



DRAWINGS BY JOSE GUADALUPE POSADA

HECHO EN MEXICO

OR HOW I SPENT MY SPRING VACATION

BY HARRY JOHNSON

On Wednesday, April 13, I loaded my wedding/funeral suit, a clean pair of levis and some socks and underwear into my old Mustang and headed south. I had to be in Santa Ana on Friday for my sister's wedding (again?).

Before I knew it I was in Mt. Shasta, having a veggie sandwich and cruising out to Shasta Abbey to say Hi to the holy Buddhist monks who taught me to meditate sitting or walking or working. A 110 mile detour into the mountains to get around a toxic chemical spill just north of Redding, got me into that dreary town about bedtime.

I had wanted to stop in San Francisco for some romantic notion which, it turned out, was just an urge to visit Ferlinghetti's City Lights Books; I passed. I turned off I-5 south of Sacramento (the Sacramento) and headed for Monterey, Fort Ord, Salinas, Big Sur and the Henry Miller Library on Highway 1. The Mustang thought it was a Porsche Carrera on the tight curves and steep straights along the cliff faces of the real Pacific Coast Highway. I slowed down at San Simeon just enough to make a rude gesture toward the Hearst Castle arrogantly stacked on a hilltop away from the rumble of the masses.

When I reached San Luis Obispo, I realized I was following the route Fr. Junipero Serra who founded a string of missions along the California coast in the 18th century. I also realized from the place names that this was really Mexico.

It was tax time and the news on the radio said that the IRS had printed tax forms in Spanish for the first time, and they were expecting a large increase in filing and collections from our Spanish-speaking brethren. The "English only" fanatics were freaking out at this official recognition that some Americans speak other languages. I wondered how they are handling the news that, by the turn of the century California will be more than 50% non-white. Minorities will be the majority.

It was getting late on Thursday when I pulled off the freeway at Hermosa Beach (My how it's grown), and found the Lighthouse down by the beach. The Lighthouse used to be a

cool jazz joint when I was a kid. I used to read about Sunday afternoon jam sessions in Downbeat, and when I was 13 I talked an older kid with a license into driving me over after church. We saw Shorty Rogers and his Giants -- Bud Shank (now of Port Townsend), Bob Cooper, Shelly Manne.... I thought I was in Heaven. On the Long Beach jazz station they were playing Shorty Rogers tunes all night because it was his 70th birthday. Anyway, the Lighthouse had a rock and roll band, which left me a little sad. I walked up the street a few blocks and found the Either/Or Bookstore, which took up five storefronts and could have been named City Lights South. I bought a new edition of *The Labyrinth of Solitude* by Octavio Paz. I got a room and read some.

Paz says that the Mexican ideal of manliness includes keeping one's privacy; sharing confidences is weakness, and can be dangerous. As a therapist whose raw material is shared confidences, I see that in most American men of whatever race.

Friday morning I picked up my sweetie at the John Wayne Airport and we made it to the small non-denominational Protestant church on time. The building and the ceremony were devoid of passion, mystery or relevance. The reception was a buffet supper, sitting at parallel tables with plastic-wrapped centerpieces -- no music, no dancing, no celebration (and definitely no alcohol); then packing up wedding gifts for transport to the couple's new home near Yorba Linda, where Nixon's formaldehyde carcass would be interred in a few days.

Santa Ana is almost entirely Mexican from the look of it. I spoke to a woman I had gone all through school with, who had lived until that week in the house she was born in. She and her police officer husband were afraid to go out at night, tired of gunshots and circling helicopters in our old neighborhood, so they finally moved out. We heard a polite racism tinged with bitterness in conversations about our home town. In the mall, white housewives were circulating petitions to Stop Illegal Immigration.

On Sunday we got start/finish line grandstand seats for the Indy Car race through the streets of Long Beach. The speed of the cars dissembles your sense of reality; cars hurtling toward a curve at 195 and not backing off the accelerator catches your breath in your throat. The engine noise vibrates your whole body.

After the race we headed south again, not even slowing down for Orange County, through more towns of Mexico del Norte -- Corona del Mar, Laguna, Capistrano (one of Fr. Serra's missions), San Clemente (Nixon's Western White House and early exile from his failed presidency), La Jolla, San Diego and San Ysidro, where we bought a few pesos and Mexican car insurance.

I remember Tijuana in the late '40s-early '50s as a small strip of border bars and bordellos, shops and stalls and a tiny downtown. Remember Orson Welles' great movie *Touch of Evil*, and the rundown hotel on Tijuana's main street where the lovely Janet Leigh was drugged and assaulted? Hot rodders used to take their cars down there to get pleated and rolled upholstery installed cheaply.

Tijuana is now a serious city. My first impression was bedlam. Signs, crowds, traffic; guys approaching the car with upraised hammers. It took awhile for me to realize that they wanted to perform bodywork on my Mustang (which didn't need any).

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