

There's Beauty in the Night

By Sheila Johnson

I had been a pastor for a little over five years, when one of my dearest friends in the world asked me to officiate her wedding in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. She is Christian, and her now husband, is Jewish. I was honored, yet a little concerned about the marital laws in the country of Mexico, and the time limitations on any international pre-registering that may have been necessary prior to arriving in Puerto Vallarta.

As we neared the clean, vibrant, quaint Mexican city (named after a former Governor Vallarta), any doubts, anxieties, or fears were quickly dissolved upon viewing the bay that lay beneath the low hanging clouds that I gleaned from the window of the airplane. The white, gentle, waves moved back and forth in syncopation with the majestic seagulls forming musical notes heard only by my eyes. I couldn't wait to actually hear them with my ears and see them again when I stood on the beach that received the water with such grace. And I did get the chance to experience that symphony in the nights that followed. Many of my life's favorite memories have been made after the sun closed her eyes and gave way to the moon and the stars to display their glory, and this journey was no exception.

My friend, Susie, planned a memorable week leading up to their wedding. Our days were filled with visiting spas, restaurants (with authentic Mexican food), art galleries, and jewelry shops. The sun was hot and welcomed. It was relentless and tanned even the darkest of skin tones.

Oh but the nights! Walking the beach gave fireflies a reason to glow. The waves were much whiter against the background of the night sky, and the stars were smiling brightly. We happened upon a very sacred ceremony — a Mama turtle giving birth and burying her progeny under the moist, moonlit sand. One night, a few of us took a midnight cruise on a small boat. The darkness of the night allowed us to only see the moving waves, the presence of a bright yellow moon, lights on ships sailing far off in the distance, twinkling stars, and the glistening eyes aboard our vessel. The night visions were heavenly!

As the sun began her descent on the ocean's surface, the glowing couple exchanged vows on the top of the highest cliff in the Bay of Vallarta on the eve of a New Year. The groom broke the Mazel tov glass with his foot (according to Jewish tradition), and the celebration began! The bay lit up with beautiful and magnificent fireworks. Mariachis played their instruments and sang their songs under the multi-colored lights that were hung on the roof of the deck where we enjoyed the wedding dinner. A white dove flew in from "only God knows where," and perched herself on the rafters above the bride and groom. Doves are symbols of peace. And peace it was. Night visions are heavenly!