

Chapter 13 - Boys Will Be Boys

It's a wonder I didn't wind up in some kind of reform school, but I managed to charm a lot of people into thinking that I was a serious, responsible young man — good student, athlete, student council officer — so I was cut a lot of slack. I was also lucky not to have been caught, giving me the time I needed to grow up and become more serious. But that didn't happen until I got to college.

For example, there was “The Big Fight.” When I was in 10th grade I took chemistry with Mr. Owen. It was his last year of teaching, and he was a shadow of his former self — very unobservant, for one thing. During one of our labs I shot a stream of water from a thin rubber tube at George Wonderly, a junior who was performing his experiment across from me. George and I were about the same size, and he was a member of the Delta Phis, a rival fraternity of the Bugs. I did it in “good fun,” of course, but it annoyed the hell out of George. The next thing I knew, we were yelling at each other and then practically got into a fistfight, right there in chemistry lab. (“Paging Mr. Owen! Mr. Owen??”) Since this happened during the last period of the day, we decided that we would meet somewhere right after school and “have it out.” Good. I was going to beat the crap out of that touchy guy who couldn't take a little squirt of water.

Word got around among the Bugs, including the juniors and seniors, as it did among all the Delta Phis, that there was going to be a big fight, not unlike James Dean and Sal Mineo in “Rebel Without a Cause.” We all piled into the seniors' cars and headed off to a vacant lot somewhere in Lomas. Each fraternity brought out its contender, egging him on like a prize fighter. “OK, Ogden (Wonderly), you're doing this for the honor of the Bugs! (the Delta Phis!)” About forty guys — maybe 20 from each fraternity —

formed a huge circle, with George and me in the middle, ready to go at it. All those guys were eager to see their guy come out like a gangbuster and beat the shit out of the other. The trouble was that, by the time we all got out to this vacant lot, over an hour had gone by, and both George's and my temper had cooled. George was actually a pretty nice guy, and I wasn't really angry with him anymore. Apparently he wasn't mad at me, either, because, rather than attacking one another, we just glared at each other. Finally, I asked him, "George, do you really want to fight?" "I don't know, do you?" was his reply, to which I said, "No, not really." So we shook hands and went back to our respective — and disgusted — fraternity brothers who had been out for blood. Someone besides George Wonderly and Bob Ogden would have to prove which was the superior fraternity.

Another memorable adventure involved an amazing "balneario," or spa, about an hour and a half's drive from Mexico City, by the name of Las Estacas. Dad found out about this place when I was in about the eighth grade, and we would go there for day trips once or twice a year. None of my friends had ever heard of it, and it must have been a really well-kept secret because almost no one was ever there except us and a few middle-class Mexican families. Las Estacas is everyone's idea of a semi-tropical paradise. It had a powerful, gushing, underwater spring which was surrounded by a cold pool of crystal clear water. Descending from this pool was a beautiful river which meandered its way through lush vegetation. The river, now warmer, eventually emptied into an enormous natural pool where there was a diving board and a swing suspended from a huge ceiba tree from which you could drop yourself into the beautiful blue/green water. The sides of this pool were dotted with idyllic picnic spots under the palm trees. It was, and still is, spectacular. And such a change from the big city.

Our family had a Las Estacas ritual. As soon as we arrived the first thing we would do was change into our bathing suits; then we'd go claim a picnic spot; and then we'd walk the five-minute walk up to the spring. Once there, we'd dive into the cold water, and then float down the river on rented inner tubes. On one such descent down the river we had to get out and walk back to the main swimming area because a Mexican crew was filming its version of "Tarzan," for which Las Estacas was the perfect setting. It was also the setting of my next adventure.

It was my senior year in high school, and we were all full of mischief knowing (or not knowing) what awaited us the next year. By this time Dad's company owned a mint-condition 1957 Studebaker Golden Hawk, an amazing vehicle. (How they acquired it is an interesting story, but suffice it to say that a drug-running employee got caught and sent to jail.) Anyway, Dad had this extra car, so he let me use it during my senior year. It really was the world's coolest car, very avant-garde. So one fine school-day morning I conned my friends Grant Brandon and Bill Birkenmeier into taking the day off and going with me to Las Estacas. So much more fun than going to class that day! Of course, I had to explain to them what this place was, as they had never been there, but once they heard my description, they were in. And off we went. Screw whatever tests we had or assignments were due that day — we were going to skip school and go for a swim!

So the three of us piled into my Golden Hawk, and off we went, taking the toll road toward Cuernavaca, exiting just before getting to that city, past Tepoztlán, and then another twenty miles or so south to this Shangri-La. We paid our five-peso entrance fee, and immediately went to get changed and into the water. Oops! We didn't have any bathing suits! This was a spur-of-the-moment

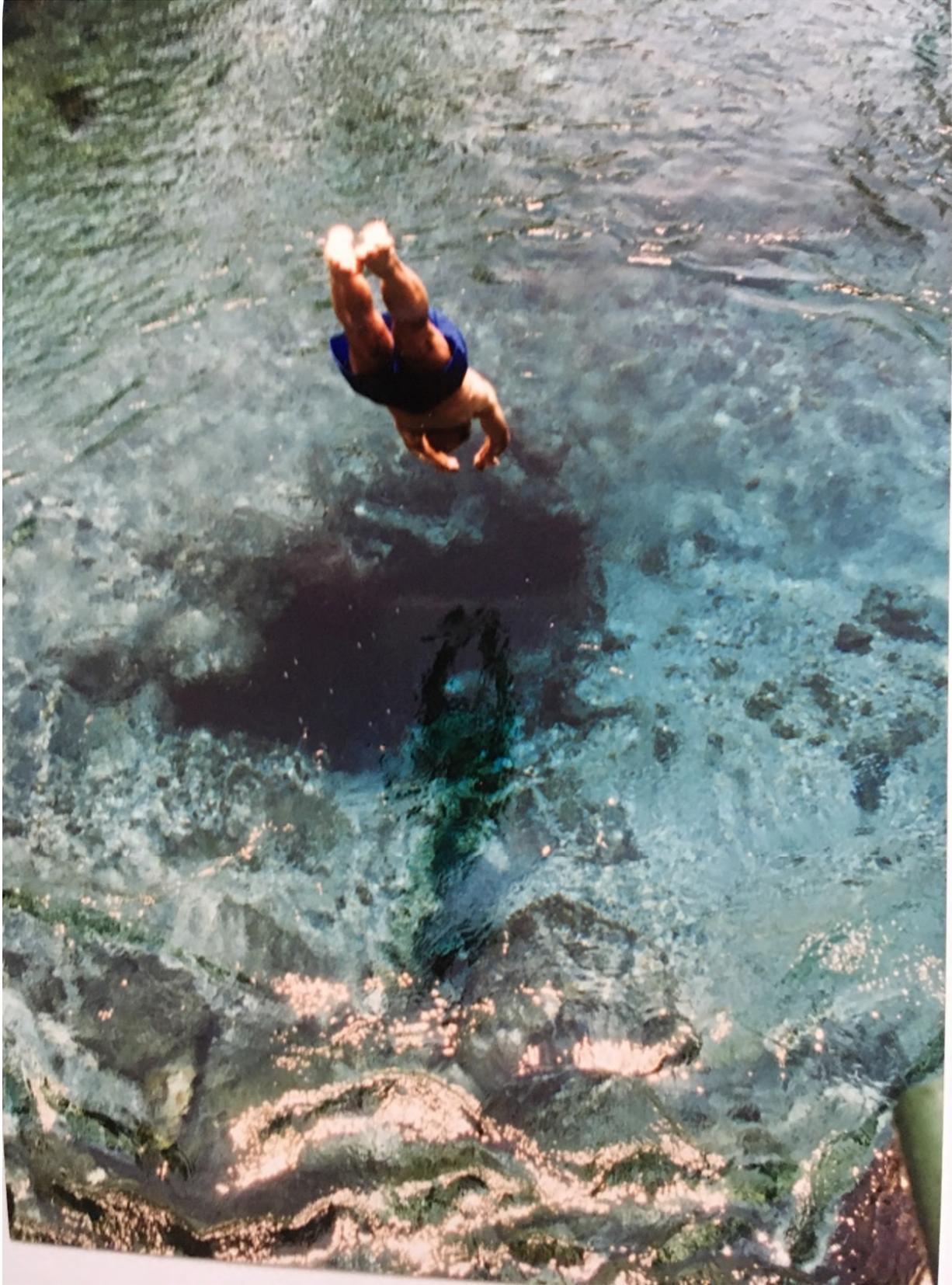
decision, so we didn't think to bring anything as essential as a bathing suit, or a towel, or a hat, much less sunscreen (which no one had heard of in 1965). But being the middle of the week, there was no one else there, so we just stripped down to our underwear and dove into the water! On the way there we had bought a watermelon which we chilled in the cool water, and it tasted pretty good on that hot day. After a couple of hours there we decided it was time to hit the road again so as to be back to school by the time classes let out and the three of us could get to our basketball practice at our usual time.

The next day we couldn't wait to tell everyone what a blast we had at Las Estacas, clearly exaggerating what a fun time it was. Everyone was really envious that we could have pulled off such a stunt, and the next thing we knew a group of kids was organizing a skip day of their own. Before long, practically the whole senior class was in on it, and, sure enough, they planned it down to the last detail. Unfortunately for them, the principal got wind of it, and he warned them not to follow through, but they figured that since Brandon, Birkenmeier, and Ogden had skipped school the week before, without consequences, that they could, too. And off they went. (To Las Estacas? I don't remember.) Grant and Bill and I, of course, heeded the principal's warning and were in school that day. We diligently went to all our classes, even though there was not a lot of instruction, being that most of the students were absent.

The principal followed through on his warning, and everyone who participated in this skip day was disciplined. But not Grant, Bill, or me, as we had done what was expected of us. We were serious, responsible young men.



Debbie and me and the Studebaker Golden Hawk. 1964



Diving into the cold, crystal-clear spring at Las Estacas.



Las Estacas, Morelos

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Chapter 14 - Climbing Popo

Senior year in high school — what a wonderful year, one of the best of my life! I had good friends, I was doing well in school, and I had a degree of independence that allowed me to experience some fabulous adventures in the fascinating country that is Mexico.

I'll begin by introducing Corky Larson, a kid that I met soon after we arrived in Mexico when we were both in fourth grade. He and I were about the same size, and we shared a passion for baseball, so it was natural that we would become best friends in elementary and junior high school. We played on the same Little League and Pony League teams, of which his father was the coach. Corky and I were always the biggest kids in the league and were two of the top hitters for as long as we played. For a couple of years we played on Mexico City's all-star teams, and that allowed us to play against the teams from Monterrey (it was always Monterrey) for the championship of Mexico. One year in particular, 1958, our Little League team was beaten badly by them, but we were consoled by the fact that they went on to Williamsport, Pennsylvania, and won the world championship for the second year in a row. "If no other team in the world can beat them, then there's no shame in our not beating them, either, right?" we told ourselves. Three years later, in 1961, our Pony League all-star team faced a team from Monterrey again, playing in Mexico City's professional baseball stadium. Unfortunately, we suffered another disappointing loss, while they went on to greater glory at the international tournament in the States.



The Little League All-Stars of Mexico City (partial photo), 1958. Corky, wearing glasses and the big “H”, I’m next to him, #5 on my pants. That’s Tommy Mount, kneeling in the lower right corner.



The Mexico City Pony League All-Stars, three years later. Notice that Corky (with glasses) and I are still inseparable. At the Seguro Social Stadium, where the big-leaguers used to play.

I was a good hitter but not much of a fielder, whereas Corky, also a heavy hitter, could play any position and was especially daunting as a pitcher. In addition to his athletic prowess, he was quite a pianist for his age. One day at his house, to my amazement, he played a flawless rendition Chopin's Military Polonaise. He was also an avid reader and a straight "A" student — quite a gifted young man.

In spite of these attributes, however, he must have had some problems at home because in ninth grade he left Mexico and went to live with his grandparents in Arizona. That seemed strange at the time since his was a family of devout Mormons, people known for their strong family ties. It was very odd that his parents should send their only son away like that.

When he returned to Mexico for his senior year those problems were more evident: he was withdrawn and unsociable, and he could also be quite abrasive and sarcastic with people. At 18, he was as strong as an ox and could be really intimidating, but he had been my best friend when we were younger, and he was never threatening to me.

Because of his return to Mexico, I had a bit of a transformation myself. He and I were on the varsity basketball team together, and during recess, instead of going to the senior lounge or up to the football field to sit on the grass and socialize with my other friends, I would go to the gym and shoot baskets with Corky. In a sense, I turned away from my other friends, preferring instead to spend my time with my loner friend.

He told me stories of his life on his grandparents' ranch in Arizona. I was captivated by his descriptions of their rural lifestyle and self-sufficiency, and I was intrigued with the idea of living that kind of life myself. Alas, I had no ranch, nor did my grandparents. But Corky and I did have the great outdoors to explore, and we were young and strong.

Just to the east of Mexico City are two beautiful volcanoes: the perpetually snow-covered (back then, anyway) 17,800-foot high Popocatepetl ("Smoking Mountain" in the Nahuatl language), and the slightly lower Ixtaccíhuatl ("White Woman"). "Popo," cone-shaped, has an enormous crater and is active; "Ixta," likewise

snow-capped, is dormant, and has a very irregular shape. Its profile resembles a sleeping woman, hence its name in Nahuatl.

One day, while shooting baskets, Corky and I decided that we'd like to climb Popo. Neither of us had any mountain-climbing experience, nor did we have the gear for it, but we were suddenly driven to scale this beautiful mountain that we had seen on the horizon since we were little kids. We figured that there wouldn't be any technical climbing involved since it was a near-perfect cone, just a long walk uphill in the snow. As for clothing, I found a jacket, a knit cap, some wool socks, and a pair of gloves that I had from skiing in Colorado, as well as a pair of boots that I thought would do the trick. Corky must have had some winter clothing, too, undoubtedly from his three years in northern Arizona. As for climbing gear, we found a sporting goods store where we rented a couple of ice axes and crampons. That was it — no ropes, of course, nor any supplemental oxygen, which we might have needed at almost 18,000 feet. But we didn't think about that.

One Saturday morning, he and I set out in his parents' old Volvo to Popo's base lodge, called Albergue Tlamacas, situated at 12,900 feet. This lodge was equipped with some flea-ridden bunk beds, which, for a small fee, climbers could use before or after their ascents. We arrived at Tlamacas in the early afternoon, and, following conventional wisdom, stayed there for several hours to partially acclimate ourselves to the higher elevation before tackling the rarefied air of the summit. At about midnight, which was the recommended time to start, we began our climb. We hadn't been smart enough to think to do it during a full moon, but fortunately for us the moon was nearly full that night. It would have been impossible to do our climb in the dark.



Popocatepetl, as seen from the Tlamacas lodge

Soon we were out of the pine forest that surrounds the two mountains, and in the open country above the tree line. After an hour or so of walking up a rocky path, the ground began to be ice-covered, and this is where our crampons came in handy. Soon the ice turned to snow, and as we climbed the snow got progressively deeper. All night long we trudged up the mountain, Corky first, me right behind him. Straight up, not a single stop until we finally arrived, just as the sky was getting light, at the rim of the 1500-foot wide crater. What an awesome spectacle it was: nearly sheer walls, dropping some 600 feet from the rim down to the crater's sulphury floor. We had read that a contingent of Cortés' army had climbed Popo in 1521 and had lowered a couple of their men by ropes into this crater to gather sulphur for their firearms in

preparation for their final assault on Tenochtitlán — a daring feat we could hardly imagine.

And just then, the sun came over the horizon above the Gulf of Mexico. Spectacular! And, with this sunrise as a background, we could see the peaks of other high mountains — Orizaba, Malinche, Cofre de Perote, and of course, the nearby Ixtaccíhuatl — rising like sentinels above the plain. It was one astonishing sight after another. And what a feeling of accomplishment! Adding to our joy was the fact that we hadn't heard of anyone our age who had ever done such a thing.

As we were admiring the view, I turned to Corky and asked, “So why didn't you ever stop? I could have used a break every once in a while!”

“What?” he said. “I kept hearing you right on my tail, practically breathing down my neck! The pressure was on!”

Two macho types, not wanting the other to think he needed a rest!

As we contemplated the now-fading lights of the city of Puebla, seemingly at our feet, we thought it would be cool for our next adventure to hike from the lodge at Tlamacas to Puebla and back. “How far could it be?” Corky asked me.

“I don't know, fifteen miles, maybe? Twenty max. Nothing to it!” I said. “So, how about next weekend?”



Me, near the top of Ixtaccíhuatl (on a different climb), with Popo in the background. 1965

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Chapter 15 - Our Hike to Puebla

From the previous chapter:

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“I don’t know, fifteen miles, maybe? Twenty max. Nothing to it!” I said. “So, how about next weekend?”

On the way back to Mexico City we began making plans for the upcoming long weekend and our hike to Puebla. No ice axes or crampons would be needed, just a good hat and sturdy hiking boots. And a sleeping bag, some food, and a canteen full of water.

At basketball practice on Monday, I must have mentioned this plan to our teammate, Grant Brandon. (You’ll recall from previous chapters that he and I had gotten into some earlier mischief.) Corky really didn’t want Grant to come along, as he was never very fond of him. In fact, as the pitcher of our baseball team, Corky would occasionally try to bean him when he was at bat for the opposing team. But Grant was a good friend of mine, and once he got wind of our adventure he begged us to let him go with us. I put the pressure on Corky and he reluctantly agreed.

The next Saturday morning, we drove Corky’s Volvo back to Tlamacas where we parked it and got ourselves registered in the log at the lodge. By then we had looked at a map and realized that Puebla was over 35 miles away. We knew we wouldn’t make it all the way there in one day, but we had our sleeping bags and some food, so we headed off, downhill this time, through the pine

forest, and ultimately emerging into the fertile farm country east of the volcanoes.

After about five hours of hiking, plus a few breaks, we came to Santiago Xalitzintla, the nearest village to Popo. It was like something out of another century: adobe houses, dirt streets, no electricity or running water, people in indigenous dress speaking Nahuatl. Three big, tall gringos must have been an unusual sight to the local people, perhaps not seen since Cortés and his army passed through here in 1519 on their way to Tenochtitlán.

At this point we were pretty tired, it was getting late, and we decided that we should make camp somewhere. The village is at 8600 feet elevation, so it was getting cold, too. When we asked permission to camp in a nearby field, a kindly lady offered us shelter in her family's humble home. We were at first a bit reluctant to accept the offer, but on second thought realized that it would be a lot more comfortable than sleeping under the stars, so we accepted. Their home was a one-room adobe house with a dirt floor, a tin roof, a wood-fire pit with a makeshift chimney in one corner for cooking, and petates (straw mats) for sleeping. Our hosts graciously shared their dinner of freshly-made tortillas, frijoles, chiles, and eggs, and we stayed up well past dark, by the light of their fire, talking with them in what was a second language for all of us. I vividly remember their beautiful daughter, about my age, and I entertained thoughts of staying in this village forever.

The next morning we were up at dawn and had a couple of memelas that the señora had prepared on her comal over the fire, plus a bowl of café de olla — a typical campesino breakfast. We chatted a bit, thanked them, and then bid them farewell as we put on our backpacks to continue our journey. Our stay was probably

as memorable an occasion for them as it was for us — “the time the three gringos came to town.”

After Santiago Xalitzintla, the countryside was not as pretty and the hiking was not as much fun. It was a pretty boring, frankly. After a few hours, we said “screw it,” and we hitched a ride on the back of a farmer’s pickup truck all the way to Cholula. This is the pre-Hispanic city of 365 churches and shrines — one for each day of the year — and the world’s largest pyramid, with a beautiful Catholic church at its summit. We spent some time seeing the sights, including climbing up to that church, and then continued on to Puebla, now just a short distance away. We tried to get a room at a relatively decent place called “Hotel Panamericano,” but we didn’t have enough money for that, so we had to settle for a grungy, disgusting, boisterous place that we managed to find. (Grant claims it was a brothel, but since no hookers tried to seduce us I think it was just a flophouse.)

The next morning we knew that we weren’t going to be able to hike all the way back to Tlamacas in one day, but we had to get there in order to be in school the next morning. So we again caught a couple of rides, the final one leaving us in San Nicolás de los Ranchos, another village in the shadow of Popo. Detailed topographic maps of the area did not exist in 1965, but we knew that we had a five or six hour hike ahead of us, about twelve uphill miles, and that there was no time to waste.

About halfway through this last slog we were getting pretty tired, and soon after we entered the pine forest it began to snow. “How can it be snowing?” Corky yelled. “It’s not supposed to snow at this altitude!” And yet it was, and that was worrisome because, unlike our climb of the previous week, we did not have the proper

clothing for it — no gloves, no winter hats, no warm clothing of any kind.

Up we climbed, sometimes a bit to the left, sometimes a bit to the right, until one of us would say, “I think we should be going in that direction more.”

“Just keep going up. Straight up.” That was the general consensus. “Eventually we’ll run into the lodge.”

But the fact is that we didn’t have a clue; we were lost. Worse, the snow was coming down harder now, and it was seriously accumulating. I was afraid we would freeze to death before reaching the lodge.

It was a freak snowstorm, and this fact somehow came to our parents’ attention down in the city. Mrs. Larson called my mom in a panic, and they decided that someone should go and see about finding us. So Mr. Larson, my former baseball coach, drove from Mexico City to Tlamacas, a distance of about 70 miles, arriving there shortly before the three of us just happened to stumble upon the lodge. It was truly dumb luck that we found it. And it’s a very good thing he came because Corky’s car, the one we had left there, wouldn’t start. Being a Mexico City vehicle, it had no anti-freeze, and the water in the radiator had frozen.

In the meantime, the forest service had sent out a team to search the mountain for three missing “climbers.” We had neglected to mention in the log that we weren’t actually going to climb, that we were going to hike — and in the opposite direction of the mountain. So the search party was called off, and Mr. Larson drove us home, upset at our stupidity, I’m sure, but thankful that we were alive. A few days later he must have managed to retrieve his Volvo — probably the same way my father retrieved his Dodge

from the Maximilian trail a few years before — by calling a tow-truck.

In school the next day we bragged to everyone about our incredible exploit. “We hiked from Popo to Puebla and back!” (which was a gross exaggeration). Before long, other boys, mainly underclassmen, tried their luck at climbing Popo and going on other crazy outdoor adventures. We had become role models!

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Chapter 17 - My Last High School Adventure: an Ill-Fated Trip

And now for the adventure that did not end well. This one again involved Corky — my baseball, basketball, and adventures buddy — and our decision to branch out and do something different. All our outings until then had been in the highlands — climbing Popo, climbing Ixta, hiking (partway) from Popo to Puebla, plus a couple of overnight camping trips in the pine forests on the way to Toluca. We needed to do something in the tropics, if for no other reason than to show that we were tough in any environment — real outdoorsmen.

“Hey, Cork, remember when we were on the top of Popo and we saw the sunrise over the Gulf of Mexico? What do you say we go down to the Gulf?”

“Not a bad idea! We could camp on the beach, catch fish, live off the land. Or the sea, or whatever.”

With that simple exchange, we knew that we had yet another adventure in store. Since it was hot on the tropics we wouldn't need any warm clothing or even a tent — maybe just some lightweight sleeping bags, a mess kit for cooking, our canteens, and some fishhooks and fishing line.

“We can find sticks to use as poles,” he said, “and we'll find bait somewhere, so we don't have to worry about that. What else?”

“That's about it, I guess,” I replied. “Oh, maybe some bug spray. I think they have mosquitoes down there.”

“Forget that! Did Lewis and Clark have bug spray? We're going to live like the pioneers, man!” *Wow! Corky is really into this roughing it business*, I thought.

So we packed up our stuff, told our parents more or less where we were going, and headed to the train station. There was still passenger train service in Mexico in those days, such as it was. First class wasn't anyone's idea of luxury, and second class? Well, that was for really poor people — and for the very occasional young gringos traveling on the cheap, like us, “roughing it.”

We bought our tickets for the overnight train to Veracruz, boarded, and soon found ourselves heading east out of the city, past our beloved volcanoes. We bumped along for an hour or so, not saying much to each other, when suddenly I had an idea.

“Hey, how about if we get off at the next stop, and climb up the ladder to the roof of the train? We could ride up there until we get to the stop after that, and then get back down. It would be like in the movies! A couple of bandits, riding the rails!”

Corky was game, so at a brief stop at a small town beyond Puebla we got off, looked for any sign of a conductor or other train employee who might be watching, and seeing that the coast was clear, scrambled up the ladder. Soon the train started rolling again and we were giddy with excitement. It was a blast being up there! I remember Corky teaching me the words to “El Hijo del Pueblo,” a Jorge Negrete song about being proud to be poor, and we sang it at the tops of our lungs. We sang a few more Mexican songs, too, and then noticed that it was getting cold. Or maybe it's just that WE were getting cold, up there on the roof of a train, in the middle of the night, going 60 miles per hour. It didn't help that we weren't wearing jackets or even sweaters.

“We're going to Veracruz! Why is it getting colder? It should be getting warmer!” I said.

“We’re still in the highlands,” my wise friend reasoned. “We’ll be warm soon enough.” I would very quickly learn how right he was.

It seemed that we were on top of that train for a long time, freezing our butts off, but at last we pulled into the station at Perote and we hurried down. No one saw us, and we went back to our seats, thankful for the relative warmth of the rickety, second-class train car.

As day was breaking we arrived at the small town of José Cardel, just a couple of miles from the coast. We had previously decided that this was where we’d get off, since we didn’t want to go all the way to the big city of Veracruz. We hopped off the train, and the first thing we noticed was how hot and humid it was, and it wasn’t even 6 a.m. yet! Welcome to the lowlands. We started walking through town, but not being familiar with it, we asked someone directions to the coast. He pointed the way, and we walked for an hour or so until we got to a village located on a small bay, where the Actopan River empties into the Gulf of Mexico. By then it was full light, and we were hungry, so we ate the little food we had brought. We found a fruit vendor, too, and scarfed down a couple of bananas each.

“This is kind of a nothing town. What are we going to do here?” I asked.

We were in the village of Barra de Chachalacas, and it’s true, there was not much there. But nearby was a beach by the same name — Chachalacas — which was on a beautiful, wild stretch of the Gulf. We decided that this was where we would make camp once it was time to settle down for the night.

But we had the whole day ahead of us. What were we going to do all day?

“Well, Og, we came here to go fishing, right? So let’s go catch some fish and we’ll have them for dinner tonight. Let’s see about getting a boat.”

We headed back to the village and asked around about borrowing someone’s rowboat. Nobody was interested. So we offered a little money, and then, suddenly, a rowboat was available. (Sing your praises to poverty all you want, but money talks.) It was just a crappy, old wooden rowboat, but the owner said he’d throw in a couple of fishing rods and some bait, and just like that, we were in business. We rowed out onto the river and cast our lines and waited. And waited. And waited some more. Not even a nibble. This was my first experience with “fishing,” and it would practically be my last. To this day I’d rather do hard manual labor than go fishing.

By this time it had gotten oppressively hot, and the humidity was something I had never experienced before. Mexico City was never like this! *How can people actually live here?* I wondered. We were feeling really sluggish, like we had no energy at all, which was so unlike how we felt on our highland adventures. And we were thirsty. By then our canteens had long been empty, and we were out on the stagnant waters of the Río Actopan, praying for a fish to bite, all the while dying of thirst. Why we didn’t just row back to town and buy a drink is beyond me now, but we didn’t; we just stayed out there and “fished.”

We never did catch anything, and dejected by our failure as fishermen, we rowed back to the village. Oh, the humiliation of it all! Once there, we bought some water (!) and something to cook for dinner, and then walked back to the beach on the Gulf. We found some driftwood, built a fire, and though still daylight, we cooked the meat we had bought and ate it.

Soon the no-see-ums came out. Damn, they were annoying! “Hey, Meriwether,” I said, “did you happen to bring any bug spray? Or maybe Sacajawea gave you some bear grease?” He was not amused at my attempt at humor, and by this point we had both decided that we were not cut out to be lowlanders.

“OK,” he said. “It was a mistake to come here, so why don’t we just tough it out here tonight, and in the morning head back to José Cardel and catch the next train home?”

“Fine with me,” I said.

As we sat around swatting bugs and waiting for it to get dark, an enormous crab, larger than my hand, crawled up next to me, startling the crap out of me! I jumped up and shooed him away. “And STAY away, dammit!” Ha, fat chance of that. As soon as I calmed down again, he, or another crab just like him, crawled back toward me, and the scene repeated itself. Soon it wasn’t just one crab, it was two, and then three. I thought I would go crazy, imagining what these disgusting side-walking creatures would do if I were to actually fall asleep. Would they eat my eyes out? There was no way I would be able to get any sleep that night! I hated the tropics!

Corky hated it, too. “Hey, old man, what do you say we walk back to Cardel now, and see about catching a train tonight?”

“I was just about to propose the same thing,” I replied.

So we packed up the little gear we had and walked the five or six miles back to the train station, in the dark. Wow, did it ever feel good to get away from those crabs!

I don’t recall how long we had to wait for a train, but at least the waiting room at the station was crustacean-free, and I might even

have dozed off for a while. Several hours later a train appeared, and we had an uneventful ride back to Mexico City. I don't think we talked much as we were pretty downcast at the absolute failure of this trip. Little did we know that the worst was yet to come.

On Monday morning, and for the next several weeks, Corky was not in school, and I learned that he was in the ABC Hospital with a triple case of amebic dysentery, typhoid fever, and hepatitis-A. He was there for a long time and at one point was actually close to death. It appears that he drank some of the river water while we were out in the rowboat. I couldn't imagine, even as thirsty as I was, ever taking a sip of that putrid water!

That was the last of my high school adventures because a few weeks later my classmates and I graduated and we all went our separate ways. I managed to graduate (without honors, I might add) from Cornell University, while Corky went on a Mormon mission to Uruguay, and then to Brigham Young University. We saw each other only once after that, while he was at BYU, when I took the California Zephyr train across the Rockies from Colorado, just to see my old friend again. After that we lost contact, but when we were about 60 years old we resumed our friendship by correspondence. He was in California, and I was in New York State, and for six or seven years we regularly wrote to each other, until his death in 2016. I still miss him.

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