

PORT ARTHUR

WE GET AROUND

By MORRIS B. SEIDELMAN

Beautiful Mexico—desert—stark—sand—shimmering heat—cacti—lush—damp—green—soft warm and yielding—Romantic Mexico, where every man is a caballero with the blood of the conquistadores in his veins—and every woman—a Carmencita—alluring—moonlight in her deep, dark eyes—forgetfulness in her soft red lips and love-knots in her long raven tresses.

Mexico called—its ancient aztec pyramids—its Temple to the Sun and Moon, its languorous nights—Spanish guitars and latin cadences—Mexico called and we answered. Besides we were between jobs—in Houston, Texas—and only a hop, skip and jump, for a Greyhound bus, from Laredo, the gateway to unknown treasures.

So we turned our backs on modern plumbing, fresh vegetable salads and sweet tasting drinking water and crossed the Rio Grande.

We were not disappointed. Every day brought new surprises. One midday in Mexico City, a barefooted Indian waitress in a restaurant along the Avenida des Insurgentes, a middle-class section housing many of our co-religionists, offered us in proud Lithuanian accent, the speciality of the house "Kalbfleisch."

The next day in the Centro-Israelita, a handsome building reminiscent of the lower East-side in New York, we feasted on Gefilte fish, chicken with lokshen and fomen. The Centro-Israelita houses the offices of the Federation United Zionist Council—Israel Bonds—an Ashkenazie synagogue and a Kosher restaurant.

We took what Mexico had to offer with avidity and asked for more—

native dances—American with Mexican sub-titles, the markets, the National Palace, glass factory—Charro costumes—even the bullfights which for me made me a vegetarian—and through the week. Some days I ever stand out, Sunday for instance—(the city not the country). In morning to Zochimilco, the flower gardens—En la Tarde (afternoon) the Plaza de Toros—in the evening.

At these centres of interest one doesn't have to ask directions. On leaving the trolley, bus or car, one mingles with the crowd and floats on the stream of traffic. Very soon, and in little Toluca, very, very soon you find yourself viewing the sights that lured you to begin with.

In Toluca, on Friday, you can buy anything for the inside or the outside of house, man or beast. You may buy finely worked rawhide saddles—embossed gold and silver inlaid—most artistically designed.

You may have hand woven sarapes in hues that shame the rainbow, and the native Mexican sarape wearer—hand woven table linen—sombrosos—laces—embroideries—objects made by every type of handicraft—with a high degree of skill, artistry and craftsmanship. The native of Toluca, or the surrounding countryside, who can offer nothing else will squat on the sidewalk near or in the market place with a crudely made charcoal brazier—some cornmeal, water, salt and pepper and play patticakes with eventual tortillas and enchiladas—prepared to order.

We went to Toluca, wandered through the labyrinthian market place and took in all the sights. My esposa querida (dear wife) (all too frequently) cast off my restraint and made some purchases—a headcloth—a neckerchief—a woven basket, the useless knick-knacks that mark the tourist.

By this time the stream of traffic had divided into little rivulets and we were faced with finding a restaurant without its compelling help. We started my search for someone to answer my questions.

I tried "¿a donde esta la cafeteria American?" on a lean member of the local police and from the blank expression on his face I concluded that he had never studied Spanish at City College in New York. — I would try elsewhere.

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slow convalescence along the Paseo de Reforma—bullfights for gringos, Jewish gringos particularly, provides exercise for even a hardened stomach.

And Friday—Friday is another big day. On Friday one goes to the market in Toluca, a nearby community.

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