the Mellberg family left Mexico for furlough and her family agreed to “babysit” our piano. Carlita began taking lessons, and when we returned her father bought her a piano of her own. She continued, though not always willingly but disciplined by her mother, for 9 years until she graduated from the Superior School of Music with an accredited technical degree in piano.





Carlita continued to grow in “wisdom, stature and in favor with God and man.” Her father, now one of the IBBM-Tepic pastors, had the privilege of baptizing her when she was eleven. She celebrated her fifteenth birthday with a beautiful “quinceañera” party, where the emphasis was not on her “coming-out” but rather on her personal choice to follow Jesus’ leading in her life. She vowed to keep herself pure and be faithful and accountable to Him. She began playing piano along with me at every church activity. She worked diligently to pass through every rank of OANSA and received the “Nobel Prize” that



we offer for excellence the year she graduated. Carla became a leader-in-training for a year, finished the one-on-one discipleship course, and then became a full-fledged leader of her own group. She has personally discipled at least a half-dozen young ladies, and she is an excellent primary and junior Sunday school teacher. She graduated from the university with a degree in business administration and works weekdays at her daddy’s lumber company.



This past month, Carla was a key player in preparing and implementing the teen Christmas party in which 80 young people observed the true reason for celebration. She had an active role in orchestrating,



rehearsing and performing the music in the church-wide Christmas celebration, an annual activity that reaches out with the Good News to the surrounding community. Carla also organized a recital at the church in which her 22 piano students played hymns and Christmas songs they had prepared under her instruction.



As I watched, worked alongside and depended on Carla (and a whole team of others who have also chosen to give their hearts and lives to Jesus, as well) this past month and reflected over the past years and decades, I find it impossible to get the awe of “Mary’s question” out of my head. “*How shall this be?*” The answer to her question, and to ours more than two millenniums later as we experience the manifold blessings He has promised, was and is, “*The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee.*”

All because of Jesus and in His love,

Debbie Mellberg