YERBA BUENA

Word-Snapshots from a Missionary Clinic

In Southern Mexico's Indian Territory

by Jim Conrad

based on a visit made to Yerba Buena in 1988

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

I thank Marie and Ray Comstocks, and daughter Anita, for their help and friendship. Also thanks to the medical staff, students and patients at Yerba Buena while I was there.

NOTE:

DEDICATION:

This presentation is dedicated to Marie and Ray Comstock who founded Yerba Buena in 1953

THIS STORY BEGINS

Coming up from the Gulf of Mexico side, I start in Villahermosa, capital city of the state of Tabasco. With a population of about l00,000, and important oil fields along the Gulf Coast just north of town, Villahermosa is bustling, surprisingly affluent and, even in January, usually too hot and wet.

Downtown I walk past a hardware store from which a man exits carrying three new machetes, their black blades wrapped in sheets of newspaper. Next door stands a bookstore with all the major Mexican magazines stacked unattended on tables out front, and then comes a pharmacy with its sweet odors of vitamin pills and linseed oil carrying onto the street. Especially at intersections, sidewalk kiosks sell yellow, blue and red plastic buckets, slices of crisp watermelon, hand-mirrors with pictures of the Virgin Mary on their backsides, and silver belt buckles... From a wooden cart built on bicycle wheels a ten-year-old boy sells spicy tacos wrapped in greasy napkins. Outside the bus station a six-year-old boy sells plastic bags filled with crisp, greasy slices of fried banana dowsed in Tabasco sauce. Here and there rise tall palm trees with smooth, whitewashed trunks. Fenced-in gardens next to people's homes overflow with vigorous, laughing kinds of dark greenness and sometimes bougainvillea and hibiscus blossoms explode in the morning air with raw, blood-red flower-color. And everywhere, everywhere, there are just too many kinds of hot, rushing, disorganized examples of humanity to describe...

The lowlands south of town used to be covered with real jungle -- tropical rainforest with tigers and monkeys. Even now, sometimes giant ceibas and towering strangler fig trees -- huge, ancient relicts they are -- rise gnarled and dark, surrounded by horizon-to-horizon plantations of glossy banana trees and immense, close-cropped pastures grazed placidly by white, hump-backed zebu cattle. Looking at the old tree-relicts, it's easy to imagine how for centuries these very organisms struggled upward toward sunlight filtering through the forest's canopy. Seeing how even still the old trees stretch skyward -- though today there's no longer need to stretch -- makes me feel sad.

Outside Pichucalco, foothills begin. The road gets narrower and starts to break up, and the bus's straining, unmuffled diesel-engine explosions ricochet off the slope, back into the bus's windows. Up and up we go, and though we're so packed that people cram the isle from the bus's very back, clear up front to beside the driver, and then down onto the stairwell leading into the bus... now we stop to let in two men wearing straw hats, one carrying a white, plastic bag holding an old red hen with a featherless neck.

Because of the curves, several of us get motion-sick and sit sweating with our foreheads cradled in our hands, or stand with our eyes closed, hanging desperately onto the baggage rack. It's too hot in here and the bus driver's marimba music is too, too loud! Babies wailing, chickens squawking, nauseating odors of cigarette smoke, cheap aftershave, overripe bananas, sour sweat coagulated in straw hats... but sometimes a fresh breeze comes through an open window and it's surprising how crisp and cool this window-air is becoming. Sometimes I glimpse through the window a profound greenness outside -- steep slopes patched with weedy cornfields. Right down below, white water gushes around enormous, round boulders while, above, ragged, slate-gray clouds cut off mountaintops.

Past Rayón people start closing windows because the air gushing in has become too cold. Outside, immense sheets of gray cloud-mist wash down from above, obliterating the view of the opposite slope, sometimes even enveloping the bus itself. Along the road, new kinds of plant appear -- Sweetgum trees with horizontal branches overgrown with ragged, gray and green gardens of bromeliads and ferns, and here and there rise fifteen-foot tall treeferns. People entering the bus now wear gum boots and heavy, dingy, ragged coats and shawls.

Just past Selva Negra (Black Jungle in English) the road more or less levels out. Now the world becomes drier and the air more crisp, and pines grow all around. Sunlight here is different from below -- bluer and somehow not so heavy. Here clouds are not leaden and sullen like those around Villahermosa, but rather they are white and behave like sailboats skating swiftly across a too-blue sky.

Extricating myself from the bus is an exercise in good- natured pushing and shoving. "*Ay, perdóname, señora*," I say again and again. Everybody laughs, for it's the only way to get unpacked. Everyone has to do it when his or her time comes, but it's especially funny seeing a *gringo* making the effort...

Having arrived at the lane leading down to Yerba Buena, now, at last, the bus pulls away, and it's time to simply lie in the weeds along the road and let the motion sickness pass. Cool wind filtering through tall pines and playful sunlight tickling the skin cause an October feeling, though it's January, not long after Christmas. Two men leading a burro loaded with firewood pass by, whispering to one another reproaches for the shameless North American lying stone-drunk in the grass.

But... during these last hours a certain thought has been brewing, and right now that thought is about to coalesce. Here it is:

This little clinic right below -- this place called Yerba Buena -- may offer much

more than a mere history or story of how a certain Seventh-Day Adventist missionary-family from the U. S. came to Mexico and built a hospital among the isolated Tzotzil-speaking Indians. Those buildings, gardens, histories and potentials below must represent a certain statement about what can blossom forth when in a certain spiritual ambiance three very different cultures meld together -- the three cultures being native American, Latin American and U. S.

Moreover, somewhere down below must reside statements on how dignity can stand alongside poverty; of how suffering can mature into understanding; and of how mistrust can yield to love and respect. Surely these are messages appropriate for sending into that world there in the north, to you, my reader.

And I... Exactly how shall I fit into all this? I am a freelance writer invited by Yerba Buena's founders to spend a winter here writing a book, the proceeds of which will be used for buying medicine and hospital equipment for the local people's benefit; of that I am sure. But, what kind of book? Though each time I have visited Yerba Buena I've been profoundly affected by the settlement's spiritual and cultural environment, I am not a Seventh Day Adventist myself, nor do I even claim allegiance to any organized religious denomination or sect, Christian or otherwise. Certainly I am not prepared to fill a book stuffed with religious catch-phrases, dogmas or persuasions.

Feeling the sickness pass, but not yet being well enough to rise, I keep lying in the grass, letting the above thoughts mature. Yellow butterflies flit above me. Then gradually I begin to daydream -- or am I receiving a certain message? --that comes in the form of a vagrant memory from a few days back.

Then I was with my family in Kentucky. During Christmas vacation I'd found an old shoebox stuffed with unsorted snapshots accumulated by my mother during the course of many years. At first I'd felt that it was a shame that no one ever had taken the time to arrange chronologically the pictures into an album. However, as I drew out one randomly selected snapshot at a time, a rather magical thing happened:

Here, a snapshot from Thanksgiving, l967, with me home from college; here, the Red Maple tree blown down in front of the house during a storm two summers ago; here, a picture of my dog Spot when I was ten; here, my Grandfather Conrad, dead now these past twenty years; here, the tulips coming up along my mother's front porch just last spring...

This randomness, this honest, uncensored offering collected over a lifetime, showed me, hinted to me, demanded that I see... much more about my family's soul than could any slick album arranged systematically according to

someone else's contrived system.

Yes: This book I propose to write about Yerba Buena shall be filled with pages gathered together like randomly collected snapshots over a lifetime tossed into a shoebox. Just maybe this approach will present, then, that part of Yerba Buena's story that goes beyond mere history, beyond mere documentation...

From the weeds along the road I rise and for a while stand blinking into the broad, green valley below. From my shirt pocket I remove a pen and a notebook. I step forward, and on the pages that follow are the snapshots I find:

"ANYBODY HOME... ?"

(snapshot dated early l953)

Wearing heavy work-boots, blue work-shirt, blue work- pants, a broad-brimmed straw hat, and with a bedroll stowed in his backpack, 40-year-old Ray Comstock hikes down the muddy foot trail between Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacan and the big ranch in the valley, called Rancho Santa Cruz. For seven hours Ray Comstock has been inside a rickety bus working its way up the seventy-four miles between here and Tuxtla Gutiérrez. Now as he hikes down the muddy foot trail toward the Rancho Santa Cruz, Ray finds himself immensely pleased. At this elevation of slightly over one mile high, cool, fresh-smelling breezes gently stream through the pines, and the dark soil here smells rich and promising.

Of course Ray does not see the trees in this forest with the same eyes that you or I would. He's a timber man from southern Oregon where the tallest redwoods have fallen beneath his saws. He knows what it's like to convert forests into hard cash. "If we don't clear a thousand dollars a month after taxes and expenses," he's fond of saying, "We don't feel like we're making money." And that's a thousand in l953 dollars... But, today, Ray Comstock senses that he is stepping into a new kind of life, a life in which earning a thousand a week, by itself, is not so important.

Down below, through low-hanging pine branches, Rancho Santa Cruz comes into view. Dogs bark and turkeys gobble; red hens with featherless necks run for

cover...

"¡Buenas tardes!" Ray calls. "Anybody home?"

Don Mariano Guerrero comes to the door. However, he does not step outside to offer greetings. In fact, he doesn't smile and his face betrays a certain wariness -- maybe even a kind of hostility. Ray Comstock is astonished, for he knows that most Mexicans, especially those living in isolated places, generally greet visitors with the greatest of pleasure.

The thing not seen here is this: Don Mariano Guerrero fears for his life. People in these parts say that he has murdered seven men, including four soldiers, without ever going to jail. Moreover, he's married to two women and he's fathered who-knows-how-many children beyond the twenty-one by three women he knows of. Thus always he's waiting for someone to come along to settle the score. Maybe this white man in blue clothing who speaks such a curious brand of Spanish is part of a trap...

"Sr. Guerrero, I think you've met some of my friends," Ray says. "A few months ago, Dr. Youngberg, his wife and little girl, and his father-in-law Dr. DeWitt came through here wanting to buy your ranch... "

Finally understanding that this visitor means no harm, Mariano Guerrero breaks into huge laughter.

"Yes, I remember," he guffaws. "They got in here very late one night, all wet and cold. I let them sleep here on the ground in front of my fireplace. I was glad to meet them, but I just didn't want to sell my ranch!"

"Well, Sr. Guerrero," says Ray Comstock, "I also want to buy land from you. But I just want enough so that my wife and I can build a clinic and a school here. We want to help your people. We're missionaries, you see -- Seventh Day Adventists. Not only do we wish to bring the word of God here, but also we want to serve your people, heal their wounds and cure their diseases. And we'd like to teach them how to live so that they won't get sick in the first place."

As Ray speaks, he thinks he detects something in Sr. Guerrero's face reflecting a certain receptivity to these plans. Maybe this man feared by the surrounding community will be generous with this tall, slender, ruddy-skinned foreigner wearing blue clothing and a straw hat. Maybe Don Guerrero thinks that selling a little land to such a man would be a good move politically, or maybe he wants to help his people, or maybe his conscience is hurting him...

After several more visits and exchanges of letters, eventually the land today occupied by Yerba Buena Hospital is sold to Ray Comstock for less than

seventy-five pesos per hectare, or less than U. S. $2.60 per acre.

"OUR FIRST HOME"

(snapshot dated March, l962)

In l959 the Comstocks began issuing a monthly *Newsletter*, usually consisting of one or two legal-size sheets of mimeographed paper detailing such items as the names and homes of people who had recently visited the clinic, what progress had been made in the building program, and what was needed from those supporters in the U. S. who might be disposed to help. Already in the early 60's the Comstocks were realizing that the history of their clinic made a good story. With each Newsletter they included a brief "chapter" describing an event or circumstance that somehow had influenced Yerba Buena's development. Here is a fine example of one of those stories, written by Marie Comstock, copied from an old Newsletter blotched with mimeograph ink and obviously typed on an ancient but dependable manual typewriter:

> **Arriving at Yerba Buena in the afternoon of Nov. 23, l954, to begin work we looked around for a place to set up our camp. It was still the rainy season so we couldn't get very far away from the road with the pickup. After scouting around we decided that the only place we could get the car off the road going down to Santa Cruz was an old section of road which was so steep that it had been abandoned but was still rocked so the car would not mire down.**
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> **Going up this old road about 200 feet we found a fairly level spot near where we built our first permanent building. This building was first the schoolhouse, then the Diaz home, then the Green home, for a short time the Walker home, and is now the Price home.**
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> **Setting up camp was not a very complicated operation in those days. We just parked the car, lifted up the tent on top of the cab over the back of the pickup making a sleeping quarters for 4 or 6 people (depending on their size). The heavy canvas which covered the tent when it was folded up, we then stretched out back of the pickup for a shelter from the rain... We think we had the wettest, coldest and windiest Dec., Jan., and Feb., that we have ever had, but it was probably only because we had to practically live out in the weather. The water oozed up through the mud floor of our one room and even though we covered the mud with more sawdust every few days we had**

to continually wear our rubber boots or galoshes to keep our feet dry.

We couldn't build a fire outside because everything was too wet and we couldn't have one inside our little room for fear of burning down our house, so we just shivered through the wet days and hoped for dry weather.

To us those first few months seemed rather primitive but we always felt better when someone from Pueblo Nuevo would come to visit and remark "You certainly have it nice here." We would realize then how cold some of these people live.

WAITING IN THE GARDEN

(recent snapshot)

It's 8:00 o'clock on a January morning. The high ridge to the east still throws its dark shadow over the one-and-a-half-lane asphalt road leading downslope to Yerba Buena. It's so chilly here that when you exhale sometimes a cloud forms. Every two or three minutes a car, bus or truck -- usually with defective mufflers or no mufflers at all -- cruise down the main road. Across the valley toward the west, the most distant mountain ranges glow in yellow morning sunlight.

Exactly 200 steps downslope from the main highway, the narrow asphalt road branches. The Y's left arm leads to Linda Vista School in the valley below Yerba Buena; the right arm leads to Yerba Buena itself. Below the Y, Yerba Buena's grounds spread out like a child's well organized model village.

Beside the Clinic a well tended garden about an acre large is planted with many straight rows of cabbage, broccoli, lettuce, a locally favored collard-like leafy plant called *aselga*, and strawberries. Along the garden's far side runs a long file of young, glossy banana trees. Much in contrast to the ramshackle buildings typical for this area, beyond the garden rise solid, well-planned wooden constructions painted white, now glowing splendidly in the sunlight. Scattered throughout the scene are peach trees, in January completely pink with blossoms. Here is such a pastoral, tranquil picture that when a flock of Great-tailed Grackles flies overhead calling out their outlandish, almost humorous, almost vulgar squeaks and whistles, you just have to laugh.

Another 280 steps down the Y's right arm leads to the fifty-foot-long oval garden, the centerpiece of which is an eight-foot-wide circular pool of water. Three concrete sidewalks converge at the pool in such a way as to form a Christian cross. Concrete benches are placed along the walks. Planted here and there in

the grassy areas are geraniums, a kind of hibiscus bush called *tulipán* -- both with blood-red blossoms -- and knee-high amaryllises with cup-sized, orangish-yellow blossoms. Also here are manioc bushes which, after a season of growth, may be dug up for their two-foot-long, arm-thick tubers, which can be boiled and eaten like potatoes.

Today two people stand next to the pool waiting for sunlight to burn the dew off the concrete benches. They'll be the day's first patients when the hospital opens at 9 o'clock. Twenty-year-old Amín Hernández Urbina from Pueblo Nuevo just up the road has the thumb of his left hand bandaged with white gauze.

"Last Friday in the carpentry shop down below at Linda Vista," he explains, "I was shaving a table top when the blade just slipped... "

Nearby, tightly drawing a heavy, brown shawl around her shoulders, stands Flor de María Agilar Tobilla. She's come by taxi from the town of Jitoto Zaragoza, just south of Pueblo Nuevo. Her legs are heavily bandaged and though she seems to be in pain she simply refuses to sit on the damp concrete benches. Rolling down the bandage on one leg she reveals extensive patches of dark skin caked into hard, shiny scales. In a soft voice she repeats again and again that everything that happens to people is the will of God, and that we humans should just be content that sometimes we may experience such glorious mornings as this.

Standing in the garden and facing west, the hospital lies to the left. The shops, a classroom and an office lie directly below, just beyond the gravel turn-around. To the right lie the Chapel, the student nurses' dormitory, and the "big house," or Casa Grande, now used as the dining hall and residence for some of the workers. In earlier days the Casa Grande served as the Comstock's home.

Now from the Chapel come notes played by someone practicing on the piano. As these transparent tones mingle with yellow sunlight, the morning's first breeze sighs through the tops of big pines. And one cannot but be content that sometimes we humans may experience such glorious mornings as this.

One Day in the Life of DR. FRANCISCO SÁNCHEZ

(recent snapshot)

9:25 AM: Dr. Sánchez's house lies about 300 yards down the valley from the hospital; connecting the two buildings is a solidly built concrete walk about a

yard wide. This morning, five minutes before the agreed-on time, Dr. Sánchez comes walking briskly through the hospital's rear gate, which stands just outside the laundry room and beneath tall casuarina trees. By Mexican standards Dr. Sánchez is a very tall man (about six feet) and slender. He's handsome and he smiles easily; his black hair shines in the morning sunlight.

This morning the whole hospital has been gearing up for his arrival. Having seen him coming, a nurse meets him at the gate, asking questions. Later, the moment the doctor steps into the hospital, ten visitors wanting information about sick relatives begin calling out questions: "Good morning, Doctor, and will my little Mario be coming home today?" "Good morning, Doctor, but what should we do about my mother?" For five minutes Dr. Sánchez takes care of this first order of business. Briefly he visits his office and gives orders to nurses. Then he begins making rounds.

9:35 AM: In Room #3, Patient #l, a forty-year old woman explains that forty-five days ago she was climbing twenty feet high in a tree, picking fruit, when she fell. She didn't break anything, but since then every third day or so she's been suffering attacks of cramps and suffocation. Dr. Sánchez advises her to go to Tuxtla Gutiérrez for electroencephalograph tests. At the mention of these tests the woman looks somewhat doubtful and asks if the hospital couldn't rather provide something for *susto*, or freight. Among the Indians, any vaguely-defined infirmity is ascribed to being *susto*,which commonly is understood as resulting from black magic. Dr. Sánchez suggests that first the tests be run; if that doesn't reveal the problem, then maybe he'll consider the freight problem, a phenomenon, he says, that he simply doesn't know about or understand. Of course he realizes that the woman wants a potion or a kind of ritual to work against the black magic that plagues her.

Patient #2 is an eighteen-year-old woman speaking only Tzotzil. She lies curled beneath heavy blankets, looking at us with huge, dark, frightened eyes. Patient #l translates the doctor's questions into Tzotzil. The young woman will only say that she has a terrible headache and a stomach ache. The doctor orders cold compresses and further observations.

Entering Room #4, we find the third patient, a twenty-five-year old woman, recovering without complications from a cesarian delivery conducted eight days ago.

The fourth patient is a seventy-year-old woman who has had a large hernia on her abdomen surgically removed. The Doctor proudly displays to me her nicely healing scar.

The next patient is a twenty-year-old woman recuperating from a cesarian, which took place five days ago. When she complains of constipation the

Doctor orders that prunes be added to the woman's diet.

Patient #6, a twenty-year-old woman, arrived here at six o'clock this morning, suffering labor pains forty days prior to her appointed time. The baby was delivered without complications; she'll rest here for three or four days.

In the next bed a thirty-year-old woman recovers from yet another cesarian. Dr. Sánchez brings out an X-ray indicating that earlier the unborn baby's head had been the same size as the mother's pelvic opening. Today the patient is constipated so she'll also get prunes, and all the exercise she's willing to take.

I0:I0 AM: Having finished with the in-patients, Dr. Sánchez returns to his office to write records and orders. In the hall, more members of patients' families accost him with their questions.

I0:20 AM: A thirty-year-old woman is encountered standing in the hall groaning and breathing hard. She's in labor, with contraction pains coming rather closely together. The Doctor abandons his schedule and orders the nurses to prepare for a delivery.

I0:25 AM: In the midst of preparing for the delivery, down the hall a commotion develops just outside the Emergency Room; the Doctor goes to take a look. A forty-year-old Indian man lies unconscious on the table while eight middle-aged men mill around, looking concerned and worried, and talking loudly. These friends and relatives have brought the man in the back of a pickup truck from an isolated village. The patient is unresponsive and Dr. Sánchez suspects a stroke. "He's very ill," he tells the men. "He'll have to stay here for a while. One of you men can stay with him, but the others should leave." When the patient's nephew is elected to stay, the seven other men go outside and gloomily climb into their old, blue pickup truck.

I0:35 AM: In the Delivery Room the woman lies on the table with her legs up and spread apart, and her feet tied into fixed metal stirrups. "When the pains come, push hard, as hard as you can," the Doctor says. Contractions come about every two minutes. The doctor tells me that his only worry so far is that the baby is situated facing the wrong direction, so that as it comes down it'll have to twist around. During each contraction I can see beneath the cloth spread atop the woman's abdomen the baby twisting to one side as its descent begins. Between contractions a urinary catheter is inserted to drain her bladder. The woman is quite alert and responds well to directions. Earlier the Doctor ordered contraction-inducing medicine to be introduced intravenously but now, just as the nurse prepares to insert the IV's needle, the contractions become so frequent and intense that the Doctor rescinds his order.

At l0:42 the baby's bag bursts, squirting a generous quantity of fluid onto Dr. Sánchez's arm two feet away. During a contraction at l0:44 the top of the baby's black, hairy head appears at the vagina's opening, but then the vagina closes up again. At l0:45 the baby fairly plops out, crying as soon as it hits the operating table. The mother asks me what it is. "*Un niño*,"I say. "A boy." She looks satisfied. She's born three girls but only one boy. Even before the afterbirth is ejected at l0:48 the woman asks that before she leaves her tubes be tied. Dr. Sánchez agrees, if he finds the husband of the same mind. At l0:50 the Doctor comes near me enthusiastically explaining something; however, none of what he says sinks in because he's diagramming his thoughts in the blood smeared on his plastic surgeon's glove... At l0:55 a nurse ties off and cuts the umbilical cord.

II:00 AM: In the office, a man selling drugs meets with Dr. Sánchez, and takes orders.

II:05 AM: Vital signs of the stroke victim down the hall are reviewed and copied into a file.

II:09 AM: The husband of the woman who should go to Tuxtla but prefers instead to be cured of *susto* visits Dr. Sánchez in the office. The main topic is how much the work done in Tuxtla will cost. It'll be about 400,000 pesos for tests, l25,000 for each day in the hospital, plus the doctor's charges -- in all, about $400 U.S. The man explains that he does not have the money, but that he'll find it. He'll sign promissory notes, or anything; the important thing is to get his wife healed. After the talk I see him outside leaning against a tree trunk, looking blankly into the sky.

II:30 AM: In the Doctor's office a fifteen-year-old female who has suffered pains in her chest for two or three months is examined, given some medicine, and asked to return in two weeks.

II:46 AM: A second medicine salesman is received, and orders are taken.

II:50 AM: The stroke victim victim's nephew is spoken to about the problem's seriousness. "Sometimes there's complete recovery, sometimes there's partial paralysis, and sometimes the patient dies," explains the Doctor. The nephew speaks slowly in a thick Tzotzil accent. The cost is the main subject he asks about.

II:54 AM: In the examination room the doctor looks at the healing scar of a young woman who has had a large boil lanced on her back. The scar bears a small, running sore. In order to understand the nature of the sore by examining the pus or fluid that runs from it, the Doctor asks to see the bandages that earlier were removed. However, the nurses already have destroyed the old bandage. For the first time today a procedure has been

followed incorrectly; the doctor diplomatically but firmly demands that in the future this error not be made.

NOON: A local plumber is spoken to about building a steam bath for the hospital.

I2:09 PM: A twenty-year-old woman who for a month has suffered with an abdominal pain is examined, told to have a pregnancy test, and to return in a week.

I2:22 PM: For insurance purposes a man needs an official-looking paper certifying that his wife was operated on her last month. At his portable typewriter, Dr. Sánchez immediately types up a lengthy letter describing the entire treatment.

I2:40 PM: One of the eighteen-year-old student nurses comes in with a sore throat. Medicine is provided to her. She'll remain under observation.

I2:42 PM: A nervous-looking sixteen-year-old female brings in results from two tests the Doctor has ordered done at a clinic in Villahermosa. Only the single word "negative" is scrawled across the clinical report. The Doctor complains that he cannot be absolutely certain that the negative result is for both tests. Medicine is provided and the patient is told to return in a week.

I2:57 PM: A thirty-year-old man with a pain on the upper, left-hand side of his back is examined. No problem is found and the man is asked to return in two weeks. Then Dr. Sánchez launches into a twenty-minute talk about a boy he once knew who feigned a toothache in order to gain permission to go home from school. Apparently he's trying to unwind. He tells me to meet him at the gate beneath the casuarinas at 3:00, and we'll take a twenty-minute walk together.

3:05 PM: We meet at the gate but as we begin our walk a nurse comes saying that a new emergency case just has been admitted. A young woman lies unconscious in the Emergency Room. Her despondent husband explains that she had wanted to have a party in their house, but he didn't agree, so they fought, she got upset, and then she lost consciousness. The Doctor checks for reflexes by sticking a pin into the souls of the women's feet: No response. Then he folds a piece of white paper, opens an eyelid, and waves the paper back and forth, almost touching or perhaps slightly touching the eyeball, and this time there is a little response. He orders an injection and compresses, and then we take the walk.

4:30 PM: A fifty-five-year old man with diabetes, looking very tired and worried, comes for his regular checkup. He carries a urine sample, on which a nurse runs a simple card-test Soon the man is informed that his blood-

sugar level is being kept more or less under control. During this man's visit nurses interrupt four times, asking for instructions on how to handle a patient down the hall who just has come in with a cut finger.

5:l5 PM: In the hospital's 8 x l5 foot classroom, Dr. Sánchez conducts a class for three student nurses. The topic is anemia, its definition, causes, symptoms, clinical diagnosis, treatment and prognosis. As the nurses take notes the doctor lectures extemporaneously.

6:00 PM: Leaving Dr. Sánchez in his office preparing to go home, I meet three Indian women with a sick child wandering down the hospital's dark hallway, looking for **el médico**. I tell them where he is, but am too tired to follow and take notes.

THESE CHAMULA INDIANS

(snapshot dated February, 1965)

Often Yerba Buena's visitors have contributed stories to the Newsletter detailing their impressions about what goes on at Yerba Buena and the surrounding region. Such was the case in early l965 when Helen Frazee and her husband passed through, and Mrs. Frazee wrote the piece presented below. Before getting to that story maybe a couple of terms need to be explained.

"Chamula" is a word coined by outsiders to refer to all indigenous peoples living in Chiapas' Central Highlands, without regard to the peoples' diverse languages and traditions. Several groups, or tribes, are represented here. Apparently "Chamula" derives from the name of a town nearYerba Buena called Rincon Chamula.

The word "Chamula" is a little like the Spanish word *gringo*, which you'll also find in this book. Most educated Mexicans consider *gringo* to be a slightly funny, not-respectful-but-not-really-disrespectful term for people from theU. S., and usually they don't use the word, at least not to our faces. However, most folks in this part of Mexico refer to all anglo-saxon-type people from abroad as *gringos*, often much to the chagrin of the Germans and French. Like the word "Chamula," then, down here *gringo* is a generic term used to

designate a diverse aggregation of people.

Now for helen Frazee's contribution to the February, 1965 Newsletter:

> **These Chamula Indians are of special interest to me. There are l75,000 of them. Until recently they had no written language. Years ago about 25 of them in this area accepted the message. Later, one of these, Antonio Diaz, came to work at Yerba Buena. He had a great burden for his people. With the Lord's blessing he has reduced their difficult language to writing, and has translated most of the New Testament and some parts of the Old Testament, many songs, and some articles. Tzotzil is the name of their dialect. Dr. Butler has managed to learn sufficient of this strange clicking language so he can take case histories a little better.**
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> **Yerba Buena Mission is not content just to sew up these people and treat their dysenteries and other diseases; it has a unique plan for training them in healthful living. The Mission has built eight simple two-room Mexican homes. They call it the Model village. The families for this training are chosen from the most promising Adventist Indians; some of them belong to the Zoque tribe. There are some whole villages who are Adventists.**
>
> **But even among our people there is a great lack in a knowledge of the simple principles of sanitation and healthful living. One of the first things they are taught is to make an out-house. They also learn that water is cleaner in a stream than in the mud puddle in the street where the pigs wallow. The fireplaces where they cook their food are up off the floor in the model homes, so the animals won't get into the food. And the fireplaces have chimneys. This last sounds strange, but these dear people somehow have never thought of making a way for the smoke to get out of the hut where they do their cooking over a fire on the floor. The smoke gets out the best way it can, and the people get sore eyes. Oh, so much to be taught. Along with these fundamental things, other simple principles of health and child care and Christian experiences are taught them. Then they are ready to return to their villages where they become the teachers.**

Breakfast in the CASA GRANDE

(recent snapshot)

The steady, heavy rain that fell all night continues this morning, drumming on the Casa Grande's tin roof. Outside, rainwater streaming across the gravel-covered turn-around coldly reflects the slate-gray sky. Most of the student nurses, as well as myself, have not come to Yerba Buena equipped with clothing heavy enough for the 40-degree temperatures we've been experiencing the last few days.

This morning fourteen student nurses and I share breakfast in the Casa Grande. We sit along both sides of three ten-foot long tables placed end-to-end, covered with a blue, plastic tablecloth adorned with cheerful representations of pineapples, grapes, apples and watermelons. On our blue, plastic plates lie heaps of refried black beans, pale but soul-pleasing tortillas, and a dish made mostly of scrambled eggs and fresh sweet-peas. We drink cups of hot atole, a native Indian drink made of finely ground parched corn sweetened with honey. The nurses make small-talk and laugh easily at things even only remotely funny.

Because Adventists consider Saturdays to be their days of rest, and today is Friday, in the kitchen this morning Doña Lilia is organizing not only for today's lunch and dinner but also for tomorrow's three meals. She and the student nurse whose turn it is this week to help her bang pots and pans, open and close cabinet doors, and exchange brief remarks about cabbage leaves, loaves of rising bread, the fate of avocado pits... Simply no one at Yerba Buena works harder and with more efficiency than Lilia Tosca.

This morning, to brighten things up, Doña Lilia plays tapes of music on the little Sanyo beside the window. These tapes have been copied from machine to machine so often that now the music comes out distorted, the highest notes going flat and the lowest acquiring a certain mellow, hollow sonority. It's American religious music being sung in English. Who knows what gringo visitor has left the tape here? "Glory, glory, hallelujah," the singers languidly intone, their voices resonating off the aquamarine-painted wallboards behind the radio. And though it's cold and dark outside and mist-filled rain chills and clogs the lungs, inside the Casa Grande an agreeable, glowing, orangish feeling reigns.

I'm the last breakfaster to leave. Washing my plate and cup, I tell doña Lilia how glad I am to be here, for this morning the Voice of America, which each day I listen to on my shortwave radio, reported that yesterday in Los Angeles it snowed, and that the high today in Chicago will be l8ºF. I expect doña Lilia to be interested in this, for several years ago she lived for a few months in San Francisco.

"Ay, yes I'm also glad to be here," she laughs. "And for more reasons than the weather. Sometimes I can't forget some of the things I've seen up there. In San

Francisco I remember one certain street where there was nothing but prostitution of the worst kind. And in the evenings we'd see long lines of people waiting to see men and women have sex on stage... Sometimes I remember those things, even when I don't want to, and all I know to do is to ask forgiveness from God, and to give thanks that my family and I are here, in this refuge..."

"Water System Update"

(snapshot dated 1986)

In the spring of l986, Ray Comstock is 73 years old. His energies and thoughts are consumed by Yerba Buena's need for a dependable source of clean water. His note to family and supporters in the March/April, l986 issue of the *Newsletter* shows exactly what's on his mind:

> **During the past months, with the donations you have sent for a new water system, l,036 meters of 2 l/4-inch high-pressure PVC pipe has been installed to bring water from the dams in the rain forest down to the holding tanks. The l-inch galvanized pipe, which had served for many years, had so many leaks that it was useless to try to patch them any longer. Ash from the volcano increased the corrosion in the pipes. Right now the new water tank has the footings and floor poured, most of the reinforcement rods in, and some of the rock broken for use in the walls. The items still needed include: 200 meters PVC pipe and some black plastic pipe to complete the lines, valves, cement, sand, rock (blasting, hauling, crushing), 2 tons of reinforcement rods, expenses of the truck, and labor. If materials can be purchased before prices rise again, we expect the cost to be about $7,000.00 (U.S.). Last week we also realized a new hindrance to finishing the project when the engine on the rock crusher broke down. A new one will cost $900.00. Please pray with us that the Lord will make a way to get a replacement soon. Thank you!**
>
> **Several major disasters in recent years, plus the drop in petroleum prices, has seriously affected Mexico's economy. The destruction and suffering caused by the eruption of the Chichonal volcano; the gas explosion in San Juanico, and the terrible earthquakes in Mexico City last September can only be appreciated fully by those who survived**

them. Yet inflation is being felt keenly by the entire nation, and especially by the common people whose wages remain much the same. For example: A few weeks ago a housewife could buy a liter of cooking oil for $l75.00 pesos. Today she must pay $600.00! Materials and parts for construction and maintenance have gone up as much as 500% during recent months.

"MEDICAL HIGHLIGHT"

(snapshot date September, 1961)

In the Newsletter's September, l96l issue, Dr. Maurice Butler -- the clinic's first doctor, who stayed between August, 1958 and January, 1971 -- contributed the following story, which offers a vivid glimpse into everyday life at the clinic.

Last week as Monday clinic was finished, preparations were being made for the routine 4 p.m. trip to the Pueblo 2 miles away, to visit several people in their homes. The Travelall serves not only as ambulance, at times, but also as bus or taxi to take fifteen or 20 workers home at the end of the day several times a week. They do not expect to ride but it is usually raining in the evening and that is a good hour for home calls anyway, as clinic visits are few.

Just then a Jeep pulled in from Bochil, 30 miles away. There, lying across the back of the Jeep was Dario, the worst-chopped man we have seen yet, but still very much alive though he had gone a whole day without treatment. True, he was pale and the pulse was fast but it was amazing to see him alive and not even in shock. The wrist was cut half way through, the muscles of the back of the arm severed, the back chopped into the shoulder blade in two places, the skull laid bare in two of the several scalp cuts, and long deep cuts criss-crossed over the vital vessels of the neck, entering the ear canal, jaw-bone and the last molar reaching to the back of the neck. All were dirty but especially the wrist had been thoroughly ground in the dirt. He had rolled over a bank down into a gulch and spent the night on the creek bank.

Cleaning the infected wounds required an hour and a half and the repair, done with only a strong analgesic injection and local anesthetic, occupied the rest of our time until midnight. The patient's father after watching for a time had to go out, but his friend remained the full time. There were over 200 stitches in all. The wrist itself was a major job with at least 7 tendons cut. After 8 hours over that low table an adjustable operating table would look good!

At 4:00 a.m. Cristobal, our boy who sleeps in the clinic, called, and we awoke, wondering what was happening to Dario now. Had he suddenly gone into shock and passed on? No, his wife was "very grave and

about to relieve herself" of her baby. Perhaps this is why she had used up so many "cigarros" during her husband's repair. We had thought it was just tension over her husband's condition. We had not even noticed the wife's contour. She was due to deliver 6 weeks later, but the fast, rough Jeep ride was too much. On arriving we found the patient fairly comfortable and not appearing at all nervous, but she was about to deliver a premature baby. So we quickly called our l4-year-old American surgery supervisor, Ann Kirkendall, to take charge, while the rest of us assisted. She handled the delivery perfectly and the 4-lb. baby has done very well. In this country, taking charge of a delivery makes you the "grandmother," and this young "grandmother" who has always been very fond of babies accepts the role!

Now, after a week, Dario's infection is largely under control and there are no signs of tetanus yet. He should be going home in a few days. God has spared his life for a reason we are sure.

ENRIQUE'S JUNGLE

(recent snapshot) (snapshot dated....)

On a Sunday morning my ten-year-old friend Enrique (one of doña Lilia's nephews from a distant village) guides me downslope from Yerba Buena, to Linda Vista School, where we've been invited to hear the band practice. It's all downhill through thick forest in which pines and sweetgum trees are dominant. Each schoolday morning Enrique and his pals descend this steep, dirt footpath. Each day around noon they ascend it.

"There's a game we play each day," relates Enrique, his eyes shining with pleasure. "When you fall, then from now on, that's your *terreno*, and then later every time you pass by it, you have to pay. No, not money, just something. A rock, a stick, a feather. Look here, this rock we're going over has seven *terrenos* around it. Three belong to Nancy, two to José, two to Juan, and this spot, here, that's mine... "

Spots on the earth invisible to me are important landmarks to Enrique. Passing by one of his *terrenos* farther downslope, almost angerly he kicks a rock poking from the ground; earning that *terreno* must have hurt, or maybe

the fall had been especially embarrassing.

"Ay, you stand there, to one side," he requests, using the formal or polite form of the Spanish word for "you." He climbs back up the slope about twenty feet, gets a running start, and then leaps from atop a particular limestone rock I hadn't noticed.

"Not as good as last Thursday," he decides, shaking his head after landing and appraising his distance traveled. "Last Thursday, *ayyyyyyy*, I just kept going, coming down real slow."

Near the slope's base a thicket of pepper-shrubs is cleared away to provide access to two forty-foot-long vines hanging like limber ropes from the top of a tall pine. The vines have been cut where they enter the ground so that now they can be swung on. Kids climb onto a fallen tree just upslope, then swing on the vines in an arc maybe thirty feet long. At the far end during their ride, they're about fifteen feet above the pepper-shrubs below them.

"Yeah, it's dangerous," laughs Enrique. "Once I fell right there in the bushes and everyone laughed, though I hurt a lot. But, when you're swinging, you go down for a while, maybe with your feet dragging on the ground, and then you go up and up, and then you just hang there out over the bushes, and that's scary. Then you start coming back down, and you have to figure out how you're going to stop yourself, for there's nothing here to grab on to. That's when it gets funny... "

And just thinking about all the sloppy landings he's seen, now Enrique runs on down toward Linda Vista, laughing almost as if someone were tickling him.

"SOLD"

(snapshot dated November, 1968)

This story, written by Ray Comstock, appeared in the November, l968 *Newsletter*:

A number of years ago a Chamula Indian man living five hours (l5 miles) north of Yerba Buena decided he wanted a daughter. (He had five sons, but no daughter.) This Indian man, Andres, knew an elderly Indian woman who was raising her granddaughter. So Andres made a bargain with the grandmother and bought the little girl for l50 pesos (l2 dollars).

All went well until two and a half years ago a band of assassins murdered Andres and four of his sons one night. Antonia, the little girl who was not l0 years old, was hit in the leg twice by stray bullets and brought to our hospital. Soon she recovered and returned to live with her grandmother because nearly all of her new family had been eliminated. But the grandmother did not want Antonia and offered to sell her for l00 pesos. So a nephew of the murdered Andres, by the name of Pedro, took the girl to live with him and his wife.

Things did not run smoothly between Antonia and Pedro's wife. So Pedro's brother, Antonio Díaz, (whom many will remember, since we brought Antonio and María to the United States six years ago) brought Antonia to Yerba Buena for us to care for here.

She is a sweet little l3 year old child and is content as one of our children, calling us "Mamma" and "Daddy."

Gregoria on the Sun Deck

(recent snapshot)

At l0 o'clock on a morning filled with sunlight and moist, warm breezes, I find eighteen-year old Gregoria Rafeala López Rodríguez from the town of Ixhuatán sitting on the Hospital's sun deck. Though she's in a wheelchair, she looks healthy in every respect, except that her hands and feet are slightly swollen and the skin covering these parts is peeling off. She tells me that she's one of eight

children, that her mother works as a maid in a landowner's house, and that she's sorry, but she'll never be able to read the book I'm writing, for she has never attended school, and cannot read.

Now Doña Metahabel arrives to give the morning's massage therapy. She lifts Gregoria's left arm and with her thumbs very gently presses the hand's upper surface. Then she moves the stiff fingers, ever so slightly, back and forth.

"Ah, it feels much better today," says Doña Metahabel. "We only began massage therapy yesterday and then she couldn't even puck up a glass of water. But today I think she might be able to do that."

As Doña Metahabel works, Gregoria whimpers from the pain. She tries to be brave, but sometimes she just has to throw back her head, bite her lower lip, and hiss out her feelings. Tears run down her cheeks.

"We'll give massages for three more weeks, each day followed by a steam bath," explains Doña Metahabel. "Also we've put her on a low protein diet -- no meat, beans, cheese or eggs, and no salt. She can eat fruits, grains, vegetables..."

Arthritis is common in my own family; at age forty-one already my own hands and back joints sometimes ache. Now I wince as each of Gregoria's fingers must be moved, one at a
time.

"Before Gregoria came to us, she visited a *curandero*, a witch doctor," continues Doña Metahabel. "The witch doctor told her that she was possessed by evil spirits, and that for a certain price he would drive the spirits away. His method was to put a little alcohol into a small cup, set the alcohol ablaze, and then quickly turned the cup upside down over the swollen areas so that the burning alcohol would create a vacuum inside the cup and suck out the evil spirits. But all that did was to burn Gregoria's skin. That's why the skin is peeling off her hands and feet."

Gregoria seems a little embarrassed to have this story told, so Doña Metahabel changes the subject.

"This reminds me of an incident we had here a while back," she says. "Among the Chol Indians, girls usually marry between ten and twelve years of age, and boys marry when they're fourteen or sixteen. By the time a girl is thirteen she should have produced her first baby; if she doesn't, people will say that something must be wrong with her. Well, one day we received an unmarried eighteen-year-old boy who had been very concerned about not being able to find a spouse. Someone had told him that if he mixed a large quantity of chicken manure with cow's blood and ate it, he'd find a wife. So he did, and the mixture

poisoned his system. He was here for three weeks, very, very ill... "

At the same time Gregoria both laughs and cries. Offering a brief recess now, Doña Metahabel steps behind her patient and unselfconsciously and systematically begins parting the strands of Gregoria's hair, looking for lice. In the villages this vital social grooming is done by a person's loved ones. Gregoria responds to the generous gesture by sticking her thumb in her mouth and holding her head to one side as if she were a child.

But, now the right hand must be massaged, and then each foot...

A Little Orange and Green Book's

HISTORY OF CHIAPAS

(recent snapshot)

Hearing me say that I wanted to learn more about Chiapas's history, Hans Bercián, the Pastor's son, brings me a much-thumbed-through, 6½- x 4¼-inch, orange and green, paperback book of 224 pages, bearing the title *Enciclopédico Chiapas*. It consists of a brief dictionary of Spanish words and a strangely organized collection of miscellaneous details about the state of Chiapas and Mexico. Here are some of the notes I take:

569 AD: The equivalent of this date is inscribed on a stele, or stone monument, erected by the ancient Maya at the ruins now referred to as Yatoch-kú or Lacanjáh, in the Chiapas lowlands. The stele shows a figure playing the Mayan game a little similar to our basketball.

l498: From the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán, 350 air-miles to the northwest (the site today of Mexico City), King Ahuizotl sends a military expedition as far south as present-day El Salvador. This army subjugates the Mayan tribes inhabiting the land that today includes Chiapas. Hereafter, Chiapas's tribes must pay tribute to the Aztecs. Despite these early animosities, Chiapas's Maya Indians eventually become loyal members of the Aztec dominion.

l524: Having defeated the Aztecs of Central Mexico, the Spanish conquistadors subjugate Indians occupying present-day Chiapas. Chiapas's tribes fight valiantly but lose to the better equipped Spanish. A Spanish

military outpost is established in a place called Zoctón Nandalumí. However, as soon as the main body of Spanish troops withdraws, the Chiapan Indians rebel and kill the troops left behind.

l527: Under Capt. Diego de Mazariegos, a second expedition visits Chiapas. During the attack on Zoctón Nandalumí at least 2000 of the 4000 Indian inhabitants, instead of surrendering, jump over a cliff to their deaths. Mazariegos's troops take control of all of the region's major cities. This date represents the beginning of Spanish domination in Chiapas. Also it initiates a history of continuing atrocities and cruelties committed by the Spanish upon the Indians.

l7l2: About l5,000 Indians, wishing to rid Chiapas of foreign influence, attack various Chiapan towns and decapitate all people not of indigenous race, language and customs. The rebellion is put down in about a year, its leaders being publicly choked to death.

l82l: Chiapas declares itself independent of Spain and recognizes the Mexican Empire as the only governmental authority. In reality the central Mexican government's power in Chiapas is limited. Many Chiapans feel more allegiance to the "Province of Central America," and many want to see Chiapas become an independent nation. Politics during these years is often laughably (and sometimes tragically) confusing.

l863: As part of France's effort to impose Maximilian I, an Austrian archduke, onto Mexico as its emperor, Chiapas's main city of San Cristóbal is attacked by French troops and briefly occupied.

l867: An Indian called Pedro Díaz Cuscat makes an idol from clay and convinces his neighbors that it's a god descended from Heaven to live among them. In l868 Cuscat's believers crucify a small boy, letting him die on the cross. The government gets wind of this and imprisons Cuscat and a female accomplice claiming to be the mother of God. Now along comes another man and a woman, apparently people only looking for some kind of scam to work, who organize the Indians, attack San Cristóbal, manage to liberate Pedro and the mother of God, but also get themselves captured. Later they are executed, but Pedro and the mother of God are able to escape into the mountains.

l945: North American explorers Eduardo Frey and John Bourne, with a chicle gatherer called Acacio Chan and some Lacandon Indians discover the famous Maya ruins in the Chiapan lowlands today known as Bonampak.

l952: Archaeologist Alberto Ruz discovers a tomb inside the Temple of the Inscriptions at the famous Maya ruins today known as Palenque, located in the Chiapan lowlands.

"Parasites, Peritonitis, & Prayer"

(snapshot dated January, 1973)

From what I can see, here are the three biggest differences between the medical problems of average Chiapans and their counterparts in the U.S.:

- In isolated Indian villages almost everyone has intestinal worms. A high percentage of the children display distended abdomens filled with worms.
- Tuberculosis is very common. In the corners of many huts often you see old people simply lying, waiting to die.
- Especially on weekends and during festivals, Indian males tend to get drunk and hack on one another with machetes, or shoot one another.

In the January, l973 issue of the *Newsletter*, Dr. Robert Bowes, who was at Yerba Buena during 1972 and 1973, writes about his extraordinary experience with one patient with a too-ordinary ailment:

> **My attention was drawn to the sound of wretching outside the "Consultorio" window. It was toward the end of a busy Sunday full of many interesting cases, but the sounds which caught my ear were the harbingers of a very long evening. Eighteen-year-old Santiago was assisted into the examining room by his concerned family and friends. He was pale, sweaty and feverish and almost unable to walk. After a few minutes of questioning, I learned that for the past three days he had run a high fever and vomited everything he ate. Physical exam revealed a very firm, tender abdomen with tenderness accentuated in the right lower quadrant and a positive rebound sign: almost certainly appendicitis, probably ruptured with peritonitis. A few quick orders for IV's, catheter, and other preparations for surgery, preceded my summons for Dr. Sanchez. After a short consultation we agreed that surgery was the only chance this lad had to live. Dr. John Trummer, the out-going Social Service doctor agreed to assist with monitoring the patient and giving general anesthetic. With prayerful hearts we began laparotomy with the aid of spinal anesthesia plus sedatives and ether. Upon opening the peritoneum -- foul smelling pus heralded the dreaded complication of peritonitis. It was with much difficulty that we examined the matted-down intestines until we discovered, not ruptured appendix, but a l/2" hole in the small intestine! With no small effort I managed a double row of sealing sutures to close the defect, praying that the friable tissues would hold and heal. More exploration for other holes and possibly a large roundworm (Ascaris lombricoides) which we now suspected to be the culprit responsible for the first hole. (A few weeks before in a similar case a roundworm was found free in the peritoneum during surgery.) No more holes or any worms! Inflamed appendix: removed! Quick closure! After surgery, the family revealed that Santiago had vomited a l0-inch roundworm the day before, undoubtedly the culprit responsible for his condition.**
>
> **Heavy doses of IV and IM antibiotics, several vensections, and good nursing care were adjuncts to the Creator's healing power. Today, l5 days later, Santiago is eating, walking,**

and spending some time each day in the sun. He is still weak and treatment to strengthen him and rid him of his parasites will continue for several days, but we at Yerba Buena feel that God has already answered our prayers in his behalf. With his body whole, we pray that his mind will now be open to the message of a Better Land where such problems will exist no more.

SUN-GOD & MOON

(recent snapshot)

One way or another, Antonio Díaz has been associated with Yerba Buena nearly from the beginning. (So far, he's been mentioned twice, first in These Chamula Indians and then in Sold. Nowadays he spends most of his time ranging deep into the mountains, preaching the Adventist word to Tzotzil-speakers in the Tzotzil language. Antonio is a handsome, fifty-five year old man who looks too youthful and easy-going to have lived though the times he talks about. When he was a child his family lived in the isolated village of Ventana Aurora. His people constituted a small subgroup of Tzotzil-speakers called the San Andreseros. Speaking their own dialect of Tzotzil, the San Andresros are distinguished among the region's peoples for their loyalty to San Andrés --the saint known in English as St. Andrew.

When Antonio Díaz was a child -- and sometimes even now -- the San Andreseros mixed Catholicism with their traditional indigenous beliefs. Antonio's manner of speaking about those times is extraordinary. In a low voice he speaks profoundly slowly, emphasizing in one way or another the pronunciation of most every word. On about every fifth word he lingers languidly, humming a vowel sound. Also he speaks with something of a lisp. Part of this interesting manner of talking can be attributed to his speaking Spanish with a strong Tzotzil/San Andresero accent, but mostly it's his own idiosyncrasy. When this man speaks of the old ways you sense that the feelings and insights he carries from those days somehow express themselves in the nuances of his strange speech. The following was spoken in Spanish that sometimes reminded me of a lonely owl hooting from deep inside a swamp at night, and sometimes of low thunder rumbling on the horizon, and always they were words being retrieved fromwhat seemed to me an impossibly distant past...

"When I was a child, we did not know about the Word of God. We believed in the images of saints. That's what our grandfathers taught us. Once, for a year, my father took care of the images. They were made of cedar wood. They were painted. St. Andrew with his black beard... About a meter tall. The Virgin was

small. Though we worshiped those images in a Catholic church, we didn't know anything about Catholic doctrine. My father thought that the sun was the Father, and that the moon was the Virgin Mary. We called the sun-god Cajuatík. Metík was the moon."

"Once when I was a child I wanted to learn how to pray to the sun-god. So one morning I went with an uncle and his wife and children when they went to pray. It was on the side of a hill. They got down on their knees and faced the rising sun. I got down on my knees with them. But they prayed for a long, long time. About forty minutes. They asked the sun-god to bless their cornfield and their beans. And their animals. And they asked to be forgiven. They kneeled there so long that I almost couldn't stand it."

"For that reason, when one day missionaries came, walking about thirty kilometers up from Tabasco... It was a morning... My father was in the house... Those missionaries were looking for the path to Arroyamita. 'Ayyyyyyy, this is the path,' my father said. 'You're not going to get lost.' But those missionaries asked my father if he could read, and he said that he could read a little. Then my father said, 'Come on in my house.' So they went in and that man, the oldest among them, he took out a Bible. But we didn't know for sure that it was the Bible. Only that it was a big, red book. It was beautiful. And the man began talking about the second coming of Christ. And my father said, 'Really? Really? Really...?' And he was transfixed. He said, 'Sell me that book.' 'I can't sell it,' the old man said. 'But I want to study that book,' my father said. 'I can't sell this one because it's my own,' the old man said. 'But if you wish, the next time we come, we'll bring you one to keep for yourself.'"

"And so when my father had his own Bible, he began studying it. But the Bible was in Spanish and he understood only a little of what he read. He kept finding the name Jehova but he couldn't figure out what that was. 'But what thing is this Jehova?' my father would ask. Then one day the missionaries came again and my father asked them what this Jehova was. 'It's the name of God,' they said. 'Ayyyyyy, and I thought it was the name of a demon,' my father said. And this is the way, little by little, my father learned the Word of God."

"One day a neighbor, a man called Lucas, came to my father. He said, 'I've heard that sometimes strangers come and talk inside your house. Is this good or bad?' 'Ayyyyyy, it's good,' my father said. 'If you want to listen, you come, too. They come every Friday.' Another day, a man called Manuel López came. One time Manual López and my father fought on the trail because Manual López had burned the forest. But now it seemed that Manual López had forgotten about that. 'I also want to know what you are learning,' he said to my father. 'You come, too,' my father said. 'It's the Word of God we hear here, and it's good.' So now there were three men, and that's all it was for almost twelve years. These were the only three men in the village who knew how to read. Then for years my father

became a missionary himself. And I did, too.

"The Story of Hades or
THE CASE OF THE WITCHES"

(snapshot dated March-April, 1988)

In *Newsletters* of recent years, often Pastor Bercián has contributed stories, frequently about his adventures on tooth-extracting trips deep into the countryside. Clearly the Pastor has a flair for writing, and he enjoys doing it. Moreover, he examines details of life among the mountains with the attention to detail of a trained anthropologist. Here is one of his stories, after someone has translated it into English. It appeared in the March - April, l988 *Newsletter*:

> **Micaela was an Indian woman of about 50 years of age living in the Indian Colony of Rincon Chamula, about 5 miles west of Yerba Buena Hospital. This locality is famous because both the men and women drink quantities of alcohol distilled in a very crude manner. There is no shortage of witches, either male or female, in this colony.**
>
> **Micaela, one of the very old witches, was brought into our hospital after being shot at close range with a shotgun. The shotgun blast left 52 buckshot in an area 8 inches wide and 5 inches high. The muscles were badly burned and the sternum and ribs were exposed.**
>
> **We presumed that one of her clients, possibly one who had no results from her treatments, had tried to kill her, or possibly the family of one of her victims had tried to get revenge.**
>
> **In reality these witches are not only used to cast spells to kill people, they are also used to cure people from such ailments as anemia or loss of appetite. The witch goes to the place where the patient was supposedly frightened by an evil spirit. The witch then, after drinking quantities of alcohol, takes control of the "evil spirit" and makes it remain in that place. The sick person is then supposed to be "curado."**
>
> **You need to understand that in this area the witches use different materials for their "work" such as human hair (from the next victim), black wax from the forest, duck eggs, or a black rooster. Alcohol is indispensable (for the witch to drink), and a shotgun to fire at the moment of the enchantment to scare off the "evil spirits." They also use rosin from the pine tree in their incense burner to frighten the evil**

spirits.

This witch, Micaela, did not die at that time even though the flesh was torn off from the upper rib cage and the sternum. After two months of treatments with medicines and honey (covering the wounds) she was able to return to her home.

The Holy Bible clearly states: "There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consultant with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all these things are an abomination unto the Lord: Deuteronomy l8:l0-l2.

FINALLY: Three months after Micaela left the hospital she was visited by two young men, strangers from a distant village. These young strangers gave Micaela some gifts of food and then asked her to go with them to their village to "cure" a sick woman. Micaela, accompanied by her 9 year old granddaughter, expected to return the next morning. The next afternoon the granddaughter returned bedraggled and very frightened to report that Micaela had been stoned to death on the trail by the two young men. Micaela's sons found her cold body on the trail, with a terribly mutilated chest and head. Micaela had lived a sinful life and she met a terrible death. "Be sure your sins will find you out."

"NOT A PENNY TOO MUCH"

(snapshot dated October, 1969)

In "Our First Home" we've already seen that in some of the earlier *Newsletters* Marie Comstock wrote about the history of Yerba Buena. In Vol. III, No. 7, issued in October of l96l, she wrote about one of the many key incidents that enabled them to establish Yerba Buena:

We had prayed "Father, if you want us to go to Chiapas, if that is where we can do the best work for you, we are going to ask that you impress people to come to us and give us the money to purchase the Santa Cruz property without our asking for any money." The money began to come in, many small gifts, some larger ones, but all with no "strings" attached, no guarantees asked, no promises given. ... We told the people as they gave us the money or sent the money that the only

possible returns for their money would be souls in the Kingdom. We even received a check by mail from a man who is not a member of our church. It might interest many of you to know that this man through the years has helped Yerba Buena more financially than has any Adventists. ...

In two weeks time we had placed in our hands $2l50.00 to purchase the Santa Cruz property. We thought the property would cost about $3000.00. No more funds came in and we were beginning to wonder why the sudden stop. After about another week we received a letter from the Sec. Treas. of the South Mission telling us that he had been out to see Mariano Guerrero, the ranch owner, and the final price on the land was $l8,000.00 pesos. $l8,000.00 pesos at the exchange in effect at that time came to $2,l50.00! There was then no doubt in our minds that the Master wanted us in Chiapas.

"A LOOK INSIDE THE CLINIC"

(snapshot dated January, 1965)

During Yerba Buena's first years, Dr. Maurice Butler was the clinic's doctor. Dr. Butler and his family stayed at Yerba Buena for the clinic's first thirteen years, then the family moved on to Africa, where they provided similar medical-missionary service for another twelve years. Frequently Dr. Butler wrote anecdotes for the *Newsletter*, often displaying his own interesting literary style. In fact, in the January, l965 issue he seems to anticipate this book by writing vignettes describing semi-randomly chosen events from a typical day in the clinic. He writes:

"Señora, please cook your food on top of the stove, because inside is where we throw all the drainage pads and bandages."

The ten in-patients have l5 or 20 relatives staying with them, and we encourage them to warm their beans, coffee, and tortillas on the stove, but have outlawed butchering chickens in the building.

"Please take us in; we came from so far"....."I am sorry but we have no place but a stretcher here in the narrow hallway. These four rooms which are full of patients were intended for other purposes, but we have put patients there, and work in half of the clinic, as we still have no hospital." Sometimes in X-Ray the patient in bed is requested to

look the other way while a lady prepares for special X-Rays.

A diabetic lady from the city has a ragged bedspread beneath and a tablecloth above -- probably one of the four that Marie has lost. Since linens are being counted out to the wash girls now, we have lost almost nothing. Some say that our linens are not worth carrying off!

"Is this the operating room or laundry?" one may ask as he peers into a cluttered room with hanging clothes, ironing board, etc. When not needed for surgery, the girls sew, iron, etc., as this is one of the only two rooms in the clinic not occupied by the general public.

"Open the door please; we need to enter the Laboratory and Pharmacy."

"Just a minute; we are bathing a baby, and must squeeze some people to the side to open the door."

On entering, we find that this "L" shaped room of l00 square feet floor space serves as central supply, utility room, laboratory, baby-bathing room, and linen room, as well as nurses' lounge for combing hair, brushing teeth, etc. The shelves on one side contain laboratory equipment, plaster bandages, hot water bottles, enema cans, stool specimens, tooth paste, brushes, hair curlers, and shoe polish; also a pathological museum of gallstones, bladder stones, parasitic worms, pickled snakes, and rare tumors.

Dr. Santos of El Bosque

(recent snapshot)

South through Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacan and Jitotol, for about twenty-five miles, then at Puerto Café left onto the gravel road and down, down we go across steep slopes of weedy, fallow cornfields and banana and coffee plantations, sometimes passing spectacular tree-ferns growing along the road, and always passing Tzotzil-speaking Indians walking long distances, sometimes carrying on their backs large, white bags of coffee beans, for the coffee here now is maturing... Women wear white blouses with the necks and

short sleeves trimmed with red embroidery displaying tiny floral and geometrical designs. Their long black dresses are held in place by wide, red belts. While most men, especially the younger ones, wear Western-style shirts and pants, perhaps a quarter of the older men wear traditional white, baggy shorts and white, loosely-fitting shirts, both made of heavy, woven cotton. And always they wear straw hats. Usually both sexes go barefooted.

About 2500 people live in El Bosque, which lies at an elevation of about 2500 feet. Most people in El Bosque's streets today are Indians who have walked here from surrounding villages. As soon as Pastor Bercián, two nurses, the truck driver and I arrive, an announcement is made on the big loudspeaker mounted on a tall, crooked pole in the town's center:

"A team from Yerba Buena Hospital has just arrived to pull teeth and fit bridges," it blares out. "They're waiting now in Dr. Santos's office."

Dr. Santos's office lies off a steeply sloped, one-lane street near the town's center. Through a door in a wall you pass down a short, odoriferous alley between two houses, picking your way past various animal-droppings and miscellaneous accumulations of refuse. On the alley's back wall, beneath a twenty-foot Cecropia tree, a hand-painted sign reads, "Dr. Santos, Consultations and Patent Medicine. Tooth-pulling and Ear-washing. Hours... " But the hours scrawled there are completely illegible.

Below the sign and to the right, we find Dr. Santos's office to be about twelve feet wide and fifteen feet long. The room's only light enters through the open door. Stacked along the back wall are shelves holding several hundred small boxes of the type in which medicine is sold. Something about them suggests that they are empty. On the wall to the left hang two framed certificates, one showing that Dr. Santos has completed basic medical training at Yerba Buena, and the other indicating that he has graduated from a three-week first-aid course sponsored by the Mexican Government. On the small wooden table in the room's center lie various tooth-extracting tools, neatly arranged, and a black, flat, smooth stone that when passed across a patient's face is supposed to cure... dandruff.

Dr. Santos himself is a thirty-five year old Indian from nearby San Pedro Nixtalacúm, speaking Spanish with a heavy Tzotzil accent. Though he wears a perfectly clean, white hospital uniform, his whiskers haven't been shaved for several days. He welcomes us effusively and in the best-natured humor. However, he is very ill-at-ease and he seems completely overwhelmed by the fact that a tall gringo has entered his office. Before many words can be said about it, however, Indians begin filing down the alley. Three come blurry-eyed, holding wet towels to swollen cheeks. Dr. Santos helps translate for those unable to speak Spanish.

"How much do you charge to pull a tooth," the Indians ask as soon as polite greetings are exchanged.

"For the tooth-pulling we don't require that you pay anything," explains the Pastor. "But if as you leave you wish to contribute something to our program, we'll greatly appreciate anything you have to offer."

A seventy-year old man wearing traditional baggy, white shorts and baggy white shirt comes for his upper plate, ordered during a previous visit. Here plates cost the equivalent of about $7.00 U.S. "*Mero lec*," the old man's friends say when the plate finally is installed; "Real pretty," they say in Tzotzil. After we've worked for about four hours, one upper plate has been fitted, four bridges have been installed and about twenty teeth have been extracted.

Dr. Santos's fascination with this six foot, three inch gringo borders on being ridiculous. He keeps asking if he can ride on my back. At the lunch prepared for us after the work is done, he reveals one reason for his behavior. He tells us that as a child his family -- as was typical in those days, and perhaps still is --taught him to run from tall, white people. "Those tall gringos eat us Mexicans," he was told. Dr. Santos's uncle used to tell about meeting a tall gringo carrying a briefcase in which were carried arms and legs of Mexicans, which he planned to carry to the U. S. and sell... "to be eaten like *chicharrones* (pig cracklings) with tortillas."

"That's just a story your uncle told you," says Pastor Bercián, assuredly, and with no hint of mockery.

"A story?" repeats Dr. Santos, clearly having never doubted the story's veracity.

"A story... " insists the Pastor.

On the road back to Yerba Buena I ask the Pastor if in Mexico it isn't illegal for people like Dr. Santos to advertise themselves as real doctors.

"Well, yes, I suppose that it is illegal," explains the Pastor. "But Dr. Santos is an Indian doctor. He treats only those who would never have the money or be bold enough to visit a real doctor. He provides an extremely valuable service for the Indians in this region, so the government just looks the other way... "

"ANOTHER TRUCK-LOAD OF EQUIPMENT FROM CALIFORNIA"

(snapshot dated July, 1968)

This Newsletter entry from the summer of l968, written by Ray Comstock, gives us insight into one important aspect of how Yerba Buena came to be:

> **Another long trip with a heavily loaded truck of equipment and medicines is over and we are happy that there were no accidents or serious trouble. Bro. Ray Comstock with Gary and Steve Neuharth arrived at l2 midnight, Thursday, June 27, after a l0-day trip from California. The truck weighed in at 5,360 lbs. on the front axle and l5,640 lbs. on the rear axle making a total of 2l,000 lbs. (l0-l/2 T.) gross. Of this, l4,200 lbs. was the load of equipment, etc.**
>
> **A complete operating room equipment including table, instruments, lights, anesthetic machine, portable x-ray, etc., etc., as well as steam generator for autoclave, large restaurant-type stove, l/4 ton of electric wire, medicines, etc., were part of the load.**
>
> **The first l400 miles of the trip were HOT, ll4° at Yuma, ll9° at Gila Bend (in the shade). Out on the highway there was no shade! We had no trouble keeping warm those first 5 days. Then we came to the mountains and we crawled up the mountains and down the mountains. Making this trip with a loaded truck is an experience that one will never forget.**
>
> **This equipment, medicines, etc., all come into the country duty-free by special permit of the Federal Treasury Department because of the type of work being done by Yerba Buena.**

Portrait of Gudulia, A Yerba Buena Graduate

(recent snapshot)

Twenty-year old Gudulia Concepción Molina Aguilar is from Simojovel de Allende, Chiapas, just down the road from Dr. Santos and el Bosque. Simojovel is about twice the size of El Bosque and a little lower in elevation, so it must be similar, except even more bustling and hotter. Gudulia refers to

it as being more civilized but more isolated -- "Way back in a little nook in the mountains," she says. Here's her story:

> *"My father is a radio technician and my mother works in the house. She also makes bread to sell in the street. I have three brothers and one elder sister. When I was a child at home, I just played. Especially I liked to play marbles, even though that's a game that only boys are supposed to play."*

Admitting that once she liked to play marbles, Gudulia looks profoundly ashamed and embarrassed. Her pixy-like face expresses the epitome of innocence. She seems younger than twenty.

> *"Well, the truth is, hmmmmmm..., Well, maybe at first I wasn't so well educated. I didn't help around the house and sometimes I didn't even pay proper respect to my parents. I wasn't bad all the time; just sometimes. And, well, my father had heard about Yerba Buena -- that here they can prepare you for life, and that they are very strict. For example, here they don't let you eat meat. Yes, strict in many ways, but the truth is that that helps a person a lot. Now that I've been here for several years my parents say that I'm a different person, and it's true. When I graduated from Yerba Buena after two years of study I was well prepared both materially and spiritually."*

The moment Gudulia touches on the theme of spirituality, for the first time she takes on an air of confidence. Instantly it becomes clear that this is the topic on which she feels most at ease.

> *"Before I came here I was a Catholic, but it didn't mean anything to me. Now I'm an Adventist, and I think I'm lucky to have found the religion. For example, my sister stayed in Simojovel and she never changed. She got married very young, had a baby, her husband left her, and now she's hurt, and very unhappy. But I'm here, working, and I'm very content. I work in the hospital. During operations I check blood pressure and apply compresses. But, most important, before the operation I make sure that everything is ready. Also I talk with the patients. I've seen that when you talk to them they don't hurt so much. Of course one problem is that many patients who come here speak only Tzotzil. Generally when they arrive they're dirty. We have to change their clothes and bathe them, but they don't feel comfortable letting us do that and it's hard to explain to them why it has to be done. However, when I was a little girl I wanted to be a social worker, so this part of my job is a little like that, and I don't mind."*

Comstock Family News:
To Put Each of You Up To Date

(snapshot dated December, 1967)

In Yerba Buena's early history, the questions "How is Yerba Buena doing?" and "How are the Comstocks doing?" meant the same thing. The destinies of the family and the institution were so intimately entwined that anything that influenced one influenced the other. Thus in the December, l967 issue of the Newsletter it was completely appropriate for Marie Comstock to report on her family. She writes:

> **Anita now 29, our eldest, is enrolled as a pre-medical student at La Sierra College. Her burning desire to become a Medical Missionary doctor is becoming a reality made possible by many interesting Providences; living in the village, batching, working, along with financial help from a very dear friend is making her education possible.**
>
> **Burton 28, wife Nela 26, with children Ruben 7, Boby 6, and Nancy 4 are helping carry the load here at Yerba Buena. Nela although busy with her home has charge of our little store or Tienda and is now assisting with deliveries and teaching the O. B. class part time. Burton, our only son, a third-generation "self-supporting" missionary (Marie's father was a self-supporting missionary in Honduras in the first decade of this century), is filling a very important place in the work here at Yerba Buena. He has charge of all the working men, is a member of the construction committee, work committee, and general operating committee. Even though he has had no engineering training he drew up the complete plans for the reinforced rock and concrete dam -- 22 feet high, 75 feet long, l2 feet thick at the base and 3 feet wide at the crest. This dam is curved to take the stress of the water against the dam. The reservoir above the dam has a capacity of one and one quarter million gallons. Burton supervised the construction of this dam using unskilled, local labor. Present plans are to build several more dams to give Yerba Buena ample water and enough for hydro-electric power part of the year.**
>
> **Ray still has to spend too much time in Mexico City on legal business. Working in a foreign country presents many problems not encountered in the United States of America. Marie as mother of 34 students, carrying office work, the responsibility of Ray's work in his frequent absences, operating the home and enjoying being grandmother has no time yet for knitting.**

NUEVO LIMAR

(recent series of snapshots collected in late February)

SATURDAY NIGHT

For a couple of weeks we've been planning this tooth-pulling/ear-washing/giving-lectures-on-healthful-living trip north into the hot Chiapas lowlands. Pastor Bercián, who operates the hospital's dental office, several nurses and myself have been scheduled to go. Don David, an employee at Yerba Buena, has volunteered to take us there in his four-wheel-drive. The first three or four hours will be on fairly decent roads, but the last thirty kilometers will be so rough that probably we'll have to walk. For days the excitement about going into such isolated territory has been growing in the nurses and me.

However, on Saturday night before the Sunday morning departure, the whole projected trip seems to collapse before our eyes. Don David now says that it's been raining too much and he doesn't want to take us. When the Pastor then asks Nela for permission to use the blue truck, Nela refuses, saying that the truck isn't properly licensed for driving outside the state of Chiapas. This remark stuns us all, for we all know that the truck is fully licensed and travels outside Chiapas frequently. Don Alfonso, Yerba Buena's chauffeur, is the most surprised, for he frequently drives the truck outside of Chiapas. For some reason Nela doesn't want us to go on the tour, but she won't give her reason. I'm disappointed to see this kind of lack of communication and cooperation at Yerba Buena. Saturday night, we all go to bed a little discouraged.

SUNDAY

Early Sunday morning I visit the Pastor's house and suggest that he and I make the trip alone, and if the clinic won't pay the expenses, I'll pay them myself. The Pastor says he'll think about the idea, and talk to Nela again. A few minutes later he comes to my room and tells me to get my backpack ready for making the trip. Within fifteen minutes we're flagging down a bus heading north. In my backpack is all the medical equipment and medicine. No nurses come with us. Apparently the Pastor instead of asking if we could go simply informed Nela of our plans.

Though our destination, Nuevo Limar, is in Chiapas, to get there by bus we must first go north for about three and a half hours to Villahermosa, in the state of Tabasco, and then east for about an hour to Macuspana. At the station in Macuspana as we're walking toward the ticket counter I spot the bus to Salto de

Agua, the next stop-over during our journey, pulling out of the parking lot. Salto de Agua is the closest town to Nuevo Limar with bus service, and only one bus a day goes there. Five seconds later and we'd have missed this bus, and had to stay overnight in Macuspana. Our luck in making this connection is remarkable. By the way, the Pastor now insists that we go "halvers" on this trip's expenses. This a wonderful gesture, for he is even poorer than I.

At dusk our bus pulls into Salto de Agua, in the steamy lowlands of northern Chiapas only about thirty miles northeast of the famous ruins of Palenque, where Pastor Asunción Velázques and his family are expecting us. Pastor Velázques is in charge of all the Adventist temples in this area. He plans to accompany us to Nuevo Limar tomorrow morning.

There's a road between Salto de Agua and Nuevo Limar, he says, but it's so bad that in places it's almost impassable. On a rather undependable basis one truck a day carries passengers to Nuevo Limar, but many times it must stop to fill mud holes with rocks or tree limbs. Moreover, one-way passage costs l5,000 pesos (about $6.50 U. S.) per person. Pastor Velázques intends to go by truck and he supposes that we shall, too. However, Pastor Bercián and I simply don't have the money for truck-fare. Besides, people are expecting us and we should not depend on an undependable truck. We'll walk the thirty or so kilometers alone...

MONDAY

Half an hour before sunrise, Pastor Bercián and I hike out of Salto de Agua. We cannot take our eyes off the brilliant, scintillating stars. The pre-dawn air, moist but warm, is suffused with the odors of coffee-flower blossoms, corn tortillas being warmed over wood fires ignited with kerosine, and brewing coffee.

By l0:00 AM the temperature has risen into the 80's and sometimes the road is nothing but interconnected mud-holes. Wild plants and animals here are completely different from those found in Yerba Buena's cool, piny woods. Here parrots, oropendolas and brown jays punctuate the morning's air with raucous calls and from the shadows deep inside thickets comes the mysterious whistle of the tinamou. Bird-of-paradise plants with gorgeously red and yellow blossoms grow as weeds along the trail. Like thirty-foot- high, leafless redbud trees, cocuite trees stand absolutely filled with pink blossoms, and every couple of minutes we step across streaming lines of large, black leaf-cutter ants (All ants traveling in one direction carrying nothing, but all those heading the other carry above their backs green scraps of leaf, about the size and shape of a fingernail. They'll carry these cut-out bits of tree-leaves into underground chambers and eventually feed on the fungus that grows on the leaves.) About thirty feet up a tree a single, foot-tall blossom of Aristolochia or Dutchman's pipe vine dangles from a limb. The Pastor leaps quickly to one side when in the roadside weeds he spots a deadly coral snake. Later when we see a seven-foot long mata ratón (in English, "rat-killer"), with its alternating bands of yellow and black, cold chills run up my spine,

though I know it to be harmless. By noon it becomes too hot and I've grown too exhausted to pay much attention to flora and fauna. Carrying the weight of my backpack stuffed with heavy tooth-extracting equipment, my shoulder muscles burn, and sweat drips off my elbows. It's a very humid 92°.

At l:30 PM we arrive in Nuevo Limar. Looking at us from inside their huts, people view us with profound uncertainty. Mostly they look at me. Children and young women flee us and no one speaks unless we speak first, and their greeting is coldly mechanical and full of mistrust. Here people speak neither Spanish nor the Tzotzil we usually hear around Yerba Buena. They speak Chol, which is another member of the Maya family of languages.

At the hut of the Adventist deacon expecting us, no one is at home. For twenty minutes we stand resting in the hut's shade wondering what to do. Eventually a child peeps around the hut's corner. The Pastor asks the child to go look for the deacon. In another twenty minutes the man arrives carrying a machete, his sweat-stained clothes covered with ants that have dropped onto him from the bushes as he passed by. He's been working in his coffee plantation.

"We sure are thirsty," the Pastor says after greetings are exchanged.

"*Síííííí*... " the deacon smiles.

"I'll bet that those coconuts are just full of cool water," the Pastor hints.

"*Síííííí*... " the deacon admits, still smiling sheepishly.

Once the Pastor understands that the deacon is unaccustomed to visitors of our kind and that he is absolutely at a loss as to how to handle us, there is nothing left to do but to smile and give an order:

"Go get us four coconuts and prepare them for us to drink," the Pastor gently says. The deacon seems relieved to be told what to do, and now he serves us with the greatest of respect.

We are conducted to the town's Adventist temple, situated atop a tall hill at the edge of town. It's about forty feet long, twenty feet wide and built atop a concrete floor. Beneath the tin roof the rafters are hung with pastel red, green, yellow and blue strips of crepe paper. One long wall is constructed of massive wooden boards and the other is of arm-thick, debarked tree-trunks. On each wall hang two small platforms for holding kerosine lanterns. Wooden boards laid atop poles serve as seats for the congregation. Seeing this, I muse to myself that the temple's builders must have been overly optimistic to have expected that someday in this town of about 3000 hut-dwelling Chol Indians such a spacious building might be filled with Adventist worshipers.

As soon as we arrive we move the table serving as a podium outside the temple, and place our dental instruments on it. As we arrange things, a young man climbs high into a tree next to the church, drops a rope, and pulls up a large speaker. As he points the speaker in one direction and then another, a second man inside the church, using a battery-operated amplifier, announces to Nuevo Limar, in the Chol language, that we have arrived.

We work until dusk, pulling about twenty-five teeth from fifteen people. Pastor Bercián does the cutting and tugging while I take names, keep instruments sterilized, keep the syringes filled with xylocane, and hold heads during the most difficult extractions. Both of us work hard, continually surrounded by dozens of close-pressing, curious onlookers.

I'm astonished as I take the people's names. In Mexico a person's middle name is the same as the family name of the individual's father. The person's last name is the family name of the mother. If a man bears the name of José Sánchez Fernández, he should be referred to as Señor Sánchez, not Señor Fernández. These people's names suggest that a great deal of intermarrying among the members of a few families has taken place. Here are the two last names of each of the fifteen patients we receive on our first afternoon of work:

- **Pérez Martínez**
- **Hernández Vásque**
- **Martínez Ramírez**
- **Pérez López**
- **Tórrez López**
- **Pérez Hernández**
- **Martínez Martínez**
- **Ramírez Pérez**
- **Díaz Rivérez**
- **Hernández Vásquez**
- **Martínez Martínez**
- **Gómez Ramírez**
- **Hernández López**
- **Pérez Vásquez**
- **Hernández López**

Seeing many young girls carrying babies on their backs, the Pastor asks at what age Chol women marry. Usually between eleven and fourteen, is the reply; the men marry between fourteen and sixteen.

TUESDAY

Here is how we pull teeth: The Indians tell us which tooth or teeth they want extracted. About half speak enough Spanish for us to understand, but always someone is around to interpret. Xylocane with *epinefrina* is injected into the gums about one quarter of an inch below the gum/tooth line, on both the inner and outer side of the roots. If two adjoining teeth are to be pulled, the shots are given between the roots. Because xylocane is such precious stuff, the Pastor tries to avoid using more than half an ampule on any one patient. Usually when the shot is given a conspicuous white bubble or blister forms beneath the gum's epidermis, just above the needle's point. The first such blisters I saw, I felt sure

they would burst, but they never did. However, sometimes as the shot is being administered the xylocane does spurt from holes in the gums, which usually have been formed by abscesses.

Crowns of most teeth are so decayed that simply grasping the teeth with instruments and twisting and pulling them out -- the basic procedure -- is impossible. The rotten tooth would break if that were tried, and then the more painful process of gouging out fragments one piece at a time would become necessary. Thus usually the Pastor begins his extraction with an instrument looking like an ice-pick. He gouges it between the teeth, trying to loosen the one to be removed and to expose enough of its base to get a good hold on it with his pincers. If the tooth is up front (canine, incisor or premolar) and thus bears only one root, then the main extraction movement is circular -- the tooth is twisted out. If the tooth is a back one, a molar, with more than one root, it must be wriggled back and forth along an imaginary line originating in the mouth's center. Once it's loose, it's simply pulled out.

Once the tooth and all fragments are removed, sterile cotton is soaked with merthiolate and packed tightly into the cavity -- all the way to the nerve-rich bottom. Wherever two or more teeth in a row have been removed, or wherever it's judged that serious bleeding might continue after the patient leaves, the Pastor places a wad of cotton over the wound and tells the patient to hold it there for about an hour.

And that's it. The open, bloody socket remaining after the tooth is pulled is not sewed up, so presumably a significant number of those holes will accumulate food and become infected. I only guess that somebody along the line has decided that this is the "compromise treatment" for those people who otherwise would receive no treatment at all, and probably will not pay anything for the the services provided to them. (We tell patients that we'll gladly accept any money they have to offer, but that if they are unable to pay, they need not pay anything. During our stay at Nuevo Limar, no money is taken in.)

Working next to the temple is not unpleasant. Big trees provide wonderful shade and always a fresh breeze blows around us. However, so many spectators crowd around us as we work that not much breeze gets to the patient and Pastor Bercián. Since I'm over a head taller than everyone else, however, I enjoy the breeze. Again and again we plead for people to stand back and give us room, but after we move them back, within less than a minute they're back, gazing curiously -- or doubtfully if they are scheduled for extractions -- into the bloody maw before them. Everyone cracks jokes and gives a hand translating Chol. When a leaf falls into a patient's bloody mouth, everyone laughs hysterically, including the patient. Though these people must understand the realities of life, death, poverty, pain and desperation far better than the average gringo, to me something about them seems adolescent or even child-like. It's simply impossible

to get upset with them as they disobey our requests that they stand back.

I'm told that I'm the first gringo ever to visit Nuevo Limar, though some years ago a tall one like me came to a village not far away, to live for several months. His name was Adán, they say (probably Adam), and he insisted on working with the men in their fields, and riding horses with them on hunting trips. He learned which plants are good for what, and he became able to speak Chol very well. Once Adán's story is told, one man who seems a bit more cosmopolitan than the others approaches me and with a knowing smile says, "Adán was an anthropologist, you know... " It's amusing thinking that now Adán the anthropologist has himself become part of these people's oral history. Maybe in a few years they'll also be passing along stories to their children about the tall gringo who one day came pulling teeth.

Yesterday afternoon Pastor Velázquez was supposed to arrive from Salto de Agua, but he did not. Apparently the undependable truck chose not to run that day.

In the evening Pastor Bercián offers a church sermon. I am astounded when over a hundred worshipers appear, quite filling the temple, the men mostly sitting on one side and the women and young children sitting on the other. Many come carrying both a Bible and a flashlight, for Nuevo Limar is not served with electricity. The Pastor lectures for about an hour on washing hands before eating, keeping pigs, dogs, chickens and turkeys out of the hut, and such. Moreover, to back up the points he makes, somehow he's able to find verses in the Bible. Each time he mentions a verse (the temple's regular preacher stands beside him translating every word into Chol) those with Bibles and flashlights tuck the flashlight between a shoulder and their cheek and in the Bible held before them search out the verse mentioned, just to see for themselves.

WEDNESDAY

As on each morning during our stay, a little after dawn the Pastor and I descend to the thatched-roofed hut of the family that during our stay has provided us with meals. The hut's walls are made of poles tied together with vines and fibrous tree bark and the floor is dirt. No chimney exists for the perpetually burning fire, so smoke simply filters through the thatch, leaving it and its supporting poles with the appearance of having been painted black and then covered with several layers of varnish. This morning, as usual, we're provided with freshly made ten-inch-wide tortillas (much larger than the average Mexican kind), bowls of black beans, and piping hot chayote (an egg-shaped, greenish, semi-prickly squash growing more or less wild in people's corn fields; it's one of the most important elements of Indian meals all through tropical Mexico). I eat everything with gusto. But early in the meal Pastor Bercián discovers a champion-sized cockroach floating in his beans, after which he cannot rekindle his appetite. So as to not embarrass our host, he flicks the soggy insect onto the ground beneath the table.

As if waiting for such an eventuality a large red hen with a featherless neck happens to be standing exactly there. Instantly she snatches up the prize and runs outside.

As we are leaving Nuevo Limar, hoping to reach Yerba Buena late in the afternoon, we are stopped by a stranger saying that the night before Pastor Velázquez arrived in the town of Limar Viejo about an hour and a half away, and that we are expected there to pull more teeth. Immediately we abandon our plans and turn toward our friend.

Limar Viejo is even more isolated than Nuevo Limar, but demographically it's very similar -- 3000 Chol-speakers. Here the temple is only about thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide. As soon as we arrive we set up beneath an acacia tree behind the temple and a deacon announces our presence on the battery-operated community loudspeaker.

Quickly it becomes apparent that in this town for some reason we were not expected. Most adults now are too busy to visit us -- the men in their coffee plantations and the women in their huts. We wait for two hours and no one comes. Then it's siesta time, so we take a meal with a deacon and return beneath the acacia to wait. Around four in the afternoon the first patients arrive. By night, we pull about twenty teeth. In Nuevo Limar, once the people had found out who we were, they were very open and friendly with us but here people are much more reserved. Moreover, in Nuevo Limar the Indians seemed to consider our service to be a friendly gesture being offered by "Adventists brothers," so they did not pay. Here, nearly everyone pays, even if it's only a few pesos, amounting to less than a U. S. cent.

In the evening another meeting is held; but this time only about fifteen worshipers show up. Once again the Pastor preaches mostly about "clean living," backing up his assertions with quotations from Scripture. When at the sermon's end he asks if anyone has any questions, a man in his fifties raises his hand and says,

"All these things you talk about -- washing our hands, keeping our animals out of our homes, the eating of plants instead of so much pork -- these ideas are very different from what we are used to. I'm not sure I understand much of what you say. Please, can't you stay a little longer to show us what you mean?"

A pained look comes into the Pastor's face as he explains that tomorrow we absolutely must return to Yerba Buena. It's too bad the nurses had been unable to come with us as planned, for part of their job on such tours always is to give talks on healthy living.

In the night the half-full moon lies straight above us. While the worshipers sing psalms I step outside to walk around and soak up the night's feelings. Carrying a microcasette recorder in my pocket, I record what I see and feel. Here are the

very words I speak into the recorder as I stand in the middle of the moonlit dirt street before the church:

> *"People singing inside the temple, no musical instruments, the songs simple and repetitive... Katydids calling from shadowy bushes... Visible in the moonlight, pale woodsmoke filtering through cracks in the pole walls of the hut next door... Lightning bugs flashing in a banana grove next door... Silhouettes of palm trees on the horizon... Horses standing tied outside the church.... In moonlight, the cumulus clouds above us are like dark blue bunches of cotton surrounded by black sky and twinkling stars.... Up and down the street, inside every hut, a candle or kerosine lantern is burning, an orange glow visible through the chinks between wall-poles... "*

THURSDAY

At 3:l5 AM we awaken and begin packing. By 3:50 Pastor Bercián and I, guided by a flashlight, are hiking down the dirt road toward Salto de Agua, picking our way past immense mud holes, hoping to arrive in Salto de Agua in time to catch the 11:00 AM train to Pichucalco, for the bus to Macuspana will leave before we can get there. We need to return to Yerba Buena tonight because the Pastor has dental appointments scheduled for tomorrow morning. Some of the more wise-looking individuals we speak to insist that here trains come and go according to no discernable schedule. One just has to sit and wait for them, sometimes for a day or more. Though my past experience with Mexican trains causes me to suspect that this is the truth, we feel compelled to at least hope for an "11:00 o'clock miracle." So now with the moon already set and the stars twinkling almost violently, and the sweet odor of coffee-blossoms hanging heavily in the moist air, we struggle northward.

We enter Salto de Agua at about l0:50 AM. I'm limping badly because of a severe blister on a big toe. My back muscles are on fire and seldom in my life have I been so thirsty. For a long time the Pastor and I sit on the train station's cool concrete benches and I do believe that if the train had arrived at eleven o'clock we wouldn't have been able to climb onto it.

If it's to be believed that the eleven o'clock arrival represents an event in a real timetable someplace (certainly not posted in the station), then our train arrives thirteen hours late. It comes at midnight. During the afternoon and early eveing I'm able to get a little sleep, but the Pastor cannot.

FRIDAY

From midnight to about 2:30 AM we ride through muggy, foggy lowlands, standing most of the way because all the seats are taken. The front half of the

car into which we are herded reeks of urine and the floor is slippery with it. Each time the rain starts or stops, long, straight tears of urine stream from one end of the car to the other. The surly conductor tells me to go stand beside the bathroom because my towering above him as he sits doing nothing bothers him. I refuse because of the odor and he curses me profanely. I want to slap him but fortunately the magnanimous influence of the Pastor saves me.

The train station at Pichucalco lies three miles from town. At 3:00 AM a van comes to pick up passengers wishing to be carried there. Though the Pastor and I are first in line, we are not aggressive enough to prevent the others from pushing us aside and cramming the van so full that we cannot enter. So, we walk. I can hardly believe that a single blistered foot can hurt so much.

We limp into the bus station at 4:l5. The first bus heading up the slopes leaves at 7:00 AM. I get a little sleep, but the Pastor cannot.

We arrive at Yerba Buena at l0:00 AM. I head for my bungalow to take a nap (sleeping right through lunch). The Pastor goes home for a bath, so that he may be clean when he returns to take care of the patients waiting in his office.

What a tough, wonderful little guy this Pastor Bercián is.

FOUR *GRINGOS*
AND A SORE TOE

(recent snapshot)

Returning from the exhausting tooth-pulling trip to Nuevo Limar, I sleep through lunch, so by dusk I'm pretty hungry. When finally I descend for supper with the student nurses, parked beside the Casa Grande I find a shiny Datsun pickup equipped with a Rockwood camper and a license plate from McMinn County, Tennessee.

"Are some *gringos* visiting us?" I ask Doña Lilia. She smiles broadly but before she can answer around the corner come Eddy and Mae Gober and Beth and C. D. Carter, speaking English with an accent that sets very

comfortably with my Kentuckian ears. They're all in their forties and fifties.

"For years C. D. and I operated a small clinic in Progresso, Belize," explains Beth. "We're heading back there now for a brief visit, and as we travel we drop in on places like Yerba Buena, just to see how things are going, and to offer any help we can. C.D. and Eddy are carpenters. I'm an anesthesiologist, and both Mae and I are willing to do anything from wash dishes to help during operations. Just so we're kept busy... "

As they talk, I catch myself staring at them, for they are so different from the Mexicans around whom I've been these last weeks. My new friends seem so large and pale -- somehow succulent, like turgid, glossy-white, white radishes. And though they behave perfectly respectfully and in a properly restrained manner, with my Mexicanized eyes, my friends seem to speak unreasonably loudly, to move about too aggressively, and to have on their faces expressions that are too self-assured. Moreover, this English now filling the Casa Grande sounds explosive and almost too full of fricatives and stops -- not at all like musical, rhythmic Spanish. Apparently I'm getting a hint of how Mexicans see us. What a strange thing is this moving in and out of different cultures...

It's a chilly, drizzly day so we linger around the fireplace. Many words are spoken about diseases and the natural cures available for them. My friends seem especially fond of charcoal.

"For diarrhea, medicine overdoses... anything for which poison must be removed from the body, you can take capsules of activated charcoal -- or grind up some yourself, using what's left in the fireplace -- eat it, and it'll clean you out," assures Eddy. "If you have a skin sore or an insect or snake bite, make a paste out of some charcoal powder, slap it over the wound to make a poultice, and it'll draw that poison right out."

Even as my friends speak, a shooting pain emanates from the blistered foot that has bothered me all during the Nuevo Limar trip. Mostly the blister is on a stiff, nerve-damaged toe that doesn't curl properly inside my shoes. Now the toe is grotesquely swollen, bright red, splotched with dark purple, and discharging copious amounts of fluid. I pull off my shoe and sock, and ask if charcoal can help my toe.

Within five minutes Beth has my foot sitting in a tub of water that's so hot I can hardly stand it. After three minutes of that I change to a one-minute, cold foot-bath; then another three minutes of hot water, and a second one- minute cold bath; then the entire cycle is repeated, the third cold bath being the last.

"The hot water opens up capillaries and pores," explains Beth, a tallish, blond woman with short-cropped hair, erect posture and determined-looking face.

"This causes the blood with its white cells, which fight infections, to flood into the infected part. Then the cold water causes the capillaries and pores to close up. As the capillaries shrink, the blood carrying the infection is driven out."

Though they say that ground-up charcoal from the fireplace before us would do fine, now Beth empties two capsules of activated charcoal from the camper's medical chest into a folded patch of gauze. This is wrapped in an absorbent bandage and taped onto my foot.

"Tomorrow morning, repeat the treatment," orders Mae. "Then at night do it again. Do it for three or four days. If it still looks bad then, go up and let Dr. Sánchez see it."

The next morning the toe looks the same, but it feels better. The second morning it looks better, too. The third morning it looks so good that I stop thinking about it. In a week the nail on that toe comes out, root and all, but otherwise it heals nicely.

PIÑA, PINEAPPLE, PIÑA

(snapshot dated July-August, 1971)

The Nortons spent several years at Yerba Buena working at many duties. The following entry by Mrs. Norton appeared in the July/August, l97l issue of the *Newsletter*:

> **For one week during June, canning pineapple was "the thing" here at Yerba Buena. Getting the truck-load of fruit into our bodega (storehouse) was made almost a game. The pineapple was picked up one by one and tossed to the next person in line. He, in turn, passed it on till the last person placed it on the pile.**
>
> **As the pineapples, nearly 3,000 altogether, ripened, the tops were broken off and the fruit washed in large tubs. Next, the pineapples were carefully peeled and cut up into bite-size pieces. You might have thought we were having surgery with one quick look at our girls wearing old surgery gloves to protect their hands from the acid in the fruit. It was, in fact, a major operation!**

Why is that wooden stick being poked down in the jars, you ask? This is to give enough juice to cover the fruit in the jars. No sugar or water is needed for this fruit in its ripe, natural state.

When the jars of fruit are ready for processing, they are placed in the two 50-gallon metal drums, cut in two vertically, which serve as kettles. These drums, each holding 24 2-qt. jars, lay on their sides over a temporary brick fire-box with three walls. Fire is kindled under the drums and the processing starts. It takes considerable wood, smoke in the eyes, and time, to get the water hot and boiling in these large kettles. And then more wood and red-eyes to keep the water boiling. This method is a bit trying but much more economical than using our gas stoves.

Several of the days and nights seemed to blend together as the fruit was canned as it ripened. We are thankful to our industrious students who worked many hours over-time to complete the job. Perhaps next year our proposed cold room will be in service so we can enjoy more fresh pineapple. We hope!....

Yours for more fruit for the Master

SCALPED

(snapshot dated June, 1967)

Sometimes Yerba Buena's patients develop special relationships with the staff. Manuela, whose case was reported by Dr. Butler in the June, l967 issue of the *Newsletter*, was such an individual:

"An emergency for you; is bleeding." Arriving in the clinic, we saw that it was not the anticipated drunk with gunshot or machete wounds, which comprise most of our night work here, but a little Chamula girl with a blood-soaked bandage on her head. Rather than attempt a repair at midnight by a smoky lamp, we put on another bandage to check bleeding for the night.

Next day, l0-year-old Manuela's "Tata" (father) furnished blood for her. The first dressing in the morning revealed all of the scalp gone from the forehead to the neck. Apparently she had come too near a fan of an engine at the Zaragoza oil well. While Manuela, like her "meh," Chamula mother, understood but a few words of Spanish, she surprised us by singing in Spanish with a full, clear voice, "Mi Dios me

ama" (My God Loves Me) as the blood streamed down her face. Later we applied skin grafts and let her wake up as we finished applying the grafts. Again she sang two hymns as dressings were applied, before she was fully awake. This little one has given witness of her Savior by singing many hymns to the other patients.

"ARMED MEN INVADE YERBA BUENA PROPERTY"

(snapshot dated October, 1982)

By l982 the Comstocks are officially in retirement from their work at Yerba Buena. Administration of the institution has been turned over to Nela, their daughter-in-law. The following entry in the September - October, l982 issue of the Newsletter describes a very serious problem for Yerba Buena -- one which has not been resolved to this very day. The entry is written by Nela:

On August 22, l982, approximately one-hundred men, some armed with rifles, others with axes and machetes, invaded the private property of Yerba Buena. They and their surveyor claimed that about 50% of all the Yerba Buena property belonged to them as members of the Ejido of Pueblo Nuevo. (An Ejido in Mexico is a parcel, sometimes thousands of acres, of government owned or formerly privately owned land that has been deeded to a group of people as communal property.)

I talked with the Commissioner of Pueblo Nuevo who was in charge of the group. He answered me in a very uncouth, unchristianlike manner. His manner was repulsive to me, especially since he claimed to be an influential member of the Pueblo Nuevo S.D.A. Church. (E. Note - This Commissioner was later disfellowshipped by the Pueblo Nuevo S.D.A. Church.)

This group also claimed that 50% of the property of Linda Vista S.D.A. Union Academy and Junior College was theirs. They also claimed a large portion of some other private properties adjoining Linda Vista. The owner of one of the properties down in the valley, (a member of a famous, or infamous family of murderers) met this group of invaders at his property line and informed them that he would gladly give some of his property to each one of them, two meters of ground for each one, (enough for a burial plot!). They did not invade his property.

Invaders Planting Beans

(recent snapshot)

On a Sunday afternoon I visit the nature reserve on the slope above Yerba Buena. Crossing the main highway I pass by large, impressive signs bearing maps of hiking trails, brief remarks about the various life-zones of plants and animals to be found in the reserve, and invitations to park and enjoy "your forest." A while back the *Instituto de Historia Natural* in Tuxtla took over administration of this land, though it still belongs to Yerba Buena.

To reach the reserve's upper elevations where the most interesting plants and animals are found a fairly steep slope must be climbed. As I begin my ascent up the zigzagging trail, I'm astonished to find that a barbed-wire fence has been erected running straight up and down the slope, cutting across every zig and zag in the path. Each time you zig or zag, about twenty feet up the path you have to cross the fence.

This fence is the invaders' doings. Yerba Buena's water supply comes from the cloud forest above, and the pipes carrying the water are laid beneath the soil over which the zigzagging trail climbs. The invaders have placed their fence so that the water pipes are just inside "their" land.

Eventually I reach a large field halfway up the slope. Once Yerba Buena cultivated a garden here, but now on the big roadside maps this field is designated as a "Zone of Reforestation." Nevertheless, today I find five horses of invaders who have ridden in from Pueblo Nuevo to work on their claims. I approach one plot of black beans planted about a month ago. I speak politely to the two men standing there looking at me. They glare at me coldly and show little interest in talking.

Farther upslope I find a man clearing weeds with his machete. When he sees me his eyes open wide. He walks up to me and without my asking a single question loudly gives me his whole name and his address, tells me how to find his house in Pueblo Nuevo, and informs me who his brothers are, who also claim land here. Then he launches into a long description of his plans to put a field of beans here, and later to grow corn.

Obviously the man is challenging me. "If you people at Yerba Buena want to try to get us off this land," his demeanor is saying, "then you just try it. We're resolved to fight... "

I continue climbing into the cloud forest, find a limestone rock and sit on it. At this

elevation the valley toward the southwest spreads out like a view from an airplane window. Some of highest, farthermost peaks must constitute the Continental Divide a hundred miles away. In several places thick clouds of white smoke rise where Indians burn off slopes, preparing to plant corn and beans. This is slash-and-burn agriculture, exactly as the tropical-ecology books describe it. Burn off an area, plant crops for two or three years, until the weeds and insects get too bad, then simply shift to another part of the slope, hack the trees down and burn, and start the cycle over again.

Only small patches of forest remain in the landscape before me. "Patches" is a good word, because from here the land looks poor and patched-up, like a Kentucky mountaineer's patchwork quilt that after many years of use now is thin, faded and about to fall apart.

This reserve in which I sit is one of the very few semi-unspoiled spots left in this entire mountain range. Clearly, however, it will not be here for long, despite the best intentions of those who should have the wherewithal to protect it, but do not.

Plants & Animals of RESERVA YERBA BUENA

(recent snapshot)

Among the most conspicuous trees in the forests around Yerba Buena are a tall, handsome species of pine and a smallish oak with leaves somewhat like our North American chestnut oaks. Maybe the most interesting feature of the forest is that three important tree species also are common trees in the deciduous forests of the eastern U. S. -- the very same species. **Sweetgum, blackgum**, and the **American hornbeam** are common here. These are relict populations from Ice Age times, when northern forests were shifted far to the south. When the ice withdrew, some of the northern species remained in the tropics simply by moving into the higher, colder elevations. The chart below shows temperature tendencies according to data collected over a year by Fred Adams of Colegio Linda Vista in the valley just below Yerba Buena.

Several dwarf and spiny species of palm lend the forest an exotic quality. Also there are several "strangler fig trees," which start out as vines but with time grow over their host tree and eventually "strangle" it, out-competing it for nutrients and

sunlight, finally becoming very large, free-standing trees themselves. Branches of old trees often are festooned with lush, green gardens of orchid, bromeliad, fern and moss.

In l986, England's University of East Anglia sponsored a graduate-student project resulting in several weeks of biological studies being conducted in Reserva Yerba Buena. Their findings were published in a report entitled *University of East Anglia Mexican Rainforest Expedition l986*. (I cannot explain their use of the word "Rainforest" in the title, for elsewhere in the publication they use the proper designation, which is "cloud forest.") The accompanying rainfall graph is based on data collected intermittently over several years by Fred Adams.

Among mammals seen in the reserve and mentioned in the report were several species familiar to any U. S. nature- lover -- **opossums, raccoons, whitetail deer, armadillos, hognose skunks, gray foxes, longtail weasels** and **Eastern cottontails**. But also there were **brocket deer** (a pygmy species), **peccaries** (wild hogs), **coatis** (like a raccoon but with a very long, slender snout and tail), and **kinkajous** (a little like a monkey with a long, prehensile tail).

Only three kinds of lizard and six kinds of snake were found. One reason for this limited number probably was that the eruption of Chichonal in l982 left about six inches of ash blanketing the entire reserve, which must have been devastating for small, ground-dwelling animals.

However, a rainbow of birds survive in the reserve. The researchers spotted l04 species. Several species are migrants -- birds that breed in North America but overwinter in the tropics -- and would be familiar to most U. S. birdwatchers. The **black and white warbler, worm-eating warbler, blue-winged warbler, yellow-throated warbler** and **Louisiana waterthrush**, for instance, are birds that I frequently see in Kentucky. Of course, many other species were more "exotic." The **white-faced quail-dove** is a very secretive specialist of cloud forest undergrowth found only from southern Mexico to northern Nicaragua; the **black penelopina** is like a black, slender wild turkey; the **blue- throated motmot** is a long-tailed blue and green bird unlike anything we have in the U. S.; the **blue-crowned chlorophonia, sparkling-tailed hummingbird, ruddy foliage-gleaner, spotted nightingale thrush, rufous-browed peppershrike, black-headed siskin**... these are all birds that to a U. S. birdwatcher are exotic and spectacular. Once **quetzals**, perhaps the most spectacular of all Latin American birds -- the bird that supplied tail-feathers for the great Aztec kings' headdresses -- were common here. However, now they seem to have been completely exterminated in this area. Burton Comstock killed and stuffed a few of them, a couple dusty specimens of which still are mounted on the walls of Nela's house.

"BOILING OIL"

(snapshot dated August, 1966)

Virginia Butler, Dr. Maurice Butler's wife, must be one of the most lively, good-humored folks ever to pass through Yerba Buena. Frequently she wrote interesting features for the *Newsletter*. Here is her contribution to the August, l966 issue, which appeared under the title "Rx: BOILING OIL, POURED OVER AREA; DRINK ALL OF A BOTTLE OF BALSAM; TAKE ALL OF A BOTTLE OF CASTOR OIL -- A LITTLE HELP FROM GRANNY MIDWIFE... ":

"She is ready to deliver? Yes, I'll be right down."

Upon entering the delivery room: "But Concha, what happened?"

"I don't know, Señora, but she appears to be terribly burned."

The perineum was one mass of huge blisters -- they stood up from the body a full inch in depth. They extended from front to back. The patient was apparently suffering, but not in the degree one would imagine for the extent of the burn. She was fully conscious and cooperative. Within a short time, but not without some difficulty, the baby arrived -- alive, to our surprise.

After mother and baby were settled in their room we asked some questions. "What happened before you came here?" "Oh, the 'abuelita' (granny midwife) tried to help me, but nothing seemed to do any good." "What did she do?" "She made me drink a bottle full of Balsam." (This is a liquid oil they use to anoint the body -- is never to be taken internally!) "What else did you take?" "They gave me Castor Oil. Still the baby wouldn't come. I've been in labor three days!" "But what caused all those terrible burns you have with such swelling? What did they do to you?" "They poured hot oil over me. I don't know why." "Is that all they did?" "No, they did something inside, too -- I don't know what. And they charged us $600.00 too." This husband probably earns 6 or 7 pesos a day! We were sure this poor abused woman would have a severe infection -- but strange to say, she developed hardly any fever, and within 5 or 6 days was ready to go home. The baby did fine and appeared to be normal in spite of the fact that the mother was apparently somewhat below par.

The Devil in These Hills

(recent snapshot)

On Saturday afternoon Pastor Bercián and I take a walk to Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacan, just to work off an especially good noontime meal. As we return, walking along the road, we meet two men who want to talk.

"Pastor, now it's five," says one of the men, and the Pastor seems to understand. "It goes from one to the other. You work with one and then the voice says, 'Well, I'll just go to the next one.' And the convulsions and foaming of the mouth keep on... "

The man is talking about the family of a man called Lorenzo. Last Friday Lorenzo visited Pastor Nicolás in Pueblo Nuevo, saying that three of his children were convulsing and foaming at their mouths. The problem sounded so serious that Don Nicolás went to Yerba Buena for consultations with Pastor Bercián. Not long ago Pastor Bercián had seen a convulsion and mouth-foaming case in which intestinal worms had been the problem. Anti-worm medicine had been given and a huge ball of more than 700 worms had been passed, and the problem had been overcome. Thus Pastor Bercián's first suggestion had been that on Sunday morning the children should visit Dr. Sánchez to get some worm medicine. But now the situation seems to be more complex and dangerous than earlier believed.

"And those children, they use words that they couldn't possibly know," continues the man. "They're all between ten and five years old, you know, but they talk like adults. And they say, 'I'm not going to leave here,' and 'Don't throw me out of this house, because I like this place.' Moreover, sometimes their voices are not their own... "

"Has anything happened that might explain all this?" asks the Pastor, who now looks very concerned.

"A few weeks ago Don Lorenzo's granddaughter got sick and since she didn't have the money to see a doctor she went to see a spiritualist," confides the man in a low voice. "That spiritualist had the granddaughter do all kinds of stuff. In Don Lorenzo's house they burned copal, lizards and snakes, and they killed a black chicken and buried its head in the floor of Don Lorenzo's house."

The Pastor suggests to the man that the family must disinter the black chicken's head, burn it some place away from the house, begin praying to God that the evil influences will go away, and fast until things are back to normal. The man acts

grateful for the advice, and we part.

Later Pastor Bercián tells me that around here this kind of phenomenon is not uncommon. However, down at Colegio Linda Vista lately they've been seeing more cases of "demonic possession" than normal. The Pastor explains:

"One student started playing with a ouija board, which is an instrument of the devil. Another student got into contact with a spiritualist. A third student was doing poorly in his studies, so he made a pact with the Devil that if the Devil would help him he'd do the Devil's work. So the student began making good grades, but when he wanted to be free, the Devil wouldn't leave. The poor student became tormented and would scream and throw his arms about and curse. And when someone asked the Devil inside the student what he wanted, that voice answered, 'I want all the students to leave this place.' Some other students, maybe they just got curious, and became trapped. In the end, six students had to leave school, and some still were not freed."

CHICHONAL ERUPTS

(snapshot dated March 28, 1982)

Back in l902 or l903, and then again in the 70's, a little smoke escaped from the volcano called Chichonal. In March of l982, once again reports were filtering in to Yerba Buena that Chichonal was smoking. However, the volcano lay twenty-miles to the northwest, so no one thought much about it. On Sunday evening, March 28, Yerba Buena's inhabitants were taking part in the second of eight evenings of special church service. Pastor Bercián was present during the services. Here is his story, translated from Spanish, of what happened then:

"At three or four in the afternoon we saw this huge cloud toward the northwest, and certain rumors began floating around that the volcano had erupted. Patients from Pichucalco had been telling us about earthquakes they'd been feeling. So we had our services that night and went to bed thinking about the volcano, but not worrying too much about it. But around midnight we began hearing something falling on the tin roofs, like rain. It was very fine ash. We went outside and looked, and lightning was coming out of the big cloud above the volcano. Well, I'm not sure if it was lightening. Maybe it was the molten lava shooting into the sky and falling back. It made a sound like thunder, but instead of the light

being white, as in a storm, it was red."

"On Monday morning when we left our house, everything had a thin covering of white ash. During our 7:00 AM worship service we began seeing hundreds of people from below fleeing the volcano in trucks, mostly heading for Tuxtla, but some coming here. When we finished services that morning people told us that it was a bad eruption and that lots of people were burned and buried in the ash. So we got together and decided to go below to help, to offer first aid. There were three men beside myself and three nurses who went.

So we went to Pichucalco. Hundreds of burn victims from near the volcano were gathered together at the Municipal Building. Chiapas's governor already had flown in, and soldiers had come to help. We told them that we'd come to offer first aid so they let us take the road that carried us right to the volcano's base. The sand and ash was over two feet deep and it was still hot; we passed many people fleeing toward Pichucalco, carrying nothing but their money. They were covered with burns and wounds from the falling molten rocks. Everywhere there were dead birds and in some places people and animals were buried under the sand. You could smell burned things and the odor of sulfur. We passed some villages where everything had been buried beneath sand. Now there was simply nothing there to indicate that once people had lived there. We were in the big gravel-hauling truck but even it hardly could push through the deep sand. At that moment, however, the sand had stopped falling."

"Climbing up a hill, we found some old people and their children, and they were all burned very badly. We brought them down and put them in the truck. One old woman died on the way back to Pichucalco and just when we arrived at the hospital in Pichucalco another died. The others we left at the hospital, and I don't know whether they lived or not. Now the officials refused to let us go back for more wounded because they were afraid of another eruption. Well, when we were going in, the thought that we might ourselves get caught in a second eruption simply never had occurred to me! At about ll:00 PM we returned to Yerba Buena."

"Here we continued our eight days of prayer. Then the next Saturday, at about 6:30, the volcano erupted again. Ash and sand from the first eruption fell to our north; we only got a little of it here. But this time the wind carried ash and sand here. It was heavy sand, too. That night we got all the student nurses together and spent the whole night in the Casa Grande praying, asking the protection of God. Some people cried, others just sat and worried, and some of the children slept. When we got up on Sunday morning, we didn't see any sun. At midday it was like midnight -- completely dark. My son Hans was coughing bad. We talked it over and decided to evacuate everyone to Tuxtla, including the patients. Only about four workers stayed here, to watch over things. The sand was two or three inches deep. Usually between here and Tuxtla you need about three hours but with the sand on the road it took about seven. We had to stay away for three or

four weeks."

"When we left, everything was white -- sad, the color of death. Many people thought that this whole area would never return to normal. People were thinking about simply abandoning their land, and going someplace else to restart their lives. But other people said that the sand would fertilize the land and that soon there'd be good harvests here better than anyone ever had seen. In many places houses collapsed because of the sand's weight on the roof. At Yerba Buena we shoveled off the sand as it fell, so that didn't happen. After about a week, a rainstorm came and washed the whiteness off the trees. Curiously, the trees didn't seem to be hurt much."

"The eruption didn't change my concept of God, but it did cause me to think a great deal about how God has tremendous forces there inside the earth. Scripture tells us that once the earth suffered a great flood. Now it awaits another flood, but this time it will be a flood of fire. Before the arrival of Christ, the whole earth will stagger like a drunkard and it'll rain fire and sulfur in order to purify the earth. The inspired books speak of God's forces inside the earth waiting for the final day. During the eruptions we thought a great deal about this and meditated on the meaning of it all."

"Many of our Catholic neighbors thought that this was the end of the world that we Adventists had been talking about, and many of them fled into the Adventist temples, and some even asked to be baptized into our church. But most of them, after the eruptions stopped, went back to the way they were before."

DR. SÁNCHEZ
TALKS ABOUT MEDICINE

(recent snapshot)

At Yerba Buena Dr. Sánchez practices medicine without the benefit of many tools that doctors in North America take for granted. No facilities exist for counting white blood cells for instance. An old X-ray machine has been installed but it doesn't work, since the voltage here is too low and irregular to provide consistently good plates. Moreover, many of the patients come here expecting black magic to be neutralized, not to benefit from Western medicine. When one afternoon I ask Dr. Sánchez to expound on how his philosophy on medicine has evolved

through the years, I have no idea what kind of response to expect. I translate his repies:

> *"In medical school usually they try to instill self-confidence into the students. Well, this is correct. However, sometimes this desirable self- confidence develops into a kind of arrogance. And that's not good, especially when the doctor must deal with other human beings. The patient can interpret the doctor's prideful manner as scorn for the sick person. Then the patient withdraws from the doctor, isn't as open about what's bothering him or her as is necessary for a good diagnosis, and the patient loses confidence in the doctor. On the other hand, if the doctor approaches the patient as a kind of friend, as someone who doesn't try to act as if he knows it all, then the doctor can plant in the patient's mind ideas and knowledge that will help the patient deal with his or her own problem, and thus help the healing process along."*
>
> *"Moreover, in medical schools they tend to teach that their healing techniques represent the one-and-only, the authentic, manner of treatment. Well, part of this approach is correct. For instance, they teach the application of the scientific approach when one is confronted with a difficult problem, and this is how it must be. But when the doctor goes afield, many situations are encountered to which university training doesn't apply. What the doctor must do is to listen to the patient carefully and then, according to the principles of what was learned in the university, design the treatment around the resources that happen to be at hand. Injections, tablets, pills -- these are fine. But the doctor mustn't forget to also look to nature. Nature has its own remedies. The doctor must learn to apply these resources correctly; we must learn to prescribe medicinal plants, for instance, with the same precision we use when prescribing aspirin or tetramyacine."*

Having seen that many of Yerba Buena's patients think in terms of their illness having been caused by black magic, I ask how the Doctor handles this.

> *"I'm sure that this problem of being possessed by demons exists -- I'm talking about the influence of the Devil. In other instances, it can be a psychiatric problem. When we run into problems with evil spirits here, we can try helping the patient by spiritual means. For example, with prayers, by reading to them the word of God -- especially the Book of Psalms -- and sing hymns... We've seen this treatment resolve such problems satisfactorily in most cases. One sure indication that a patient might be possessed by demons, and not suffering psychiatric problems, is if he or she reacts to our spiritual messages rebelliously. Also, possessed people usually have their senses clouded. It's as if they were only half conscious. Furthermore, most such patients manifest unnaturally increased physical strength. Sometimes three or four strong men will not be able to restrain them..."*
>
> *"Concerning my regular medical practice, I've been able to put into practice many aspects of natural medicine -- hydrotherapy, for instance. Often people for one reason or another stop taking the medicine that is prescribed for them. Then I*

suggest hydrotherapy, and usually I've seen positive results from this treatment. For example, I remember a patient of about twelve years of age who when she arrived here was having convulsions about every ten minutes. I asked one of the North American doctors here at the time permission to work with him with the patient. He agreed, and together we decided to give the patient anti-seizure medicine. After three days of standard drug treatment, the patient was worse. Then I asked permission to discontinue the medicine and begin treatment with hydrotherapy. Well, that same day the convulsions became less severe. The following day the patient only had five seizures. The third day only one, and the fourth day, none. The kind of hydrotherapy given was very simple. From her ankles to her neck we rubbed her with cold water, then immediately wrapped her securely in blankets. After this, almost immediately the patient would go to sleep for about half an hour. Then we'd give her another cold rub. We did this for about a week. Then we taught the parents how to do it. The patient went home, the parents continued the treatments for a time, and eventually the patient was cured completely."

"SCALPED (UPDATE)"

(snapshot dated September, 1968)

In an earlier snapshot, from the June, l967 *Newsletter*, we read Dr. Butler's account of a little girl who had been scalped. In the September, l968 issue, Ray Comstock offers an update:

Many of our readers will remember little Manuelita, the Chamula Indian girl who came to our hospital over a year ago. She had been completely scalped when her long, black hair got caught in the fan belt of an engine. At the hospital they took hundreds of pinches of skin from her thigh and put them on her weeping, draining head. Some of the grafts took, but others sloughed off. The process was repeated many times until finally, last month, her head was all nicely covered with skin.

Manuelita suffered much pain during all this, but she would say, "Un poco" (a little) if you asked her if it hurt.

The members of the Alabaster Club of La Sierra, California are getting Manuelita a wig so that she will feel more normal again.

Now Manuelita has applied for permission to come to Yerba Buena as an industrial student. She will probably be coming up in October. At present she lacks the necessary 3,400 pesos or 280 dollars.

WHEAT-FLOUR MEAT

(recent snapshot)

Adventists believe that meat-eating is unhealthy. All meals served at Yerba Buena are vegetarian. Often Doña Lilia provides the student nurses and me with extraordinarily savory dishes based on meat substitutes. Commonly used is texturized soy protein, which comes in a 400 gram plastic bag, looking like bread-crumbs. This is produced by Alimentos COLPAC, in the Mexican state of Sonora. With appropriate soaking and additions of onion, garlic, sauce and the like, texturized soy protein can be mixed deliciously with such items as scrambled eggs, vegetable mixtures, fried potatoes and cheeses. Though this plant-based protein comes in beef and chicken flavors, to me their tastes resemble very little what I recall beef and chicken tasting like before I became a vegetarian many years ago. However, it has its own wholesome flavors, which is unique and desirable. In the small store next to Yerba Buena's post office, small cans of "sausages," also made from soybeans, can be bought. Though very tasty, they cost too much for me.

One of the finest dishes I've tried at Yerba Buena is prepared weekly by María Bercián, the Pastor's wife. She calls it *carne*, which is the Spanish word for meat, though it's made of white wheat-flour. To make the basic "meat" all that is needed is a good quantity of wheat flour -- not whole-wheat flour -- just regular, white, processed, off-the- market-shelf wheat flour, and a little salt.

Much of meat-making is "having a feeling" for when things are ready. Probably a person needs to make meat two or three times before developing adequate "feeling" that will permit good meat to be made every time. Today Doña María invites me to help make meat, and here's what we do:

- A little less than three pounds of white wheat flour is poured onto a water-repellent section of the kitchen counter. Then with her hands, Doña María forms this heap of flour into a low, broad-mouthed "volcano" about eighteen inches across, and with a rim about one and a half inches high. A pint of cold water is poured inside the volcano's rim.

- Now the idea is to mix the flour with the water. When the flour inside the crater is well mixed with water, then more flour is scraped from the crater's wall into the pool. She mixes until she has a moist dough of the kind used in baking bread. She kneads the dough vigorously until it's nice and

gummy. Often Señora Bercián uses the same hand-action that Indian women use when washing clothing on rocks. Anchoring the slab of dough's bottom with the left hand, the palm of the right hand stretches the rest of the dough toward the top. Doña María says that she knows her dough is ready when, as she pushes her right-hand palm up through the dough, she can hear sharp little puffs of air escaping from it. Also, if you prod the dough with a fingertip, it bounces right back, leaving not a trace of the poking. The Señora accomplishes this perfect state of doughiness after twelve minutes of vigorous kneading. Probably most of us will knead around twenty.

- Finally the well-kneaded dough is formed into a ball and deposited into a dishpan into which cold tapwater is run until the ball is completely submerged. Now the idea becomes for the starch in the dough to leach into the water, leaving just gluten -- the part that will be used to make "meat."

- The Señora lets the submerged dough sit overnight. The next morning I'm back again to see that the water has turned milky white. This milky water is poured off, and new tapwater is introduced. For about five minutes Sra. Bercián squeezes and kneads the dough with her fingers, trying to get as much starch to go into solution as possible. New water is added and the squeezing and kneading process is repeated for seven or eight times, until the water remaining after squeezing is more or less clear. By now the dough has been reduced in size to a little less than half of what it was originally. And it looks like pale, stringy, sticky... lung tissue.

- Finally we cook some dough, which now can be referred to as gluten. Into about a quart of water, Doña María pours a cup of soy sauce, adds the broad, leafy tops of two sticks of celery, about half a clove of garlic, and a quarter of a medium-sized onion, half-heartedly sliced or semi-chopped. This mixture is brought to a boil. Then the gluten is cut into tenderloin-sized hunks -- the whole hunk of gluten makes four or five of them. With her fingers the señora forms these hunks of gluten into flattish shapes and drops them into the boiling broth.

- After about five minutes of boiling with the pot's top on, the hunks of gluten puff up and look like spongy sections of liver. The cooking continues for twenty or thirty more minutes -- until the pieces of gluten more or less have the texture of meat.

- At this point we remove the cooked gluten, drain it (helping it drain by pressing on it with a large fork) and store part of it in the refrigerator. The rest, we fry. Before frying the gluten, Sra. Bercián smears and smashes a fresh clove of garlic across a four-inch-long, smooth rock she keeps in a drawer, and then rubs the rock across her small hunks of gluten. Then she

coats the gluten with a mixture of pungent, powdery ingredients that certainly never could be gathered together in most U. S. cities. Probably the best we can do is to coat our U. S.-made gluten with our own home-designed mixes, using spices that sound good. Three important ingredients in Sra. Bercián's, which are available in the U. S., are half a cup of brewer's yeast, a cup of whole wheat flour, and a cup of ground toast.

- While coating the gluten, a heavy, cast-iron skillet has been heating on the gas stove. The skillet's bottom is covered with about one eighth inch of cooking oil. When the oil becomes so hot that a drop of water splatters dangerously, then we put in the coated gluten and fry it for about ten minutes.

And that's it! And it tastes wonderful!

HIDALGO THE LACANDON

(recent snapshot)

Mexican tourist brochures usually have at least one picture of a brown-skinned man with very long, black hair, wearing something like a white, knee-length cotton tunic. Probably the man holds a bow and some arrows, for this picture is of a Lacandon Indian, an inhabitant of the Selva Lacandón, or Lacandon Jungle, of the lowlands of northeastern Chiapas. Lacandons are considered to be the most "primitive" of all of Mexico's indigenous peoples.

On television and in the press the Lacandons are much romanticized. Present-day Lacandons are descendants of the ancient Maya who a thousand years ago built a great civilization, the hallmarks of which are the pyramids and temples that today can be seen at the ruins of Palenque and Bonampak here in Chiapas, Chichén Itzá and Uxmal in Yucatán, and Tikal and El Mirador in Guatemala. When you ask a Lacandon what language he speaks, instead of replying with a name like Tzotzil or Chol, which are languages or dialects deriving from the ancient Maya, the Lacandons simply reply, "Maya."

The ancient Maya were divided into many subgroups and these subgroups often were at war with other Indian nations and one another. At least some

Maya practiced human sacrifices and one source for their sacrificial victims were the prisoners-of-war taken during raids on neighboring villages. Apparently the Lacandons were a Maya subgroup who went deep into the jungle, perhaps to escape this very persecution.

There, the Lacandons' isolation preserved them from the fate suffered by other indigenous peoples who were exterminated or enslaved by the invading Spanish.

Today only a few more than 300 Lacandons survive, and most of them are as familiar with the outside world as many Tzotzil speakers within just a few miles of Yerba Buena. Anthropologists, film makers, writers, and wide-ranging hippies from France, Germany and the U.S. have visited them too much.

Hidalgo is an Adventist Lacandon who now comes to Yerba Buena for treatment of a tumor on his left arm. Pastor Bercián and he are old friends, for the Pastor has visited his village pulling teeth. Wanting to talk to Hidalgo, I ask the Pastor to come along, and even to do the taping, since I fear that Hidalgo might be reticent talking with a foreigner. But what I find is that the Pastor and Hidalgo zip through the interview like jaded professionals. The Pastor, already knowing the highlights of Hidalgo's story, asks questions that get right to the point; Hidalgo, knowing what is expected of him, supplies answers that somehow seem rehearsed. Instead of being intimidated by the tape recorder, Hidalgo hardly can hide his boredom. Here's how the interview goes:

> **PASTOR:** "At what age were you baptized into the Adventist Church?"
>
> **HIDALGO:** "Eighteen. I'm thirty-two now."
>
> **PASTOR:** "What did you eat before you were baptized into the Adventist Church?"
>
> **HIDALGO:** "We ate filthy bodies (in Spanish, *cuerpos sucios*). Javalinas (wild pigs), parrots, scarlet macaws, frogs, snakes... "
>
> **PASTOR:** "What did you do with your idols when you received the Word of God?"
>
> **HIDALGO:** "We carried them to a cave on the other side of the lake. We used to feed them, but they really didn't eat. We'd put into their mouths *pozol* (a bread-like paste usually made of corn and eaten by many indigenous cultures in Mexico and Central America). The idol was just a head made of clay, below which

there was a basin. In the basin we'd burn incense made from pine-tree resin and ask for the idol's blessing. But the idol didn't know how to bless anything.

PASTOR: "What happened when a baby was born with a disease, or maybe a blemish such as a crooked foot?"

HIDALGO: "It was killed. We said that it wouldn't live, so it was killed."

PASTOR: "What did you do with your wives before you knew Christ?"

HIDALGO: "We hit them. Sometimes there'd be discontentment in the house, so we'd hit them. Maybe a man would have four wives. So when evangelism came, the man chose the youngest woman, my mother. The older ones would stay in the house, but the man wouldn't sleep with them. Also, before we knew Jesus, whenever men wanted to, they would exchange wives among themselves."

PASTOR: "In earlier times did you use medicinal plants from the jungle?"

HIDALGO: "We used many. But not now. Only the old people know how to do that. Now we don't know much. Just one for snakebite."

PASTOR: "Did your people used to get drunk a lot?"

HIDALGO: "They always got drunk. They made their drink from sugarcane and the bark of another plant that in Maya is called *baché*. It was strong. People stayed drunk a lot."

PASTOR: "Would you like to live in a big city like Tuxtla?"

HIDALGO: "No. In the jungle it's better, where there's no sound of trucks, and you can breathe air and hear birds."

PASTOR: "What do you do when you go into the forest?"

HIDALGO: "Hunt deer and *faisán* (great curassow)."

PASTOR: "Many years ago, how did your people get their money?"

HIDALGO: "They didn't know about money."

PASTOR: "Many years ago, when a baby was born, how was its umbilical cord cut?"

HIDALGO: "With the edge of an arrow's head."

PASTOR: "Among your people, did brothers and sisters once marry one another?"

HIDALGO: "They used to, but not now. Well, I know a couple who five years ago married. But their children turned out alright."

PASTOR: "What's going to happen to the Lacandons?"

HIDALGO: "Who knows? Already many of us put on shoes and trousers and cut their hair short, like yours. They don't want to be Lacandon any more. But the government says that we need to keep our hair long so people will know who we are. Who knows?"

MEMORIES OF
DON CHÚS

(recent snapshot)

Jesús Laguna, known by everyone at Yerba Buena as Don Chús, is a native of Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacan. He's worked here longer than anyone else. He's an intelligent, good-natured man with an immense goiter on the right side of his throat, and a predilection for wearing on cold days a sock-top beneath his straw hat. Today he's in charge of dispensing gasoline, and he does a few other such chores. As we talk, we stand on the platform outside the shop. From here we can look out over the entire grounds. I ask Don Chús how his association with Yerba Buena began.

"In Pueblo Nuevo, one morning I met a friend on his way to mail a letter. He'd been working out here for a few weeks and he said that I should try to get a job here, too. So that same day I came out. When I got here, Don Ray (Ray Comstock) was cutting trees with a chainsaw. I'd never seen a chainsaw before. And right beside Don Ray, Doña María (Marie Comstock) was chopping weeds with a machete. Back then, neither of them could speak much Spanish so I went

to see José Díaz, from Oaxaca, who spoke English real well. He was in charge of signing up workers and keeping hours. Even though back then I didn't know how to do much of anything, on January 11, 1955, at the age of twenty-five, I came to work out here."

"Back then, the only building out here was a little shack put together with sheets of corrugated tin, where Don Ray kept the tools. Don Ray's family had a camper on the back of their pickup truck, and that's where they slept. That truck was a powerful one, too, with a winch on it. Well, it had to be a good truck because the good highway between Tuxtla and Villahermosa didn't exist in those days, and between here and Pueblo Nuevo, there was only half a road."

"My first job here was cutting trees where the garden is now. Once we'd cleared out those trees, we had maybe fifteen or twenty more men come in. Some chopped and some carried wood to pile up for burning limestone rock, to make lime for use in making mortar. We sold part of the lime and used it ourselves in our buildings. After clearing the garden we cleared places for other buildings. The first building to go up was the clinic, in l957. It was built of wood. First we tried building it alone, but it turned out all crooked. Then a tall gringo came down and he knew how to build things, and he did a good job. His name was Roberto. Other Americanos also came, like Edwardo and Dean. As soon as the clinic was up, Don Ray and Doña María began pulling teeth. Then Dr. Mauricio arrived (Dr. Butler) and they began curing people, even though in those days the clinic was real small. Now it's been rebuilt and enlarged a lot."

"After that, we built two houses where the dormitory now stands, one serving as a warehouse and the other as a kitchen. After that we built the Casa Grande, where Don Ray and his family came to live. After that we dug wells -- one for the Casa Grande and one for the clinic. After that, we built the building where today the office, post office, store and classroom are. After that, so we could have light, we built the electrical plant, which burned oil. After that, we built La Loma, where Doña Nela lives on the hilltop, and then La Victoria, where Pastor Bercián lives."

"Then we built four houses for the Model Village and cleared a big area for the village's garden. The houses were four by twelve meters (a little over four by twelve yards), divided down the middle, so two families could live in each one, with one chimney serving both sides. There was one toilet for every two house. Don Ray invited people from the villages to come there and live, and learn how to conduct their lives better. He gave people seeds and the people living there were expected to work in the garden."

"The Model Village kept going from l976 to l978. Antonio Díaz lived there and he worked in the garden and also spread the word of God, for he knew how to read but also how to speak and even sing in Tzotzil. But the others living there, they got bored and wanted to drink, smoke and eat meat. Don Ray scolded them, and they just left. Of course Don Ray was trying to help them live better lives, but they

left anyway. It was during those days that I decided to quit smoking and drinking, too. Before then, I smoked two packages a day and twice a week I'd drink. Well, you couldn't work with Don Ray doing that, so I quit. Now down at the Model Village all that's left is one house, and the garden is grown up with trees."

"After the Model Village, I worked on the water system. It took ten months. For the first ponds we had to carry on our backs 350 bags of cement, all the way to the top of the mountain, and we had to work in mud that came up to our knees. The first tank we made was twelve by six by four feet and then the second was six by three-and-a-half by two. For the next tanks we had to carry 650 bags of cement. Sixty men worked on that project and I was in charge of them. By then I'd learned how to do all kinds of things. After the tanks were finished, we had to bring water pipes down from them. After the water system was installed, we built the student-nurse's dormitory and the church, and some more houses, where today the workers live."

"Nowadays Doña Nela has some ideas for other projects -- like a two-story building for an office, store and post office. And up by the dormitory we'd like to build a hotel for people who come visiting their family in the hospital."

"But, since the Comstocks left, the building has slowed down a lot... "

"CATS & GHOSTS"

(snapshot dated March, 1967)

During her years at Yerba Buena, Myrtle Neufeld, the wife of Dr. Ray Neufeld, many times displayed her fine writing skills by contributing very interesting, often humorous stories to the *Newsletter*. Here are two such pieces from the March, l967 issue:

"Catventures & Meditations"

I am a beautiful, white angora cat. I really do not belong in the clinic, but when there is a rat problem a cat likes to help out.

So every night I silently steal from corner to corner and from room to room, pouncing upon the evil creatures that trouble those poor humans so.

One night recently I had a terrible experience. I went creeping up on the rafters along the wall and decided to cross to the side. "Nope, I better not," said I to myself when half way over, "but how can I get down from here? Oh, that's easy after all! There's a bed right below." I landed and there was a terrible shriek. What could be the matter? I ran for my

life... and now, they are all talking about me! How was I supposed to know that that girl had just been operated on and that I landed right on her incision? I've been thinking, they really do need a new hospital around here!

****

"Ghosts!"

A week ago at the clinic we were suddenly brought to the realization that we indeed live in the land of the enemy. A middle-aged man came 200 miles to have his bilateral hernias repaired. During the examination the patient offered the following story:

He had been to a witch doctor who had promised to have his hernias cured by the "invisibles" (een-vee-see-blays), who do their work in the night without waking the patient, "no mars, no scars." All he had to do was pay $l,200 pesos ($96.00 dollars), go to bed, and get up in the morning -- healed!

He did get up in the morning, but he still had his hernias. The "invisible" was gone and so was his money. He sent the law after his money -- but no success. He brought himself to Yerba Buena and is now recovering from an operation -- with success. This time he will have "scars" to remind him of his surgery experience.

PORTRAIT OF MARÍA, A STUDENT NURSE

(recent snapshot)

Twenty-eight year old María Antonieta Jiménez Sedano comes from Cuentepec Morelos, population about 4000, in the central Mexican state of Morelos, just south of Mexico City. When she speaks she looks straight into my eyes, but not in an aggressive way. Her eyes seem always to be saying, "This is the exact way I am and I hope that that's alright with you." Here's her story:

"When I was a child, my father cultivated the land, producing corn, beans and peanuts. "My mother worked at home. I had four sisters and two little brothers. Every day I'd help my mother make tortillas and do other things around the house. Also when my father wasn't working in the fields, I helped him make sweetbreads, which we sold in the streets. In those days my only dream was to study -- to go to the nearby town of Temixco to attend high school, for in Cuentepec we had only a grade school. When finally I graduated from grade school I did go to Temixco, where I lived with a family and studied in high school.

However, at that time, like most people in Cuentepec, I spoke only Náhuatl. Also, I had so much work to do for the family with whom I stayed that I seldom could study. I just couldn't adjust to life there, so I went back to my family in Cuentepec without finishing school."

"Then one day I went to live with a godmother in Cuernavaca, the largest city in our state. My godmother spoke both Náhuatl and Spanish and she was very patient with me, so this time it was easier. I helped take care of her two children, and the two little stores she ran, in which she sold chicharrones *(pig cracklings) and vegetables. One day some people came through selling books and I bought one. It was about The Message -- about being a Seventh Day Adventist. Though in my family we were all Catholic, I read the book and I liked it a lot. I talked to some Adventists, accepted The Message, and converted. It was a wonderful feeling, so after eight years with my godmother I wanted to return home to share what I'd found, for among my people there were many problems -- much fighting and drinking."*

"Meanwhile my father also had discovered The Message and had converted, so he and I, along with my little brothers, began holding study sessions in our home, and to invite neighbors to join us. An Adventist pastor from a nearby district heard about us and decided to help us build a church. One day he mentioned our work to the Maranatas, from the state of Michigan in the United States, so they came and built a temple for us there in Cuantepec, staying among us for about a month. And they also talked with me, asking about my life the way you are right now, and then they told me that if I wanted to study they'd help me any way they could. They are responsible for bringing me to Yerba Buena, where I've been studying for over a year."

"When I first arrived here it was very sad because they didn't want to accept me here, because I'd never finished high school. I wrote to the Maranatas about my problems, and they wrote to Doña Nela on my behalf. I don't know what they said but later I was invited to stay and study at Yerba Buena. Of course it's been hard because I don't know a lot that the others do, because they finished high school. However, I've managed by working at my studies very hard."

"When I graduate, I'll return to my village and try to improve things there. At first I'll just try to set things right in my own family's house. Maybe greater projects will develop from there. Do you have a better idea that can help me... ?

FOMENTATIONS FOR
RAY HASSE

(recent snapshot)

A few months ago 80-year old Ray Hasse gave his business card to a man he met at an Adventist gathering in the U. S. The card read:

RAY L. HASSE -- V.A.E

HCR -- 932, Black Canyon City, AZ 85324

Retired -- Building Contractor

Hobbies -- Photography, Video, Travel, Books

Church -- Seventh Day Adventist

You can guess a little about Ray's sense of humor if you know that the V.A.E. after his name means... absolutely nothing. Anyway, some months later the card's recipient, who happened to be an administrator in an Adventist organization that financially aids Adventists programs in developing countries, gave Ray a call.

"I notice on your card," the man said, "that you're interested in photography, video and travel. Well, there are some Adventist undertakings down in southern Mexico and Belize from which we'd like to see some pictures so we can better determine what their needs are. Would you be able to go down and take a few shots for us?"

Consequently, late on this Thursday night Ray Hasse and his grandson David knock at my door, having just arrived here and heard that one of their compatriots is spending three months living on the hill. Ray is a tall, blue-eyed, white-haired, very fat man wearing a massive brass belt-buckle that spells out RAY. He looks more like he's sixty than eighty. Twenty-three year old David is a smile-flashing, sharp-witted, curly-haired fellow with a new degree in Advertising from Washington state's Walla Walla College. These days he's working hard on figuring out who he is and where he wants to go in life.

It turns out that David is invited to participate in a four-day trip to the isolated Indian village of San Lorenzo. While he's away, *Abuelito* ("Little Grandfather"), as

everyone begins calling Ray, stays in the Casa Grande. Ray arrived at Yerba Buena with a sore throat. The weather turned chilly, overcast and misty during his wait for David and soon his sore throat has become a head cold, and he feels very weak. I'm invited to come along as interpreter when Ray visits Dr. Sánchez.

No high temperature. Lungs sound OK. Dr. Sánchez returns from the stockroom adjoining his office with two packages of VIROSYNK, which he describes as being good against the common cold, and a package of Vitamin C tablets. Also he prescribes fomentation treatment. He'd like for the treatments to run for several days, but since Ray is leaving early tomorrow morning, a treatment now, at 4:00 in the afternoon, and another at 9:00 tonight will have to do. Here's how the fomentation treatment goes:

Aurelia Hernández Laguna, a student nurse, escorts us to the Hydrotherapy Room. On the room's right there's a large gas stove with one burner heating a two-foot-high aluminum pot in which five thick, dark, much-scorched, rolled-up towels are steaming, standing inside the pot on their ends. On the room's left there's the Steam Bath room and three alcoves with curtains drawn across their entrances. Aurelia leads us into one alcove equipped with a small, homemade, wooden bedside table just large enough to hold an open book, and a homemade, wooden bed about a yard high, covered with a thick blanket.

4:45 -- After *Abuelito* is asked to remove his shirts and to lie on his back, Aurelia spreads three dry towels across his chest and stomach. Then from the big pot, with long, stainless-steel tongs, she carries a steaming hot towel into the alcove, unrolls it and spreads it atop the three dry towels covering Ray's upper torso. Atop this hot, wet towel goes another dry one. Then Ray is covered from neck to feet with a heavy blanket. Next Aurelia places a band of gauze-like material across Ray's forehead. He says that it's cold and wet. He smiles now and recalls wistfully that when he was a child seventy-five years ago this is exactly what his Adventist mother did whenever he had a cold. Aurelia asks again and again, "*¿Quema?*" -- "Does it burn?" Sometimes it does burn through the three dry towels, but instead of telling Aurelia about it, Ray just reaches up and shifts things until he's comfortable.

4:52 -- The hot towel is replaced with a new hot towel from the pot; the first one still being so hot that steam rises from it when it's taken away. The dry towel next to Ray's bare skin also is replaced with a new dry one. Ray says it's because the towel next to his skin gets wet from his sweat. The cold headstrap also is replaced.

5:0l -- The above procedure is repeated.

5:05 -- Aurelia places a thumbless mitten soaked in cold tapwater onto her right hand, removes all the towels from Ray's chest, and for eight seconds rubs his

exposed chest and belly area. She asks him to turn onto his belly. Now the entire procedure is repeated with Ray's back.

5:I5 -- The hot towel and cold headband are renewed.

5:I9 -- They're renewed again.

5:25 -- Aurelia returns with her cold, wet mitten and for another eight seconds scrubs down Ray's bare back. Then she declares that the treatment is ended, and that *Abuelito* can replace his shirt.

After the treatment the skin on Ray's back, chest and belly looks fresh and rosy, but he says he can't tell much difference in how he feels.

At 9:00 PM the entire operation described above is repeated.

On Wednesday morning when I meet Ray for breakfast in the Casa Grande, he looks better than I've seen him since his arrival. "I really coughed up a lot of stuff last night," he says. "I feel a lot better. I wish I were staying so I could continue the treatments. But maybe getting back into the hot lowlands today will accomplish the same thing."

Notes from
The Student Nurses' Little Blue Book

(recent snapshot)

Every prospective participant in the student nurse program is given a 3½- x 5¼-inch, eight-page booklet with a pale blue, soft cover. This publication provides a general description of Yerba Buena, its Student Nurse program, and the requirements for entry into the program. Here are some excerpts, translated from Spanish:

About Conduct:

The following rules are obligatory:

l. -- Strict temperance. (total abstention from tobacco, liquor, coffee, narcotics).

2. -- Purity of language. (books, recreation, music and associations that edify the mind and character).

3. -- No clandestine and improper friendships. Having Sweethearts during this course is absolutely prohibited.

4. -- Modest and simple clothing. (for ladies: dresses with sleeves that cover the shoulders and skirts that reach the knees)

5. -- Respect for your superiors, respect for your classmates, respect for others outside the institution.

6. -- Care in the use of material provided you.

7. -- Obedience is of vital importance.

8. -- Breaking of the above rules will constitute grounds for suspension.

"The course lasts for two years and upon graduation a diploma is given indicating the course's completion. No title is extended, for that requires a more extensive preparation, which we cannot supply. However, the two-year course does provide an education that is useful and of benefit to mankind. The young man or lady should be dedicated and ready to serve humanity, and to impart his or her knowledge to others."

Last entry in pamphlet:

"True education means more than the taking of a determined course of study. It means more than preparing for today's life. It embraces the whole being and all the period of existence accessible to man. It is the harmonious development of physical, mental and spiritual faculties. It prepares the student to enjoy serving in this world, and for a superior joy given by a wider service."

Talking with an Old Invader

(recent snapshot)

Job La Flor (In Spanish, *la flor* means "the flower") is an old man living with his family beside the main highway, just as it enters Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacan. I go to see him now because not long ago he was an invader -- one of the group of people that for years, and even now, has given Yerba Buena and Colegio Linda Vista so many problems (see "Armed Men Invade Yerba Buena Property," and "Invaders Planting Beans. When I finally stand before him, I find myself unprepared for the peaceful, wise-looking and even compassionate look in his eyes. Though he walks slowly and his hair is gray, it's clear from his appearance that most of his life he's been a good-looking, robust man, and the glint in his eye says that he's always been willing to enjoy a good laugh.

"I'm a member of the *ejido* here," he explains. (*Ejidos* are basic units of Mexico's semi-communistic system of organizing communities into agricultural cooperatives in which members have sole rights to farm parcels of land assigned to them, but the land's actual ownership lies with the *ejido* organization.) "Well, a few years ago the leaders in our *ejido* began telling us that the *gringos* had taken land from our *ejido* in order to have land on which to build Yerba Buena and the Colegio. A surveyor came in and showed us where the property boundary really should be, so we put barbed-wire fences there. I was assigned a plot of land that the Colegio claimed, and so were several of my *compañeros*. But from the beginning I could see that there was a lot of confusion about this matter. So I just let my land go, and kind of withdrew from the whole thing. But other *compañeros*, you know, they wanted to fight for their land."

Job La Flor does not mention the time when some supporters of Linda Vista school went to remove the barbed- wire fence. Several members of the *ejido* spotted them, got some help, and then overpowered the school's people, tied them up, and marched them to Pueblo Nuevo to be put in jail. However, at the town's edge the *ejido* members lost some of their steam as some of the townspeople taunted them. The school's people were let loose, but not until after the school promised that the fence could stay. To this day barbed-wire fences cut off both Linda Vista and Yerba Buena from large portions of their land. About 700 people from Pueblo Nuevo now gather firewood on this property.

"I'm out of all that now," he says. "In a situation like that, you just can't know who has the right. It causes bad feelings, even among *compañeros*... " When he

refers to those problems with his friends, I clearly see in his face that he is remembering one or more incidents that still trouble him. He simply stops talking and looks into the dust at our feet. After a while I say that to me it seems that already there are too many people in this land. All the good soil already has been used, and now it is deteriorating from erosion and weed and insect infestation. But it's typical for families to produce seven to ten children, and in twenty years, those children will have children...

"What's going to happen then," I ask.

"All that is in the hands of God." he replies in a whisper, without hesitation.

"DETAILS OF THE ACCIDENT"

(snapshot dated January, 1969)

The January, l969 issue of the *Newsletter* carried grievous news. It was about Burton, the Comstock's only son and now the husband of Nela. Marie Comstock wrote the story:

Ray and I were in Mexico City on business. At 4 a.m. (2 a.m. California time) the telephone rang. It was Anita, [the Comstock's daughter] telling us of Burton's accident. She had no details. We were too stunned to do any thinking and told her we would be in Mexico City for the day to finish the business. After realizing the facts, we called Anita, telling her we were leaving immediately for Yerba Buena and would call her that evening to get details of what had happened. By the time we wasted about a half hour trying to call our lawyer to cancel our appointment for that day, packed and loaded the car, (without the help of the elevator, which had gone out of commission the night before, leaving us with 4 flights of stairs and a lot of stuff!) and drove to the lawyer's home, it was about 8 a.m. before we were on our way. We stopped only for gasoline.

After trying unsuccessfully in Villahermosa to get an International line to call Anita, we drove on to Pichucalco (our last phone connection with the outside world.) It was two and a half hours later before we got the line -- then only two minutes until we got our party. We spent a half hour at Nela's parents' home in Ixhuatán. There we picked up her mother and brother and brought them with us to Yerba Buena, arriving at l:30 a.m., December ll.

We did not get details here of the accident until December l5, the day that Nela and Anita arrived. Brother Stanley Sornberger (who gave Burton his flying lessons) and his wife flew down, bringing Nela and Anita. They returned to the U. S. the 22nd of December -- Anita

returning with them.

The accident occurred at 9:08 p.m., December 9, eight miles South of Willows, California, on temporary Interstate 5. A semi-truck-trailer had been following a car with a trailer. The truck finally tried to pass, four miles before he would have reached the free-way. When he saw Burton's car approaching, he pulled to the left, right into Burton's path. They had to call a special wrecker from Chico to Willows (not Willits) to extricate his body. Four hours were consumed before getting Burton out. The casket was sealed.

God could have delayed Burton a few seconds anywhere along that highway. He is in the hands of a just God and there are many things worse than death. God is right now in the business of winding up this old world's history and is laying away those who are not able, for reasons known only to Him, to go through the terrible experiences of the last days.

"'SCALPED' (SEQUEL)"

(snapshot dated December, 1969)

Burton's death did not defeat the Comstocks. The *Newsletter* excerpt you just read was sent out in January of l969. In December of the same year the *Newsletter* carried the following story, written by Ray Comstock:

Many of you readers will remember the item in a recent Yerba Buena newsletter about Manuelita, the little Chamula Indian girl that was scalped. [Click here and here] Manuelita is now one of our girls and lives and works at Yerba Buena.

I was away on a trip when she came to live at Yerba Buena. The first time I met her after I returned, I didn't recognize her, so I asked her who she was. (I should have known her by the big, red handkerchief she had over her head.) She said, "I'm Manuelita. Don't you remember me?"

Then with a big smile she took the red bandanna off so I could see her badly scarred bald head. She asked, "Now do you remember me?" Of course I did!

Eighteen months ago, when Manuelita was receiving her first skin grafts in our hospital, Chloe Sofsky, art teacher at La Sierra College, was visiting Yerba Buena. She told us that the Alabaster Club of La Sierra would take as one of their projects the purchasing of a new wig for Manuelita as soon as her head was healed.

The skin grafting was finally finished and healed this summer. The Wig Warehouse donated one third of the cost of a nice, shiny, black wig for Manuelita, labeled, "made in South Korea." The Korean women have black hair like the Indian women

do here.

The next morning we called Manuelita in to tell her we had something for her. When she saw the wig she just stood there, looking with her big, black eyes, like any little girl who has just been given her first, long-wanted doll. Then she looked up at us and smiled shyly. "Is it for me?" she asked.

She took off the red bandanna and Marie put the wig on, taking the dear child into our bedroom where she could see herself in our full-length mirror.

The happiness in Manuelita's eyes and her smile were all the payment anyone could ask.

EDDY GOBER'S POEM

(recent snapshot)

Eddy Gober was one of the four middle-aged *gringos* mentioned in "Four Gringos and a Sore Toe." He's a former Kentuckian who grew up in an impoverished hollow in the mountains. This is Eddy's first trip outside the U. S., so I've been asking him how he feels about the things he sees here. At breakfast on the morning my friends leave, after being at Yerba Buena for four days, Eddy presents me with the following poem filled with images from Yerba Buena and the marketplace in nearby Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacan:

Yerba Buena

by Eddy Gober

It's wintertime, a chilling mist
Is falling silently
The clouds obscure all beauty now
A mile above the sea

I came south to get some rest
And lie out in the sun
I wanted pictures I could show
When my trip was done

But as I moaned I saw a lass
Dressed in some tattered clothes
And as she walked I saw the mud
squish up between her toes

As she passed by, I forced a smile
A smile she did not see
But on her back her baby brother
Smiled right back at me

The marketplace was busy now
The sun burned through the mist
While others bartered, bought and sold
A teenage couple kissed

I'd never seen the sky so blue
Or clouds that stood so still
Where flowers bloom all winter long
In yards carved from a hill

Tortillería was a sign
I'd never seen before
They made tortillas while I watched
Through the open door

Fifty people stood in line
They blocked the narrow street
It seems tortillas are a must
With every meal they eat

Now the children laughed and played
And begged for little treats
Sometimes parents purchased them
A fruit or something sweet

I watched a kid unwrap his sweet
His face lit up with glee
Then without a word he smiled
And shared his treat with me

A lady stood beside the road
Her burro lay there dead
The burden that the beast had borne
Now rested on her head

But life goes on though sometime sad
Their blood runs brave and free
Their hurt is mine, their laughter too
My roots are Cherokee

Now my shoes were muddy too
As I stood on the path
I realized these are the things
A man can't photograph

Life and love and sadness too
Though written in the sand
Are born and die and yet live on
In Yerba Buena land

DR. SÁNCHEZ
TALKS ABOUT HIS LIFE

(recent snapshot)

On a certain afternoon about twenty of us pile into the blue truck, mostly in the back, and head up the road five miles to the village of Bosques. At the town's Adventist temple we're going to present a program of preaching, the recitation of poems and singing. Most of Yerba Buena's adult population comes along, as well as some of the student nurses. Even Dr. Sánchez accompanies us, for he's a member of the choir. I'm surprised that in his busy life he finds room for such activities as this. Seeing how demanding Yerba Buena is on his life, and understanding how few material rewards life here has to offer, I become curious about how he views life. I ask him to tell me a little about himself. With a far-away look in his face, he smiles and, choosing his words very carefully, begins at the beginning:

"I was born in the state of Zacatecas on January 30, l934 -- I'm more than fifty-five years old. The name of my town was Río Grande. Now it has a population of about 50,000. But I grew up in the country outside of town, so from about six years of age I began doing farm work of a more or less vigorous nature. My father, it could be said, was a hard taskmaster. He worked hard himself and he inculcated into us his discipline. Moreover he taught us to love work, and he showed us how to do things. Though he wanted all of his children to go to school to become professionals, when I finished primary school at fourteen, for reasons that I don't know, I didn't continue my education. I stayed out of school for eleven years. Finally I finished my secondary instruction in Montemorelos, in the state of Nuevo Leon. Montemorelos is an institution operated by the Seventh Day Adventists. My mother was an Adventist. My father was just a sympathizer."

"Even when I arrived at Montemorelos I hadn't yet decided on what my vocation would be. My mother had told me, 'Study whatever you want, but please don't become a teacher. Nowadays teachers don't want to work. All they think about is

politics and going on strike. Many of them sit around so much that they become alcoholics.' On the other hand, my father said, 'Study whatever you want, but don't become a lawyer. You'll never be a good lawyer, son, because you don't know how to steal from people.' Well, I was thinking about becoming an agronomist, a preacher, or possibly a doctor. Finally, in preparatory school, some friends urged me to become a doctor, so I began working for that."

"Three months before I finished my medical studies, I still hadn't found a place in which I could do my internship. Then one day Sr. Comstock visited us, looking for someone who would do his internship here at Yerba Buena. Well, I accepted his invitation. This was mid June, l969, when Dr. Mauricio Butler was here. He was a very capable, eminent North American doctor, and under him I did my ten-month internship."

"After my internship, I did my Social Service in a health center in El Bosque, and that lasted for one year and two months. Then I was for over a year and a half down below at Colegio Linda Vista. Finally I came here. At that time Dr. Clarence Attaberry, another North American doctor, was here and beside him I was able to have a good practice. For four years I learned a great deal, especially about surgery."

"In fact, for me Yerba Buena has been my second university. Also it's been my home. My children have grown up here. My family and I love this place. We've unconditionally dedicated ourselves completely to this work. And we hope to stay here until someone else is able to take the responsibilities upon themselves."

"However, the time has come when we must be thinking about leaving here, mostly in order to acquire a good education for my girls, who now are growing up. Wherever they go to study, my wife and I would like to accompany them. Maybe we'll even go to the United States... "

THE ELEVATOR STORY

(a recently-told story from 1962)

Ray Comstock loves to tell stories about the adventures he and his family have lived through

during the Yerba Buena years. In 1989 when the author asked Ray if he had any particular story he wanted to share with the readers of this book, the following was offered. It's printed in its entirety, in Ray's own words, not only because it's a funny story about Antonio Díaz (see Sun-God & Moon), but also because it touches on problems of "red tape," which certainly have figured prominently in Yerba Buena's development. Moreover, the manner in which the story is told reveals a good deal about the man Ray Comstock.

"In March of 1962 we brought Antonio and María Díaz of Yerba Buena Hospital to the U. S. A. for six months. First we had to go to the Foreign Relations Department of the Federal Government in Mexico City to get passports for the Indians (Antonio and María). We had had pictures taken of the Indians separately because we thought that we would need a passport for each of them."

"The Chief of Foreign Relations asked if the Indians were going to travel together in the U. S. A. I said, 'Yes.' He replied, 'You only need one passport then. It will cost you much less if you get pictures of them together. You can go down to the corner and up on the third floor is a studio where you can get pictures of them together."

"We went down to the corner building and entered into the elevator. It was a self-service elevator. Antonio and María had never seen an elevator before. I pushed the button for the Third Floor and the elevator started up very slowly so the Indians did not realize what was happening. However, when the elevator stopped with a jerk on the Third Floor, Antonio grabbed María and cried, 'The building is going down in the ground!'"

"When we came back to the elevator I said, 'We will go back down now on the elevator.' Antonio said very emphatically, '¡No, no, es muy peligroso!' *-- 'No, no, it is very dangerous.' I said, 'OK, we will walk down the stairs.' I was thinking, 'When we go to the American Embassy we may have to go up to the 22nd Floor. We'll see what happens.'"*

"Back at Foreign Relations we started working on the passport. The Chief of the Department then said, 'This young man has never done his military service. In order to finish this passport you will have to go to the "Pentagon" and get a special permit from the General in charge of your area of the country.' He gave us the General's name and we took a taxi to the 'Pentagon.' After waiting three hours we were ushered into the General's office, only to have him inform us that we had to see a different General. After waiting another two hours we were admitted into the second General's office, only to have him inform us that we would have to see a General on the next floor above. We finally were admitted to this third General's office. Again we received the same runaround. The same thing happened with the fourth General. Finally the fifth General said he could take care of us, but that he could not do it until the next day."

"The next day we went back and the General told us to come back the next day.

The next day when we went into the general's office he was really angry. He pounded the table with his fist and said vehemently, 'This Indian man is thirty years old and he should have done his military service when he was eighteen! We should throw him in prison!' Needless to say, poor Antonio was frightened half to death. He could see himself rotting in one of the terrible prisons he had heard about."

"After the General had ranted for about five minutes I thought, 'He cannot do anything to me unless I hit him.' So I said to him, 'Shut up!' He looked at me in surprise and I again said, 'Shut up!' I then said, 'Señor General, you know as well as I do that a new law was passed this year making it possible for a young man like Antonio to leave the country, providing he is back in the country by January 1 to do his military service.' I continued, 'The governor of my state is here in the capital city and I talked with him this morning. I'll go to him and if necessary I will go to the president of Mexico. I want that permit!' the General said, 'Espere un momento,' *-- 'Wait a moment.' He went into the back office and in about five minutes he came back with the permit. Needless to say, I breathed a sigh of relief."*

"We finished up our work at Foreign Relations and went to the U. S. Embassy for the necessary visas. The lady in the Visa Department on the First Floor said, 'You will have to go up to the 22nd Floor to get a special permit to travel in different areas of the U. S."

"Antonio and María crowded into the back corner of the large elevator where Antonio grabbed the pipe railing with both hands and closed his eyes. Antonio and María were dressed in their native Chamula costumes, and the Mexicans that crowded into the elevator looked at the Indians and smiled and shook their heads. Some of them asked, 'What is the matter with these Indians?'"

"After getting the visa on the 22nd Floor we walked up to the restaurant on the 23rd Floor and out on the balcony. Antonio and María really jabbered to each other in their San Andresero Dialect. When my wife and I talked together we spoke in English; when we talked to the Indians we spoke in Spanish. This talking in three languages caused many people to turn their heads during our travels in the States."

"When we were back into the streets, Antonio turned to me and said, 'Don Ray, how is it? We get in that little room and then the building goes up and down and then we get out right where we want to?' I replied, "it isn't the building that goes up and down, Antonio, it is the elevator. It is pulled up and down by cables.' He shook his head and I thought he understood. How wrong I was you will see later."

"When we arrived in Niagara Falls we wanted to take the Indians over to the Canadian side to get a better view of the falls. The Border Officials said that if we left the U. S. we would have to go to Ottawa to get a new entrance visa. We said,

'Forget it, we will see the falls from the American side."

"We walked out on the big platform high above the river where we could see the falls up the river, and far below us was the boat 'Maid of the Mist.' I went and bought tickets for us to go down the elevator to the level of the river. I said to Antonio, 'I have tickets for us to go down the elevator to the river.' Antonio walked over by the elevator room and looked down, down to the little room at the lower end of the elevator. In between there were just steel beams connecting the upper and lower rooms. He shook his head emphatically and said that no way would he go down that elevator. I said, 'But Antonio, we don't want to waste 25¢ for each of these tickets, and after all, you and María want to see the ice and snow down by the river.' He asked, 'Are you going?' 'Certainly,' I replied. He stood and thought for a number of minutes and then said, 'All right.'"

"We crowded into one side of the elevator where we could see better. As the operator kept up a running conversation about the depth of the falls, the number of gallons of water per minute, etc., I translated, and Antonio kept looking down toward that little room below. He was holding onto my arm with both his hands, and as we went down, down, he began to shake more and more. I thought, 'What is wrong with him?'"

"Finally he said, with a break in his soft voice, 'Don Ray, how far can those cables up there stretch before they break?'"

SAN LORENZO

On Thursday

(recent snapshot)

At 7:00 AM, except for a few small, isolated, fast-moving, and nervous-looking cumulus clouds with jagged edges, the sky is a deep, steely blue. I've never felt the air here as cold as this. Descending toward the Casa Grande for breakfast I find the valley floor cast with a ghostly whiteness. It's an optical illusion, I assume -- sometimes low-slanting, early-morning or late-afternoon sunlight bounces off towering thunderheads someplace out of sight, painting this whole valley with strange hues. But, no, when I reach the Casa Grande it becomes clear: What I'm

seeing really is frost. Not just a hint of frost, but a heavy one -- the kind that in Kentucky in late October we'd call a killer.

The workers stand around looking, sometimes bending over to take a better look at grass blades adorned with lacy crystals. Don Chús looks with concern at the banana trees along the garden's western border. Their broad leaves instead of appearing glossy and green as usual, now are dusted with pale, silvery hoariness. A frost like this comes along only every few years, they say, and some swear they've never seen such a heavy one as this. A stunned feeling hangs in the air. People seem unable to organize their thoughts. They just stand looking at the frost, shaking their heads and cracking jokes.

At 7:53 Don Alfonso drives the old Dodge van, a recent gift from a patron in Nashville, onto the road to Villahermosa. On this trip Pastor Bercián and I are accompanied by two nurses. Gudulia, whom we've already met in "A Yerba Buena Graduate" accompanies us, as well as Marcela Ramírez Juárez, distinguished among the student nurses as being the tallest woman on campus -- a good five foot, six inches.

Heading north we find the frost lying spottily upon the landscape, sometimes very heavy, sometimes absent. Where it's heaviest, like the workers at Yerba Buena, people just stand looking. However, one old Tzotzil-speaking woman in a black dress, red belt and white blouse trimmed with red embroidery trots along with a load of firewood on her back, and she is barefoot as usual. Descending the slope beyond Selva Negra, the frost vanishes and the air warms with each mile. At 9:20, just north of Ixhuatán, we arrive next to the fast-moving, l00-foot wide river called Garganta del Diablo (Devil's Throat). Here the river flows across the road we need to take. Our van rides too low to make it across so we unpack and cross the river on a footbridge that sways unnervingly about seventy feet above the river's surface.

The bridge consists of four steel cables, upon the bottom two of which are tied cross-lying wooden planks. About two and a half feet long and half a foot wide, these planks are separated from one another by about four inches of open space. Many boards are missing where they've broken and fallen into the river. About three feet above the planks, on both sides of the bridge, the other two steel cables serve as handrails.

Beyond the footbridge a one-lane, much-broken-up, paved road continues. We're told that it's possible to purchase rides on trucks crossing the river, heading for villages on up the road. After waiting about half an hour, a truck carrying supplies from Ixhuatán comes along and for a small fee carries us to another footbridge, not unlike the one just crossed. Spanning the Río Amatán at a place called Puente Benito Juárez, this bridge serves as the trailhead of a footpath leading to several isolated villages, among which is our destination, San Lorenzo.

As promised by messengers who last week came from San Lorenzo to Yerba Buena, at Puente Benito Juárez two young guides and three mules for carrying gear await us. Gudulia and Marcela are invited to ride mules but they gamely insist on walking, though both wear slippers more appropriate for window-shopping than for hiking, and heavy clothing more befitting Yerba Buena's high-elevation cold weather than this merely chilly morning in the foothills. Beneath heavily overcast skies a slight breeze is blowing. It's 62º now -- good weather for hiking.

At first the trail is wide and climbs at a gentle rate. We pass several other walkers and mule- and horse-riders coming and going. One old man carrying firewood on his back says that last week at this very spot on the trail, and at this very hour, a bandit robbed a man of everything he had. After climbing for half an hour we enter a town of several thousand, surprisingly large to have no road going to it. Here we break off the main trail, descend briefly into a valley, and then begin climbing again. Now the trail becomes just wide enough for one or sometimes two walkers side by side, and it's very muddy. Frequently the hooves of mules and horses have worked the mud into a runny, brown soup smelling mightily of wet earth and manure. A cool, heavy mist begins falling, causing the outcroppings of limestone over which we must climb to be very slick. Sometimes steep grades cause our heavily laden mules to balk. The nurses soon dump most of their layers of clothing and when they look at their shoes just laugh and shake their heads. I'm carrying my full backpack. Though the air is cool, in the high humidity I sweat profusely. Sometimes I feel nauseated, apparently from the exertion of climbing and from so much sweating. The whole landscape hums with soft, continual tintinnabulations of stridulating grasshoppers and crickets.

For most of the distance the trail climbs, often very steeply, and often through intimidating fields of mud. But also there are long descents, especially in the afternoon. Early the nurses establish the routine of riding mules up slopes but then dismounting and walking downhill. Sometimes the trail courses along narrow ridge crests. Around us, except on the highest, steepest (almost vertical) slopes, the forest has been destroyed by slash-and-burn agriculture. The landscape is a mosaic of small fields, some being grazed by white, hump-backed zebu cattle, others amounting to no more than rank patches of weeds, and others growing up with dense stands of spindly weed-trees. Around noon, periods of moderate drizzle begin, accompanied by clouds of slope-touching mists that majestically sweep through the vast scenery of deep green valleys and high, bluish peaks. Constantly I vacillate between watching the evolving landscape and cloud-theater, and paying full attention to picking my way across the mud and slippery stones. In the end I get too tired to pay attention to anything but the mud and stones.

At 4:45 we trudge up the last slope, an especially muddy and steep one, into the town of San Lorenzo. It's drizzling, and the temperature is 55º.

SAN LORENZO

On Friday

(recent snapshot)

At dawn on Friday morning everyone is cold except me The teacher's wife from the hut next door admits that all night she shook and her teeth chattered, but now she just laughs and says, "But, it passes." During these moments as the odors of firewood smoke and brewing local coffee drift from all of San Lorenzo's huts, I reflect on the fact that last night, because of my membership in faraway Western Technological/ Materialistic Society (and subsequently my sleeping in a blue, mummy-type sleeping bag stuffed with Polarguard) I was so toasty that I had to partially unzip my bag to keep from overheating.

In San Lorenzo, which has a total population of about 400 Tzotzil-speaking families, most houses are constructed of heavy, unpainted boards nailed to wooden frames. The boards are taken from local trees using chainsaws. Visible all along every board covering every house in town are j-shaped scars left by the chainsaw's cutting edge as it briefly paused or was redirected during the cutting process. I ask a man how chainsaws can be made to cut so regularly, for these boards are remarkably straight and of uniform thickness. He replies that it's all done by eye, and that the only secret is that one must practice.

Built thirty to fifty feet apart, San Lorenzo's homes lie on a rather steep, northeast-facing slope. Often they are separated from one another by hedges, typically composed of thickly planted tulipán, a bush-hibiscus with cup-sized, scarlet blossoms. Narrow footpaths between houses regularly degenerate into muddy quagmires. No stores of any kind are apparent, though people know that rice can be bought from this family, that the man who lives in this house sells medical supplies, that this house sometimes has nails on hand... The town's center is the basketball court, which nearly always, except in the middle of nights, is being used by at least one or two boys. During hours of late afternoon twenty or more boys and men always are playing, several wearing regular basketball uniforms with numbers, and several players being quite good.

Pastor Bercián explains that a few years ago Dionisio López Hernández, a man presently thirty-nine years of age, became dissatisfied with certain things in San

Lorenzo, so he moved to a location upslope. Then with others he built a Seventh-Day Adventist school, the town's second Adventist temple, and the barracks in which we are staying. He also built several other things, such as a landing strip for missionary airplanes. This Dionisio and his airstrip arouse my curiosity; I had not expected such community spirit by anyone in such an isolated, really forlorn-looking place as San Lorenzo.

Our "barracks" is about fifty feet long and fifteen feet wide, divided into three sections along its length. The first section is home to one of the Adventist school's three teachers and his family. The section in the barrack's opposite end, where we sleep, is equipped with one bed and, along one wall, eight homemade bunk-beds, stacked four high. The barrack's middle section holds a hodgepodge of bags of shelled corn, old typewriters, carpentry tools, boxes of medicine, broken guitars, etc. Along one wall are shelves holding several hundred books.

Mostly they are primary-school books written in Spanish, but among them also I find a surprising number of English titles such as *The Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue (l954 Edition), The New Modern Medical Counselor (l95l)*, a paperback edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary,* Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, and *Sewing Made Easy* (l952). No one can say how these books arrived here, where Tzotzil is the only language spoken by everyone, even Spanish is considered a foreign tongue, and English might as well be Urdu.

The few men who are able to read do so with the greatest sense of propriety. Ceremoniously they sit at a table and open the book squarely before them. They read aloud, slowly, and with a dignified expression on their faces. Nearly all they ever read consists of religious literature, especially the Bible, and official papers generated by the government, so to them the act of reading is a ritual permitting them entry into sacred and political matters -- things absolutely and deliciously removed from their usual world of mud, sickness, toil and isolation.

But before I realize all this, I stand beside the wallside library quickly flipping through pages, skipping here and there and half-reading, and sometimes snickering with pleasure at the old books' out-of-date fashions or modes of expression. Finally I realize that men are standing watching me, and that they are unable to comprehend my apparent lack of respect for the written word. I see no way to explain to them that for me books are different kinds of things than they are for them, but that I respect them, too. I replace the books, say that the people of San Lorenzo are lucky to have such a collection, and walk away.

SAN LORENZO

On Saturday

(recent snapshot)

On this Adventist day of worship we pull no teeth (about thirty were extracted yesterday). At noon, a few moments after Pastor Bercián returns from preaching, two men in their fifties come up the trail from the temple. Walking amidst rank weediness, profound muddiness, scurrying chickens and turkeys, and general isolation, they wear clean and well- pressed polyester leisure suits. With very serious looks on their faces they ask to speak privately with the Pastor. So that others can't hear their conversation, they ask the Pastor to walk with them into the weeds in front of the barracks. Curiously, they gravitate to a spot not far from where I'm sitting on a rock, reading. Maybe they don't realize that I speak Spanish, or perhaps to them it simply makes no difference whether a foreigner hears their private conversation.

The problem is that they are first cousins, and now the daughter of one wishes to marry the son of the other. They've heard that such marriage within the family is unwise, and they want to know the Pastor's opinion. They listen with pained expressions as Pastor Bercián explains that, yes, there can be problems. Sometimes the offspring of such marriages have diminished hearing, or are blind, or may even be born feeble-minded.

I feel sorry for these men, their families, and especially the young lovers involved. In these small, isolated villages where nearly everyone is related to everyone else, this is a common problem. When the Pastor is finished, the men thank him and walk away, staring distractedly and silently into the weeds.

Soon afterwards a woman from the church arrives asking if possibly at two o'clock Gudulia might return to the Temple to give a lecture about general first aid. The Pastor explains that already we are scheduled to meet with a group at 2:30 for a tour of a nearby cave, but that certainly a half-hour talk can be arranged at 2:00. At l:50 I notice that Gudulia is making no preparations for her talk. I assume that she doesn't realize how time is creeping up, so I casually mention the time. She looks at me oddly and then begins preparing. We arrive at the temple at 2:l0 but no one is there except some young men practicing on the xylophone, which in this land of marimba music is used to accompany religious hymns instead of a piano. The musicians, all young Indians from San Lorenzo, are surprisingly good. Simultaneously four of them play on one long xylophone beautifully ornamented with inlaid wood, playing familiar Adventist tunes. We ask them to continue practicing until our audience arrives. By 2:30 still no one has come. I remind the others that we've promised to be at the cave at this time, so we leave and go there. On our way we pass by the home of the church member who had asked for our special 2:00 lecture. She's sitting on a rock talking. She looks at us as if wondering why we've been in the Temple.

The cave is impressive, though most of its stalactites and stalagmites have been shattered. Our guide asks us if it is possible to find figurines in such caves. He asks this in such a manner that I must think he already has found such figurines, but does not want us to know about it. Several times back at Yerba Buena Indians have come to my door asking if I would like to buy pottery and figurines taken from caves. To my only semi-trained eyes, most of their artifacts seem to be genuine.

When we leave the cave we're met by a small group of men who ask us somewhat pointedly what happened to the talk about first aid. The Pastor explains what happened. Though my name is not mentioned, the men look at me a bit disapprovingly and then one says only half laughingly, "Yes, here we are on Mexican time, but I suppose that you work on *gringo* time... "

Finally I realize that I have committed a faux pas. For, it is true: Especially in places like San Lorenzo, one simply is not expected to do things on time. "Two o'clock" means "Sometimes this afternoon, probably not earlier than three." When Gudulia had been letting two o'clock approach without preparing for her talk, she had understood this, but I had not. When the woman who arranged for us to speak at two o'clock saw us leaving the temple at 2:30, surely it hadn't even occurred to her that we were leaving because no one had appeared at 2:00. Throughout the rest of the day I hear too many references to "*gringo* time."

In the night, finally I have a chance to sit and talk with Dionisio, the man most responsible for building the Adventist school and airstrip. Happily, if anything, he seems to admire my habitual punctuality. Since the women in his household are shelling corn and working hard to prepare supper for us, and thus need all the kerosine lanterns and candles for their work, Dionisio and I sit in a separate room talking in pitch darkness.

> *"My father founded this colony in l939," he begins. (Though probably he speaks the best Spanish in town, he still exhibits a strong Tzotzil accent; however, his Spanish is easy to understand because he speaks slowly and simply.) "He settled here because in his home area there was not enough land. Here he could have some land for himself. At that time no one owned this land, so he just came here, cleared the forest, and began planting. Soon others joined him. At that time the forest here was full of deer, big cats, monkeys and* faisán *(great curassow)."*
>
> *"In l953 he decided to get papers to make the settlement's presence official, so he walked across the mountains to the capital in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, wearing out four pairs of sandals on the way. But in Tuxtla, for eight days they just gave him the run-around. No one wanted to take responsibility, and no one wanted to talk with an uneducated Indian. So later my father went to the federal government in Mexico City. By then he'd learned how government people operate, so one day he simply walked up to a big administrator who was entering his office and asked to talk right then and there. That way he got the papers to make San Lorenzo official."*
>
> *"In l96l, invaders came onto our land. They wanted our land for themselves, so they destroyed our coffee and citrus plantations, and ruined our crops. Because*

they spoke Spanish and knew how to talk to officials, and we were just Indians who couldn't yet understand Spanish well, we were very afraid. Somehow the invaders even got papers saying that they owned our land. Finally we went before the Agrarian Reform, which settled the issue by giving the invaders completely new land of their own. But for a long time those invaders made life very hard for us."

"Later I became dissatisfied with certain things. For instance, we had a government school, but the teacher would only come for a single day and then for one or two weeks not come at all. Our children were learning nothing. So we moved up here and with a few other families built this school. We asked that Adventist teachers be brought in, teachers who would show our children how to understand Spanish, and how to know what their rights are, and how to defend those rights. We also erected these other buildings."

"I got the idea that we should build an airstrip so that missionaries could fly in. Therefore a group of us men stopped work on our houses and began paying too little attention to our farming, and for several months we worked on building that runway. Every day, every day! It was hard work! But we got it finished, and a missionary group in the U. S. started helping us. We wanted to build a small hydroelectric station just downslope, where the water rushes out of the cave. They helped us by flying in bags of cement, sheets of corrugated tin, and such."

"But we had enemies and they told the government that the plane was being used to carry drugs. The Army seized the plane and put the pilot in jail. For five days they kept the pilot but were unable to find any evidence supporting the accusations. They let the pilot go but they confiscated the plane, and still have it. We had to abandon work on the hydroelectric station and now the airstrip is grown over with trees. Seeing so much work and time wasted made us all very sad."

SAN LORENZO

On Sunday

(recent snapshot)

For Adventists, Sunday is a work day, so today is our busiest day for pulling teeth and other emergencies. Once again I am saved from having to use my book-knowledge about tooth extraction, for Gudulia wants to try her hand at it. To

be honest, she's not such a good puller. She tugs and tugs and the patient squirms and groans, but the teeth too often just don't come out. A good half of her attempts end by her asking the Pastor to take over. Apparently she's not strong enough; or maybe she just needs more practice, or confidence (later she becomes quite expert). Marcela washes ears (frequently flushing out objects looking suspiciously like half-disintegrated cockroaches) and helps Gudulia. I wash and sterilize the instruments. Here is an example of the kind of thing that happens all day long:

Up the weedy trail an old woman comes riding on a horse, with two scrawny dogs following. Way down the trail I see her staring hard at us, but when she comes nearer she begins looking into the weeds in front of her horse, never giving us even a hint of a glance. She's about sixty-five. She wears the usual baggy, white blouse trimmed with red embroidery, a longish black skirt and a wide, red belt. Her graying black hair is tied into two long pigtails. She dismounts, leads her horse through knee-high weeds to a spot that looks a little more lush and thus more palatable to a horse, and ties the reins to a waist-high bush.

Then, still without looking at us, and with the hungry-looking dogs following with uncertain looks on their faces, she grimly walks toward a group of about ten Tzotzil-speaking women of her own age. The women greet her familiarly but rather solemnly. Now she stands with her back squarely toward us while asking about our cost (free) and the pain and bleeding (much, by North American standards). Later in the day I recognize her sitting in the tiny, homemade chair with her mouth wide open, explaining through a bilingual friend that she wants six teeth removed, not just the two that the Pastor says he's willing to extract. The Pastor asks the interpreter to explain that extracting more than two teeth might cause excessive hemorrhaging.

Despite the old woman's wish to have six teeth removed, I'm astonished that teeth here seem to be in much better shape than generally they were in Nuevo Limar and Limar Viejo. I wonder whether this area's limestone bedrock might be the reason? Limestone is largely composed of calcium, a major constituent of teeth. In contrast, I don't recall seeing limestone around Nuevo Limar and Limar Viejo.

In the afternoon, down from the forested slopes above us, a pair of board-cutters arrive carrying their 3½-foot long Homelite Super l050 chainsaw. In Tzotzil they explain to Dionisio that the chainsaw has stopped working. Required for producing their only source of income, the tool cost about $775 U.S. Dionisio removes the spark plug, identifies no problem, but then finds that the spark plug won't go back in. He invites me to look at the problem, for here *gringos* are honored for their knowledge about everything. Threads in the aluminum cylinder-head have been ruined by someone trying to force the spark plug in crookedly. Inside the combustion chamber large flecks of aluminum filings can be seen.

"Didn't papers on proper maintenance come with this chainsaw?" I ask? "Doesn't anyone here know about small engines?"

No. And, no. Dionisio seems to be the only alternative, and he freely admits that he doesn't understand these things much at all.

Today three people have asked for special afternoon consultations in their homes, so at 3:00 PM the four of us walk down to the main part of San Lorenzo. At the first home the man who asked that we come at this hour has not returned from work. We say that we'll return later.

The second house, typical for San Lorenzo, is a 20 x 30 foot wooden building with a tin roof, dirt floor and no chimney. Smoke from the eternally burning wood-fire escapes through open areas between the roof and walls. We are met by a tall, incredibly gaunt, forty-seven-year old man, the father of ten. Never in my life have I seen a face so inflicted with the hollow look of impending death. This man's head is like a skull with articulating jaws and blinking eyes. He says that for six years he's been coughing, and that two months ago he began coughing up blood. He's spent most of his family's money on "*inyecciones*." (Here injections are seen as kinds of "magic bullets," with not much thought for what is injected; just having an injection is what counts.) But the injections have done no good, so now he hopes to enter the free government hospital in Pichucalco, as soon as he can scrape together money to rent a horse to get him to the road, and bus money for the trip to the hospital.

Though the man talks as if he hasn't the slightest idea of what is wrong with him, surely he realizes that he has TB, and that almost always people in his shoes simply die, as did his sister eight years ago. The Pastor advises him to get a lot of fresh air, to each morning sit in the sunshine, but to wear a hat so that his face doesn't burn. Eat lots of eggs and greens, he says. And lots of garlic and onions, adds Gudulia.

During this talk children peek from beneath beds, gaze through windows and squall from hidden places. The air here is oppressively warm and moist, smelling of mothballs, baby excreta, mud, kerosine and wood-smoke. I can hardly stand being inside. Becoming nauseated, I stagger from the house gasping for breath, and wishing mightily that here all this were not so real, so commonplace, so inevitable...

At the third house the woman who sent for us lies in a room partitioned off by walls of slender poles tied together with fibrous tree bark. A pink, tattered blanket hangs across the doorway. Her room is lighted by the pale orange glow of a single candle. A week ago the woman had a stomach ache so she paid someone to give her an injection. Apparently the needle was dirty, for now she suffers from a large, feverish abscess in her rump's left cheek, where the shot was given. Though we've come prepared to drain the abscess, the woman's husband is not

at home and she refuses to let Gudulia work until he's here. So we return to the first house.

Still the man who asked for us has not come home. However, among the fifteen or so people of various affiliations in the household (children, children everywhere, crying, whining, vomiting, playing, running, screaming...) is a woman of about forty who says that her fifteen-year old boy has had severe stomach cramps for several days. Would we please look at him? He's lying there in the corner... Gudulia diagnoses the trouble as "inflamed intestines" and suggests mudpack therapy. She asks the woman to go dig up some clean mud. At 9:00 PM we'll return and show the mother how to make mudpacks.

At 9:00 PM sharp we return. (Though I no longer keep an eye on my watch, word has gotten around about *gringo* time, so now it's like a big game, and everyone laughs about it good naturedly.) In a yellow, plastic bucket the mother presents Gudulia with a ball of yellow-brown mud about six inches across. It looks like wet putty. Gudulia adds two inches of water and with her fingers begins mixing the mud and water, sometimes adding more water. Fifteen minutes later the mud is of the consistency of thick, creamy mayonnaise. Onto a clean rag about l8 x l8 inches in size she dips three handfuls of mud, creating a layer of mud about half an inch deep, and nowhere coming closer to the rag's edges than three inches. Then she folds the rag into a neat rectangular package. This is placed on the boy's stomach. Finally the boy and his mudpack are covered with a heavy blanket. Coldness from the hardening mud is supposed to be beneficial, plus the mud itself will "draw out poisons." Among Gudulia's further instructions are these:

- Make such mudpacks four or five times daily until the stomach feels better, and then reduce treatments to two or three daily applications, until the patient is well
- Keep the mudpack on until the mud hardens, unless it causes discomfort
- Don't apply a mudpack until at least two hours after eating

Furthermore, Gudulia suspects that the boy, as well as everyone else in the family (and probably all of San Lorenzo), is heavily infested with intestinal parasites -- worms -- so she advises the following:

- Each day eat five to ten raw pumpkin seeds. (Pumpkins here are completely different from what we have in the U.S.)
- For several days, each day drink the juice of two lemons
- Take several enemas of "tea" brewed from garlic and the commonly available herb called *epazote* (*Chenopodium ambrosioides*, sometimes called Mexican tea in U. S. botany books).

By the time we leave, an uncomfortable chill is creeping into the night air. Everyone agrees that it's going to be another cold one. A man who so far has only sat in the shadows saying nothing now approaches the Pastor and asks if

the thing that people are saying is true -- that someplace back toward the Guatemalan frontier a volcano has erupted, spewing out vast storms of pure, white ice...

SAN LORENZO

On Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday

(recent snapshot)

MONDAY

Even before we've had a chance to eat breakfast a man comes asking the Pastor to look into his wife's mouth. Yesterday the woman had a tooth extracted. "She bled all night," the man says with a pained look on his face. "This morning, blood all over her face, all over the bed, all over the front of her body... "

This man and his wife are close relatives of Dionisio, whose family has assumed prime responsibility for feeding us. He's not the only close family member who has come to us with special problems. Apparently these family members feel more at liberty to ask special favors of us than others, for those without this relationship generally do not return. However, they certainly must bleed and ache just as much as do the members of Dionisio's family. In this immediate family we are seeing an incredible level of disease and misery. When I extrapolate this family's medical problems onto all those other families scattered through these mountains, it is mind- boggling.

Monday becomes another day of extracting teeth, washing ears, and handling various odds and ends. In the afternoon Dionisio takes me to see one of his failed projects. About 300 yards downslope we enter a cave with a mouth about thirty feet high and twenty feet wide, mantled with green moss, ferns and such pleasing wildflowers as a red-flowered member of the Gesneria Family (African Violets). Water gushes from the cave in a fast-moving torrent about two feet deep and five feet across.

Here we find what's left from the effort to build a hydroelectric dam three years ago. First, they'd had to dynamite an access path to the cave. Then they'd built a wooden sluiceway to carry water from the cave to a steel pipe about two and a half feet in diameter. The pipe had been laid running thirty feet downslope to a dynamo set in concrete. The idea had been that as water shot from the pipe it

would turn the dynamo's paddlewheel, and electricity would be produced.

But now the wooden sluiceway is so rotten that walking upon it, as we do, is dangerous. The steel pipe is rusting away and the dynamo lies half-protected and full of ants beneath a sheet of corrugated tin. The steel pipe's lowest six feet displays a wide crack where once so much water pressure built up inside that the steel broke apart. Wire ineffectually wound around this section of the pipe tells part of the story that Dionisio seems happy to forget.

"The system almost worked for just a little while," he recalls. "We even got a little electricity. But the water coming out didn't turn the dynamo's paddle fast enough to produce the voltage we needed. We needed a bigger pulley. And then the soldiers confiscated the airplane and parts couldn't be brought in anymore, and the Americans went away. All that work... This is something that hurt us. For many days... we were very sad."

As we return to our barracks, for the first time I learn that two or three times each day I've been walking down the often-mentioned but never-identified airstrip. Though abandoned only two or three years ago, now the runway is overgrown with trees twenty feet tall. I'm astonished at the steepness of the slope up which the airstrip runs. The pilot who landed here either had a lot more guts, talent and dedication than I can imagine, or he was nuts.

TUESDAY

On our last night in San Lorenzo we receive the message that the women with the abscessed rump-cheek still is in great pain, that now her husband is with her, and that she wishes for us to come and lance the abscess. So with flashlights we make our way through San Lorenzo to find the twenty-year old woman in her pole-walled sleeping room, lying on her stomach, with her two-year old child beside her. The young husband stands just outside the room's door, nervously shifting back and forth. The house is lighted by a single orange-colored flame issuing from a wick passing through the top of a small bottle of kerosine. Inside the room another small bottle of kerosine blazes and a neighbor holds a flashlight as Gudulia begins her work. (By the way, nowadays Gudulia's tooth-pulling manner has become much more expert.)

First she injects a pain-killer. Then she unwraps from its sheath a single-edged razor blade, smears merthiolate on it and the cheek, and cuts a two-inch long incision. She cuts deeply -- about an inch deep -- so deep that when she pulls the cut open with her other hand the tips of the fingers holding the blade enter into the incision itself. Then she squeezes the area, but only a little blood comes out. She cuts deeper, but once again a squeezing produces only clean blood. Then with the unattached needle of a syringe she pokes into the wound very deeply -- pokes and pokes -- about three inches deep. Finally she punctures the abscess and copious, bloody, cream-colored pus rolls out. Though the woman

insists that she is not hurting, she whimpers constantly. The clammy odor of warm blood fills the room. The kerosine flame flickers nervously and though the situation really is not a dangerous one, a desperate feeling fills the house.

While Gudulia continues to squeeze out more and more pus, I step outside. The half moon is exactly overhead, shining so brightly that a black dog can be seen coming up the path, and the high peaks to the northwest, instead of being black on the horizon, are silver colored. Crickets and frogs drone monotonously, dogs bark and, like ocean sounds that on the beach seem to come from everywhere, all around us wash the sounds of children crying, laughing, screaming, calling...

Once the wound is cleaned and we're walking back up the slope, I think a lot about what I've seen these last few days. Especially I think about the children.

The children here, though usually dirty and frequently diseased, are delightful. They laugh much more than they cry, and when they peek at me from around the corner of a hut, and see me seeing them, they smile and their eyes dance, and their presence fills me with pleasure. In fact, in most households the middle-aged and old people generally appear profoundly tired, sick and depressed, but the hoards of children that always are present enliven the atmosphere and make one feel welcome. They remind us that life under almost any circumstances sometimes can be a delight.

Thus one person might come here and say that San Lorenzo's poverty and wretchedness is precisely because people produce too many children -- there's so many children that no single child can be properly cared for. But another visitor might point out that without the children, life here hardly would be worth living -- it is the rainbow of children that gives this community its very reason for being.

Fireflies flash inside dark shadows. Against the pale, late-night sky, clusters of banana trees display silhouettes of broad, tattered leaves. San Lorenzo in the night smells of mud, horse and mule manure, kerosine and wood-smoke. Who knows what it all means?

WEDNESDAY

The hike back to Puente Benito Juárez takes place beneath a bright, hot sun. The nurses walk out of San Lorenzo much more slowly than they walked in, so the Pastor and I are able to take our time and walk almost contemplatively. Atop high ridges, 85º winds smack us like stiff breezes in the sails of a sailboat. Escaping San Lorenzo feels good, even though the people here have treated us royally, and have done their best to make us feel at home. But, the suffering we've seen, the desperation...

At Yerba Buena, the afternoon's cool wind streams calmly through tall pines

glistening in pure sunlight. Because of the frost we witnessed on the morning we left, the banana trees' big leaves are nothing but brown, crumbled-up tissue-paper. Lots of mail from addresses in the U. S. await me but for a long time I do not read my letters, simply because it seems that some kind of violence would be committed were I to too nonchalantly mingle that plastic-filled, aseptic, bored world to the North with the mule-manure-and-mud, TB-and- intestinal-worms, marimba-music-and-weeping world of San Lorenzo.

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[Upon the author's return to the U. S. he fell ill with a severe case of Hepatitis A. Judging from this disease's incubation period, probably it was contracted during the trip to San Lorenzo...]

LEAVING YERBA BUENA

(last snapshot)

It's a chilly, sunny Monday morning. The student nurses and Doña Lilia are away on spring vacation and the workers haven't arrived yet. At dawn, except for a squawking grackle down in the garden, all is quiet. Yerba Buena looks empty and lonely. This morning Nela is heading downslope to visit her family in Ixhuatán, so I hitch a ride with her. Taking a last look, I shake my head, seeing what a crazy world it is when you can leave a place like this when it's asleep, simply by getting into a car and driving away.

During my visit here I've hardly scratched Yerba Buena's surface. This becomes especially apparent as I chat with Nela. Though I've only occasionally mentioned Nela in this book, probably no one on earth has so much of his or her life invested here as she. When the Comstocks came here, Nela came as an inexperienced girl, and though now she's a middle-aged lady with gray streaks in her hair, she's been here ever since, except for the years from 1978 to 1980 when she served as mayor in her native Ixhuatán.

Nela married Burton, the Comstock's only son, but Burton died in a car accident in 1968. Presently Nela is Yerba Buena's administrator. I've

mentioned her so seldom because she comes to Yerba Buena from her home in Tuxtla only on weekends, and then she's too busy for much socializing.

What other stories have I missed, simply because the timing hasn't been right... ?

Nela mentions the need to find someone else who can stay at Yerba Buena full-time, but we agree that that will be hard. Why should capable people like the Comstocks, Dr. Sánchez, Pastor Bercián and Doña Lilia, who certainly could find interesting and financially rewarding lives in "the real world" come to such an isolated, backward place as Yerba Buena?

The Comstocks, Dr. Sánchez, Pastor Bercián and Doña Lilia have come here because their minds and hearts are focused on a spiritual ideal -- the living of life according to the tenets of Adventism. Here they do not feel isolated at all because they see their daily living routines and good works as direct channels of love between them and God. Who thinks like that anymore?

Of course, Yerba Buena will survive, even if more government clinics open up nearby, and money from the North dries up. Government-paid nurses simply cannot compete with Yerba Buena's Doña Metahabel, whose warmth, sympathy and generous nature express themselves to patients in her eyes, and the clinic has a long tradition of getting by on very little money. The central messages of proper nutrition, cleanliness and avoidance of bad habits are, after all, free. Nonetheless, in San Lorenzo I should have liked to give enough money to the man with TB to hire a horse to carry him to the road, and to buy a bus ticket to get him here, where at least Doña Metahabel's loving care could make his last days more dignified...

Descending the slope toward Villahermosa for one last time, air gushing through the car's open windows becomes warm and moist. By the time Nela drops me off in Ixhuatán I'm sweating and already Yerba Buena's crisp coolness seems to exist on another planet. Now I'm back in the world of banana peels rotting along sidewalks, open sewers and dirty children hawking chiclets. Up in the highlands Yerba Buena stays behind like a shimmering island of spirituality, sanity and hope.

And with such thoughts, now I turn toward the North to bring to you, my reader, the news from Yerba Buena...

END