



I missed the road to Ensenada and asked for directions from a young man in a car next to us. "Sigame," he said, "Follow me." We followed him through the traffic; he paused for us to catch up. He gesticulated toward the road as we approached and waved us on. Nice.

I had been a little guarded about Tijuana since the Archbishop was gunned down a few months ago. A couple of weeks before our visit, Luis Donaldo Colosio, the candidate of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (IRP) to succeed Carlos Salinas as president of Mexico, was assassinated. (A few days after we left, the chief of police and his bodyguard were also shot on the street.) Last September, a busload of rank and file members of the IAM, the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, traveled to Tijuana to observe labor and environmental conditions. While they were parked in front of a maquiladora plastics plant, the bus was boarded by Mexican immigration officials who detained the American unionists for three hours. They told the Americans that traveling to Mexico to discuss internal working conditions with Mexican workers was illegal. (It isn't.) They said they were acting at the request of the plant management.

About 45 Ks, 30 miles south of Tijuana on the Ensenada toll road, is Puerto Nuevo. We pulled off for lunch. There are three streets in town mostly filled with restaurants. We picked one with a second floor ocean view dining room. We ordered langosta mediana, and were served a platter full of broiled lobsters, bowls of rice and refried beans, chips and salsa and those handmade flour tortillas you can get at Juanita's in Warrenton. This qualified as one of my all-time great meals.

Back on the toll road to Ensenada, which I had last seen 45 years ago when my father drove us down to go fishing. Another city which has grown up around a village. We turned inland and headed across the desert of the Baja peninsula. It is about three hours to San Felipe, a fishing village on the Golfo de California. On the road and in town, every wall has been painted with the name COLOSIO and the PRI logo as part of the lopsided campaign for the election in August. In the manner of royal succession, President Salinas handpicked Colosio to be the next president. Paco Taibo calls Mexico "a monarchy disguised as an oligarchy in turn disguised as a republican democracy."

The PRI has ruled Mexico for 64 years. Opposition has been difficult to mount where the oligarchy or the government controls the media and the election process. In the last election, Cuatemoc Cardenas, the center-left candidate, almost unseated Salinas, despite massive voter fraud. It was beginning to seem possible that he would defeat Colosio in August. Mexico is rife with rumors that the PRI did Colosio in to avoid defeat at the polls. The appointment of another technocrat close to Salinas, the former Secretary of Education, Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de Leon, as the PRI candidate may squelch some of the conspiracy rumors.

The January uprising in Chiapas and several other states by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, declared its intention to demand free and fair elections, "unlike the present illegitimate and lopsided ones." The rebellion is largely against the "disaster of neoliberal economics" and the "violence of poverty, hunger, sickness and unemployment," according to a proclamation released in Mexico City on January 6. Clearly not all of Mexico supports the American educated elite of the Salinas government and their economic policies, including the NAFTA, or their control of elections by hook or crook.

San Felipe isn't much bigger than Hammond. It is stretched out along the water, with a couple of trailer parks (one for sale), and two large motels, both nearly empty in April. There is a block of open air fish and beer cafes and two blocks of shops. An early walk along the beachfront will take you to a dozen or so 15-foot fishing boats pulled up on the beach. They have bows like Columbia River gillnetters, with handnets piled in the bow and small outboards on the stern. The fishermen are smoking and joking and seem pretty laid-back about getting to work this morning. There is no surf and the water is warm.

We got a room right on the beach — actually, there was a pool between our room and the beach. The bar/restaurant attached to the motel has a verandah almost at the water's edge, and overhead fans and a waiter in a white shirt who listened patiently as customers practiced their Spanish. We ate delicious shrimp, camarones, caught that morning, and cold Mexican beer. In the evening the temperature seemed to be exactly that of your skin and a soft breeze slipped in off the water. It was a perfect place to eat and digest and drink and talk and know that you were right where you wanted to be.

We wanted to take a look at the mainland side of the Gulf, so we drove north to Mexicali, another bordertown become a city. Entering the city from the south, we saw a huge statue of Lazaro Cardenas, the popular liberal president in the '30s, who founded the PRI. He is related to Cuatemoc Cardenas who now leads the opposition. We saw a few of the maquiladora factories, including the Coca Cola plant where eleven workers trying to form an independent union were beaten by management thugs and fired. Kenworth has had the reputation of being the Cadillac of American diesel trucks. The big Kenworth plant in Mexicali was turning out rows of white cabover tractors with the familiar block letters KENWORTH on the side. If you look closely, you will also see KENMEX.

We got gas at a PEMEX (Petrolio Mexico) station, the only stations in Mexico. PEMEX, the pride of the Mexican economy, has fallen on hard times because of the fall in oil prices, and the debt they incurred building extraction and refining facilities, a dozen years ago. They have not yet succumbed to American oil companies who lick their chops at the idea of a "partnership" with PEMEX. Even NAFTA's invitation to American industry to further exploit Mexico excludes PEMEX because it is such a focus of national pride.

From Mexicali we headed east, and at San Luis Rio Colorado, we crossed the culvert containing the trickle which remains of the Colorado River after the dams and canals which electrify and nurture most of Southern California get theirs.

It is about 175 miles east to the little bordertown of Sonoma, where we stopped at a long-distance phone service, and at a drugstore where a pretty girl seemed entertained by my Spanish. About 55 miles back to the southwest is Puerto Penasco on the eastern shore of the Gulf, across from San Felipe. The Gulf is 85-90 miles across from here, too far to see across.

Puerto Penasco is larger, being a serious port, and seems more interested in tourists. We stayed at a large hotel with a big pool and a voluble American woman who was manager or co-worker. She pursued us more than we wanted; she was promoting a time-share plan for the hotel.

On an early morning walk around town I saw a guy stumble out of his shack and head for the outhouse scratching his belly; another, bringing a large plastic bucket of water into his house. There were a lot of unkempt, independent dogs, not hostile or even much interested in me. At the port are rows of large rusted fishing boats tied alongside each other; only one has any activity on board. There is also a row of the same one- or two-man boats we saw in San Felipe. These are heading around "Rocky Point" and into the Gulf. The Point is a hill with four or five little streets of shops which are still Cerrado, closed, at this hour. There are stucco houses, shacks and a few expensive homes. We went into the church. It was cool and dark, with candles and stained glass, the stations of the cross, and private nooks with personal saints and life-size Christ, wounded, imploring. It was almost impossible not to kneel and beg forgiveness and make promises to be better, truer and more loving. The contrast with the flat Protestant church in Santa Ana was striking. Religion is real here, a part of life. We had seen a snappy Camaro in Mexicali with the face of agonized Christ etched on the back window. Trucks had crosses of lights on their radiators. Even bad guys wear crucifixes. Little crosses marking sites of highway fatalities are turned into shrines with flowers and stones. The Virgin de Guadalupe is everywhere — the drummer of the Mex-rock band, Los Lobos, even has her painted on his bass drum.

We had dinner on the verandah of Lily's on Rocky Point, another memorable meal of shrimp and enchiladas. The owner was seated at a table near the entrance, talking to a middle-aged woman with black hair in a severe bun, red lips and a long black dress. She reminded me of a Spanish *Grand Dama*; and I thought of "La Passionara," Dolores Ibaruri, the passionate leftist defender of the Republic in the Spanish Civil War, who urged the women of Spain to fight with knives and burning oil, and said, "It is better to die on your feet than to live on your knees! No pasaran!" ("They shall not pass!"), which became the rallying cry on the anti-fascists.

We went back to Sonoma and crossed the border to Lukeville, Arizona. No waiting.

Phoenix was 98-degrees and unbearable; Falstaff was a bit cooler. Grand Canyon, Hoover Dam, Las Vegas (a story in itself), Reno, snow in the Sierras, Klamath falls, Eugene and home. The Mustang ran like a top the whole way. It didn't even ping on PEMEX unleaded.

Harry Johnson lives in Astoria. His previous article for the NCTE was *What's Up With Labor?* in the Mar/Apr 1994 issue. Earlier articles included a series of *What's Wrong With* trade pacts (NAFTA in particular), economics, health care, welfare and education. His poetry was featured in the Jan/Feb 1994 Times Eagle.

Old Town Framing Co.

(DON'T BE A VICTIM OF INFERIOR FRAMING)

WARNING

1287 Commercial St., Astoria, OR 97103 • Phone (503) 325-5221

Cotton Basics
Unique
Rayon Prints

**El Mundo
for Women**

• Portland 3556 SE Hawthorne / 239-4605
• Cannon Beach 215 N Hemlock / 436-1572

**1235 S. HEMLOCK
Cannon Beach**

7 AM — 2 PM

**Breakfast & Lunch
Closed Mon. & Tues.**