

# Senior Lawyers

The newsletter of the Illinois State Bar Association's Senior Lawyers Section

## From the Chair

BY EUGENIA C. HUNTER

*You don't stop laughing when you grow old,  
you grow old when you stop laughing*

-George Bernard Shaw

*A merry heart doeth good like medicine:  
but a broken spirit drieth the bones.*

-Proverbs 17:22

*As soap is to the body, so laughter is to  
the soul.*

-A Jewish Proverb

Today we need both soap and laughter.

Do not neglect either. ■

## 5 Things Senior Lawyers Should Know About Legal Cannabis

BY THOMAS E. HOWARD

*Editor's Note: The former chair of Senior Lawyers, Tim Howard, asked his son to provide this article for our members.*

### 1. It is the same weed from the 1960s.

While you may be scared into believing that this is not the weed from Woodstock, nothing is further from the truth. The quality of cannabis has increased with legalization, but the cannabis from the 1960s (or 1860s) is the same. Today, it is grown with scientific precision so that it is of the highest quality. While much of the weed from decades ago came from Mexico and was smuggled into the U.S., it was of poor quality with up to 40 percent of the

weight of the cannabis from seeds and stems instead of the cannabis buds.

When cannabis is grown it is either male or female. All the cannabis sold is female because its buds make the **tetrahydrocannabinol** (THC or usually referred to as Delta-9-THC) and other sticky cannabinoids, terpenes and flavonoids so that pollen from the male plants stick and fertilize the buds and create seeds. This reduces the potency of the cannabis because THC creation slows after fertilization. However, in Northern California high quality seedless marijuana (sensimilla) has been its chief crop since the 1970s and was widely used by the

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## 5 Things Senior Lawyers Should Know About Legal Cannabis

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Grateful Dead. Interestingly, the remaining members of Dead & Company still use it. Finally, Columbia's Santa Rosa Gold has provided extremely high quality imported cannabis to southern states in the 1970s.

### 2. It is also completely new since 2011.

While THC gets all the controversy, a lesser known cannabinoid, **cannabidiol** (CBD), has become all the rage in recent years. In 2018, the Federal Farm Bill legalized all cannabis plants that have 0.3 percent or less THC, which resulted in a booming hemp market to produce buds that make CBD flowers instead of those laden with THC. For the 2020 crop year, many hemp farmers are shifting to **cannabigerol** (CBG) flowers because of new USDA regulations that measure total THC levels instead of only Delta-9-THC.

In 2011, the Stanley Brothers cannabis farm in Colorado began making a new type of cannabis that had high levels of CBD and low levels of THC. It began with the strain name of "Hippie's Disappointment," but eventually became named after the child with epilepsy that needed it to reduce her seizures, her name was Charlotte Figi. The strain became Charlotte's Web and swept the nation. The 2014 Federal

Farm Bill allowed for a hemp pilot program, and full legalization of hemp came in 2018. Unfortunately, Charlotte was a victim of COVID-19 and passed away in April of 2020.

### 3. It greatly reduces use of other medications.

Both CBD and THC have certain medicinal properties, which federal law directly contradicts for the THC version of the plant. Studies into CBD are ongoing, but it has been shown to help with certain forms of epileptic seizures, anxiety, and pain. THC helps with pain, insomnia, nausea, but may cause anxiety if the person has too much. THC and CBD are antagonistic. Consequently, blended cannabis strains like Harle Tsu (which is

high in CBD content and virtually non-existent THC content) may be the right choice for seniors that have not consumed the plant in years and do not want to get high.

States like Colorado have seen double-digit reductions in heroin overdose deaths, and 6 percent to 8 percent fewer opioid overdose deaths. Interestingly, one study found that the counties where dispensaries were allowed to operate enjoyed the reductions, while counties that banned dispensaries did not see any reductions. Numerous studies have shown the reduction of opioid overdose and deaths. One 2019 study found that legalization and access to cannabis reduced annual opioid mortality in the range of 20 percent to 35 percent. To put it another way, legalization not only saves lives, but it is also the correct policy for social justice and tax revenue.

### 4. You can grow your own.

If you get your medical card in Illinois, you can cut the cost of accessing your medicine substantially by growing your own. Hours of free grow tutorials are online at YouTube. Also, Amazon has packages for everything you need—except the seeds—to grow your own medicine.

Illinois law permits medical cannabis card holders to grow up to five cannabis plants in a secured locked space at their residence. The law limits the number of plants to five per household; places additional restrictions on keeping it away from children and from public view; and also allows landlords to prevent their tenants from growing their own.

The equipment and seeds for a home grow may range from \$300 to \$500 dollars. While you can spend more or less - it can be an expensive hobby. However, the cheapest eighth of an ounce of medical cannabis that I have seen at an Illinois dispensary is \$49. A single cannabis plant can yield several ounces of medicine. So, if you grow a plant that yields two ounces of cannabis buds, you have saved hundreds of dollars.

## Senior Lawyers

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The articles in this newsletter are not intended to be used and may not be relied on for penalty avoidance.

## 5. It is still illegal if you have too much.

While you can go to the liquor store and buy all the vodka you need to overdose, or to the grocery store and buy all the Tylenol you need to overdose, and despite cannabis being incapable of causing an overdose, you can only possess one ounce or less, unless you grow your own.

Legalization routinely has these types of ceilings. In Illinois, the limit is one ounce; the same for Colorado and Washington state. Colorado and Washington have also banned public use, which is different from the alcohol that is freely served in public establishments. Illinois, however, has some statutory provisions to allow for social use lounges, but the evolution of those laws

and regulations became stalled when the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered practically everything. However, cannabis was declared an 'essential' business by the executive stay-at-home order. ■

# Traveling Safe & Smart Overseas With Internet-Enabled Electronic Devices

BY WILLIAM AUSTIN

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In normal times—that is, before concern over the COVID-19 pandemic began to dominate the news and our daily lives—we might be traveling now or making plans to do so. We might also be looking to this *Senior Lawyer* newsletter for travel tips from some of our frequent contributors, who are veteran travelers. If your plans or planning has been derailed for the time being, this may be an opportunity for you to use this hiatus to tool up for the next trip.

Most of us today wouldn't think of leaving our electronic devices behind when we are on the open road. There are good reasons why these devices, which hardly existed a generation ago, have practically become necessities for many of us. If you travel with, and rely upon, a computer, smartphone, or other internet-enabled electronic device to send and receive information, here are some things that you should consider:

- Unsecure public Wi-Fi systems in coffee shops, hotels, and other public places, and electronic devices in internet cafes, do not offer privacy. In some countries, these systems are monitored electronically on a routine basis. Hackers may be pranksters, at best, or criminals (and even foreign security services), at worst.
- The internet was created for the easy exchange of information, not for

user privacy. Any information that you send by electronic means can be intercepted. Wireless devices are especially vulnerable to intrusion by others.

- Hackers can track your movements using your mobile phone and can turn on the microphone in your phone even when you think it's off. To prevent this from happening, remove the battery.
- Hackers can also insert malicious software into your device through any connections they control. They can also do so wirelessly if your device is enabled for Wi-Fi.
- Malware can also be transferred to your device unsuspectingly through thumb drives (USB sticks), computer disks, and other devices. Thumb drives gifted to you may be compromised.
- If you transmit personal or sensitive information from abroad, you do so at an even higher risk level, than when you do so domestically.
- Hackers are adept at "phishing"—that is, pretending to be someone you trust in order to obtain personal or sensitive information.
- High-profile travelers are most at risk, of course, but you should not

assume that you are too insignificant to be targeted.

So, what measures can you take to protect yourself? If you can do without the device, don't take it; but if you do take it, here are some of the things that you can do to mitigate your risk:

- Back up all information that you take; and, leave the backed-up data at home. You should already be doing this even if you never leave home.
- If feasible, travel with a different computer or mobile device from the one that you use at home. That old smartphone that you replaced last year, which has been lying in your desk drawer, can be put to use (if it is "unlocked") with a new SIM card for the country you are visiting, at a very modest cost. Check with your provider to see if your phone will work in the country that you are visiting and find out whether it is unlocked. Switching the SIM card is easy, and most stores will do it for you while you are waiting.
- Consider using a virtual private network (VPN). By subscribing to a service provided by a VPN company, such as NordVPN, your transmission is routed through an encrypted tunnel to a server operated by that

company. That means that anyone connected to your router will not be able to see your information. You can even conceal your location, *i.e.*, by connecting to a VPN server in a random country, you can make it appear as if you are accessing the internet from that country. There are both free and paid VPN services available, and each has its pros and cons.

Plan in advance. You can prepare your device in advance of your travels by taking these recommended steps:

- Create a strong password (using a combination of numbers, upper- and lower-case letters, and special characters - at least 8 characters long). Never store your passwords or sign-on sequences in your device.
- Change your passwords at regular intervals and avoid using the same password for more than one web site.
- Use secure password manager programs such as LastPass, Dashlane and Keeper.
- Remember that Comcast email account that you never use? Consider using it or setting up a separate email address to use only while you are traveling.
- Download current, up-to-date antivirus protection, spyware protection, operating systems, security patches, and a personal firewall.
- Of course, you do not want to forget to pack essential accessories, *e.g.*, charging cord(s), a plug adapter, and/or a voltage converter. Most devices today will only require plug adapters, and not voltage converters.

While you are traveling, do not forget these security measures:

- It goes without saying, do not bank or shop online if you are using an unsecure Wi-Fi service. Less obvious risks to avoid are entering sensitive information such as passwords, credit card numbers and bank account numbers in an unsecure environment.
- Locking down your social media

account(s) is a common-sense security measure, although your friends will have to wait until you return home to see what you had for dinner each evening.

- Avoid carrying your electronic devices in checked baggage, even if it is aggravating to take them through security screening stations.
- Use online accounts that offer two-factor authentication whenever possible to add an extra layer of security to your account. Once you set it up, you will sign into your account in two steps using something you know (such as your password), and something you have with you (like your phone). Also, use encryption capabilities whenever possible.
- Turn off Bluetooth-enabled accessories, such as earphones, and turn off the Bluetooth setting on your internet-enabled device, when not in use. Hackers can steal personal information by pairing with your device's open Bluetooth connection when it's not in use.
- Don't leave your electronic devices unattended, *e.g.*, at an airport charging station. Not all travel risks are high-tech. You will want to protect the devices themselves from theft, as well as the information contained in the devices. If your hotel has a room safe, you can secure your electronic devices in it with reasonable confidence.
- Protect your passwords. Don't use the "remember me" feature for websites that you visit; rather, re-enter the password each time you return to the site.
- Be alert, especially in public areas, to "shoulder surfers" who may be looking at your computer screen.
- Never open emails or attachments from unknown sources and delete suspicious emails. Remember what we said about "phishing."
- Avoid Wi-Fi networks, if you can; or, if you must use them, also use your VPN that is described above.

- Most of all, do not leave your common sense at home.

With the added peace of mind of knowing that both you and your internet-enabled electronic devices are properly prepared, you can enjoy your well-deserved travels, wherever they may take you.

For more detailed information regarding certain products and services (*e.g.*, VPN) see:

<https://www.isba.org/practicehq>

For general travel alerts and information, see the Department of State's site:

<http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/alertswarnings.html>

Obtain official government cyber security alerts from resources such as:

[www.onguardonline.gov](http://www.onguardonline.gov)

[www.us-cert.gov/cas/tips](http://www.us-cert.gov/cas/tips) ■

# Staying Active, Healthy, and Productive at Home

BY MICHAEL B. HYMAN, E. KENNETH WRIGHT JR., & ERIN CLIFFORD

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Most legal professionals have either been working from home or not working at all due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is cause for anxiety and stress for us and anyone who lives with us. According to experts, embracing a healthy lifestyle maintains overall health. We offer a few suggestions to help you better manage working from home.

## A Home Office

In uncertain times, structure is essential. Our minds do better with plans. Set a schedule for the entire workday and keep to it. A daily routine increases productivity, and in turn, creates healthier moods. Make sure to block time not just for the tasks that need attention, but also for stretch and snack breaks. Ask others living with you to respect your boundaries when working. The more distractions and background noise, the less productive you become. If space is scarce, get noise cancelling headsets or headphones.

Create workspace, if possible, near a window or an area that offers good lighting. Looking outside will brighten your frame of mind; dark workspace may strain your eyes and make it difficult to focus. Be disciplined and follow the routine that works for you.

A recent *Forbes* magazine article recommends against multitasking. *Forbes* reported that studies found people who work on “one task at a time are calmer and more effective and productive.” In addition, the article suggests pacing oneself, “Productivity isn’t a marathon it’s a sprint, and studies show that productivity is enhanced with balance. Plodding puts you at the finish line in time plus you can enjoy life on your way. Remember, the tortoise, not the hare, won the race.”

## Steps to Boost Wellness

Exercise provides the best defense against coping with life’s daily stressors. Being active

distracts from daily worries while boosting feel-good endorphins. Experts recommend at least two-and-a-half hours of moderate exercise or seventy-five minutes of vigorous exercise each week. Can’t go to a gym? That’s not an excuse to stop working out. Make a point to keep up with a fitness routine at home. Workouts are available on YouTube or on exercise apps.

As long as you practice social distancing, enjoy the outdoors. Go for a walk, a run, a hike, or a bike ride. Spending time in nature provides much needed fresh air, sunshine, and a change of scenery.

What you eat makes a difference. Enjoy foods that support a healthy immune system like fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds. These foods also can provide fiber, protein, and healthy fats. Limit foods high in sodium, added sugar, and saturated fat. A healthy diet also includes two fish meals a week.

Consume alcohol in moderation. Alcohol is not a health food and encourages unhealthy food choices. The National Cancer Institute recommends that men have no more than two drinks per day and women have no more than one drink per day. (A drink serving is 12 ounces of beer, five ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of liquor.)

## Managing Stress

Mindfulness or the “science of chill” can effectively manage stress and anxiety. Meditating even a few minutes a day has a positive effect on emotional and physical health. Meditation puts you in the present moment, away from the latest news or stressing about the future. Any time you start to feel stressed or anxious, do breathing exercises to refresh your mind. For example, the 4-7-8 (inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds, exhale for 8 seconds).

## Dealing With Anxiety and Depression

Social isolation can lead to mental health problems. Over an extended period, social isolation has been known to cause negative thoughts, severe anxiety, and depression. Positive thinking can help mitigate these feelings.

While it may be tempting to think more about the things that you’ve given up, it’s healthier to think about the things that you’ve gained. For instance, maybe you’re spending quality time with your spouse, your children, or your pet. Or, you picked up that book you have been wanting to read for who knows how long.

Positive thinking takes effort, but that effort can make a big difference to your well-being. Among the ways to generate positive thoughts are reading inspiring books, listening or watching uplifting podcasts, television programs, or movies, and downloading apps that encourage positive thinking such as Shine, Motivate, Headspace, Moodscope, and Moodpath.

## Health Precautions

The safest place to avoid COVID-19 is at home. This means stocking up on groceries, medications, and other essentials to minimize trips to stores. It also means being wary of “high touch” surfaces. These include elevator buttons, door handles, credit card machines, and handrails. Use a tissue or your sleeve, and wash your hands as soon as possible. Of course, always wear a mask when in public places.

Experts say wearing gloves doesn’t do enough to avoid the spread of germs. Gloves come in contact with multiple objects that might contain the virus, and spread it elsewhere. Experts recommend frequent hand washing as the single most effective way of protecting yourself. Gloves should

be used for specific tasks such as cleaning infected areas, disposing of waste, and pumping gas.

### Physical Distancing, Not Social Distancing

You need to stay in touch and connected with your personal community. Call or FaceTime, Facebook, or Skype with people you care about. If you're part of a breakfast club or book group, continue it remotely. Hold a virtual party, a virtual dinner, or a virtual game night. And if you haven't heard from someone, chances are they and you could benefit from your reaching out to them. These measures can reduce stress and anxiety associated with social isolation and blunt depressive thoughts.

### Self-Care and Staying Connected

Take mental time outs. Call a friend, a family member, a colleague. Read a book or watch a good movie. Cook a meal. Play a game on-line or with friends. Limit listening to the news.

On average, you need seven to nine hours of quality sleep. This is crucial for maintaining the body's immunity. A good night's sleep stabilizes mood-regulating serotonin levels. Lack of good sleep inhibits brains from rebalancing.

### Conclusion

These are uncertain and stressful times. But by staying active, healthy, and productive, they need not be so stressful. As it has been said, "If life was easy, where would all the adventure be?" ■

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*Michael B. Hyman is a member of the First District Appellate Court; E. Kenneth Wright, Jr. is the presiding judge of Cook County's First Municipal District; and Erin Clifford is the Director of Marketing and Business Development at Clifford Law Offices.*

# What Is the Electoral College and What Does It Do?

BY NANCY EASUM

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The November 3, 2020, presidential election will soon be here. The candidate with the most popular votes will be the winner and be inaugurated as president in January 2021, right? Not necessarily! The Electoral College must be considered—but what exactly is the Electoral College?

The Electoral College was established by the United States Constitution and is comprised of 538 members in total from all of the states across the Country. Each state has the same number of electors as it has members of Congress. So how does the Electoral College function and what is its purpose?

Each time voters go to the polls to elect the president of the United States, they are not really voting for a presidential candidate, but rather are voting for 'electors' each of whom pledges to vote for a particular candidate when the Electoral College in their state convenes on the first Monday

after the second Wednesday in December. Following this vote, the report of the state electors across the country is prepared and incorporated into a certificate of vote and presented to Congress on January 6 following the election. A candidate must receive 270 electoral votes to be elected. If no candidate receives 270 votes, the election is then decided by the United States House of Representatives with each state having one vote. This situation has happened two times in the history of the Electoral College.

Excepting Maine and Nebraska, the votes cast in each state go to one candidate. So how is that candidate chosen? The votes are not prorated based upon the percentage of votes earned by each presidential candidate. All of the electoral votes of a state go to the candidate who won the popular vote in that state. Consequently, it is possible for a candidate to earn the most popular votes nationwide but still not be elected as

president.

When the founding fathers of our country were working on the United States Constitution, they wanted to develop a system that gave each state an equal voice but did not create a monarchy. While at that time the state legislatures elected their own governors, the Constitutional Convention delegates did not favor having Congress elect the president. They were instead seeking a method that did not promote favoritism or create a system of royalty. The potential for control by the large states was also a concern.

While some delegates favored a direct election by all voters of the states, others were concerned the voters would not be well informed about the candidates. Of course, communication with and among the public then was much different than now. The founding fathers were also trying to avoid election re-counts or run-offs. They were worried large states would control the

election which could result in not giving everyone an equal voice. The purpose of the Electoral College was to combat tyranny and support the federalism doctrine—both outcomes believed to be good alternatives and a compromise to allowing Congress to elect the president or for a popular vote to decide the outcome.

As a result of the Electoral College method, battleground states have developed. These are states with a large number of electoral votes. Consequently, candidates focus on these states, as winning their votes will help ensure one's election as president. Focusing on states with a large number of electoral votes and spending less time campaigning in or ignoring smaller states with only a few electoral votes has been one of the major criticisms of the Electoral College method and its influence. Only 20 percent of voters nationwide live in battleground states. Therefore, 80 percent

of voters are being ignored or not taken seriously by the presidential candidates. Often the candidates do not even visit these states or only travel there on a limited basis. If the president were elected by popular vote, a candidate would need to campaign in every state, not just those with a high number of electoral college votes.

Another observation regarding “battleground states” is that the percentage of voters who go to the polls in these states is higher than those voters in non battleground states. One theory is that more people would vote if the president were elected by a purely a popular vote, without the use of the Electoral College. Proponents of this theory argue that its adoption as a means for voting would result in the election of a president by a truly nationwide popular vote. Some of these same individuals also argue that “battleground states” get more attention from federal programs and funding and thus have

an unfair advantage over other states.

Are battleground states receiving too much attention from the presidential candidates? Does the current communication system allow for well-informed voters? Has the time come to revisit and perhaps even revise the Electoral College system developed by our founding fathers? What do **YOU** think?

If you do have a view about whether or not the Electoral College is serving a meaningful purpose in our national elections, we suggest that you recommend the scheduling of a discussion or debate about the topic in your classroom—whether you are a student in that classroom or the teacher. If you do further research beyond this piece about that system, you will find it is actually a hot topic across the country as residents/voters struggle with finding the best way for voters to truly have a voice in the election of the president. ■

## Book Review: ‘American Dirt’

BY GARY T. RAFOOL

The book I have chosen for this review is “American Dirt” by Jeanine Cummins. It is a 2019 novel with 378 hard cover pages, plus five pages of notes by the author.

It is a 2020 book pick by Oprah’s Book Club, and it follows the plight of Lydia, a well educated middle class Mexican woman in her 30s, who speaks both fluent Spanish and English, and her eight year old son, Luca, who has a photographic memory, as they leave their comfortable life in Acapulco and attempt to travel to the United States by foot and by hopping freight trains through Mexico.

The author is a citizen of the United States, whose grandmother came to the US from Puerto

Rico, but she is not Latino. Because the book deals with migrants from Central America and Mexico, it has become controversial among Latinos, presumably for its perceived stereotypical depiction of Mexicans. The author’s promotional book

tour was cancelled by her publisher for fear of her safety. Leonard Pitts, an opinion writer for the Miami Herald, published an editorial in February of this year entitled “Who Gets to Tell The Stories,” which criticizes, among other things, the threats made against this author, and the pressure on Oprah about her book club’s selection of this book.

The story starts during Lydia’s niece’s fifteenth birthday celebration at Lydia’s mother’s home in Acapulco. The guests included Lydia’s husband, Sebastian, a journalist, her mother, her sister and her sister’s husband and various other nieces and nephews, as well as Luca for a total of eighteen celebrants.

Luca leaves the party to go to the bathroom, and after a while, Lydia leaves to look for him. As she finds him in the bathroom, several members of the largest and most powerful drug cartel in Mexico crashes into the party with AK-47s and murders all sixteen of the other guests, who

are outside on the patio. Hearing the shots, Lydia pulls Luca into the bathroom shower and they hide there until well after the shooting stops.

Seeing her husband, her mother, sister and all of the other guests dead, Lydia knows that it is the powerful drug cartel headed by Javier Crespo Fuentes, who had been recently featured in a detailed published article written by Sebastian. However, because Lydia feels that since many of the police are bribed by the cartels, this investigation will simply be cursory with no arrests made.

Lydia also fears for her and Luca’s safety because Javier many weeks before these killings, by chance, came into Lydia’s successful bookstore near the beach in Acapulco to purchase some books. These books were also some of Lydia’s favorites, and, not knowing who Javier was, Lydia started a conversation in both Spanish and English with him, which apparently impressed both parties. As a result, Javier

came back to the bookstore several more times, and his presence was warmly welcomed by Lydia.

Over several teas and coffees, Javier talked about his wife and his mistress with Lydia, who also told him about Luca and Sebastian, as well as that Sebastian was a journalist. Javier also told Lydia that the true love of his life is his only child, a teenage daughter, who was attending boarding school in Barcelona. Their friendship continued to grow during these meetings, and Javier even shared with Lydia some of the poetry he had written. Javier also started growing very fond of Lydia, who did not encourage or want this kind of attention from him.

After an article by Sebastian about the Mexican Drug Cartels, and in particular his detailed depiction of Javier, was published and circulated, Javier felt that the article was a fair description of him, including many of the charitable works he has done, and he was not originally concerned about it. However, his daughter read a copy of the article and became so distraught by it that she hanged herself in her dormitory room in Barcelona, leaving a note for Javier which read: "One more death should not matter much".

This, of course, hurt Javier and his wife immensely, which then resulted in the avenging sixteen murders of Lydia's husband and her family. Consequently, Lydia decides to leave not only Acapulco, but Mexico itself because of the influence Javier has throughout the country. This fear then caused Lydia to flee for her and Luca's lives.

Lydia packed some bare essential clothes and other sundry items into a carry-on bag and into a backpack. She then went to her bank and drew out all of their money in pesos, which amounted to about \$12,500 in U.S. dollars. She and Luca spent a night in a hotel in Acapulco before boarding a bus the next early morning just to get out of that city.

On the way, and with the help of a Mexican attorney, who was a college friend of Sebastian, Lydia and Luca were able to get to Mexico City in a van transporting several Indiana high school church missionary students to the airport. These students had been doing missionary and charitable work in Mexico while visiting this attorney and his wife. Because of various road checks and required bribes on the way to Mexico City,

Lydia had to pose as a counselor for these students.

Once in Mexico City, Lydia attempts to purchase plane tickets for Luca and her to Denver, but because she did not have proper identification documents for Luca, she was denied these tickets. It would have been very dangerous in Lydia's mind for them to take a bus or passenger train north, because of all of the anticipated roadblocks by the cartels and police along the way. Lydia was also sure that Javier had put the word out about Lydia and Luca being wanted by him to the police he bribes and to his cartel members throughout Mexico.

While still in Mexico City and near railroad tracks, Lydia talked to several migrants, who were mostly from Central America. From them, Lydia found that if you knew what you were doing, it would be possible to jump onto slow moving freight trains heading north. These trains were called "The Beast", because if you did not time your jumps just right, you could slip under the train's wheels and be dismembered and even killed. Obviously, this frightened Lydia, but, because she felt that she had no other choice, she decided to do it. However, she wanted to watch to see how these other migrants did it before she and Luca would even try.

Fortunately, after observing several trains, Lydia met up with two teen age girls traveling from El Salvador, who were heading to Baltimore because of gang violence in their country against them and their family. They explained to Lydia an easy and safer way to hop onto these freight trains.

Once migrants boarded these moving trains, they would climb up ladders to ride on the top of the cars. Lydia and Luca following the girls' suggestions were able to climb onto several of the trains and ride on top with the girls and a number of other migrants.

They rode each train as far as it was going, and then they would climb off as safely as possible and wait for another train heading a little farther north. Sometimes they required heading south to find a train with fewer Mexican immigration problems heading north. Along the way, the migrants stayed in several safe houses where they were not only welcomed, but fed and given warm showers

and beds.

At one such early stop, the migrants were told that they will most likely be robbed, possibly raped and some have even been left by their guide (coyote) to fend for themselves in the hot desert sun, which killed many of them. They were also told that probably only one in three migrants will actually make it to the US. Their biggest problem was said to be Mexican Immigration Officers (la migra), who will send most migrants back to their original countries unless they pay sizable bribes.

Lydia and Luca decide to stay and travel with the two teenage girls, Soledad, who is 15, and Rebeca, who is 14. The girls also have a reputable coyote who helped one of their relatives get to the US from Negales. This relative then traveled to and settled in Baltimore, where the girls, Lydia and Luca would also attempt to go once they safely crossed onto American soil or American dirt.

The book goes into great detail about the problems encountered by Lydia, Luca, Soledad and Rebeca along the way, including being caught on one of their trains and shaken down for all of their money by Mexican Immigration. Lydia and Luca, being Mexican citizens, could not be deported, but they had to pay dearly for their release, as well as to prevent Soledad and Rebeca from being deported.

Fortunately, Lydia still had her mother's bank card, which she was authorized to use at a bank in Negales, where a sympathetic banker allowed her to use it to withdraw the money she needed to pay the coyote to guide them through the desert and rough terrain to avoid detection by US Immigration.

The author also shines a very favorable light on the generosity of the Mexican people, who Lydia, Luca, as well as all of the other migrants traveling north encountered along the way.

They finally meet up with their coyote in Negales, whose nickname was El Chacal - the Jackal. However, he was very careful about his good record and reputation, as well as for the welfare of his clients. ■