

We All Went to Mexico

The summer after graduating college and just before I married my first wife, I mudlogged for a company named Core Lab. The work took me from Laurel, Mississippi to east Texas. In between, I sat a well in south Texas, near the Mexican border. I met quite a few oil patch characters and learned a lot about drilling oil and gas wells. Most of all, I learned a few things about life.

One of the people that I met was Bob, an Oklahoma native. He filled in for a few days while another logger took a much-needed rest. A south Texas cornfield provided the location for the giant drilling rig but we stayed in Weslaco when not on the job.

“Whatever you do, don’t take the company car into Mexico,” our supervisor had warned us. “If something were to happen, we have no insurance to cover it.”

His warning fell on deaf ears as barely a night went by that we did not take the company car over the border. We spent little time in the touristy part of Reynosa, usually heading immediately for what we knew familiarly as “Boy’s Town,” and no, it had nothing to do with Father Flanagan.

Art, Jack and I had worked on the drilling well for more than a month, Mexico already old hat for us. When seven arrived, though, Bob was ready to rock and roll. Skipping dinner, we headed for the border instead.

“There’s more to Mexico than most tourists ever see,” Bob said. “We’re going to eat real Mexican food tonight.”

We parked the company car on a well lighted, albeit dirt street and paid an old senor a couple of dollars to watch it for us. I followed Bob down a dark backstreet with rows of tiny shops. Amid them, we found a little café that had no door.

“Let’s check this place out,” he said, going in and taking a seat at one of the only two tables in the place. When a senora approached the table, Bob pointed to some dried meat hanging from a rafter. “Y soupa,” he added. “This will be the best meal you ever ate, and the cheapest,” he assured me as the senora nodded blankly and walked away.

When the soup arrived, it was little more than a bowl of hot water with a few beans in it. “That’s all right. This is authentic,” Bob assured me.

The plate of meat arrived cold and tough. Bob and I dutifully ate every morsel because 1) we were hungry and 2) we did not want to insult the two restaurateurs, smiling as they watched us gnaw at the dried beef. When we finished, Bob handed the senora a dollar bill.

“No,” she said, shaking her head.

From her frown, we could tell the money he offered was not enough. She continued frowning and shaking her head, even after he gave her five one-dollar bills. The owner of the place soon joined the senora and proceeded to tell us something in Spanish that neither of us could understand, except for the word policia. It took another twenty dollars to get us out of the place and the owner still did not look very happy. The meal didn't seem to deter Bob's enthusiasm.

"Forget about that. We are in "Boy's Town." Let's get laid."

We were in "Boys Town," in fact the very heart of the red light district. The dirt street was dark and lined on both sides with tiny cubicles, each sporting a senorita standing outside, beckoning us to join them. I was more than a little skeptical when Bob made his next pronouncement.

"The way to do it is to choose the oldest and ugliest putah. Since you'll probably be her only customer for the night, you'll get a real ride for less than half the price."

"You go ahead. I wait here for you."

Bob took his own advice and chose a prostitute that fit his theory. "Three dollars," he said when he reappeared ten minutes later. "Three dollars for the best time I ever had in the sack. You better get you some of that."

"Maybe next time," I said.

Several bars and many cervezas later, we returned to find our car still safe, the wheels, tires intact, and the same senor still guarding it. I handed him another dollar out the window as we headed back to Texas. It was three when we got back to Weslaco and I took a needed dip in the motel pool. I never saw Bob again after Jack returned to relieve him but I did hear that the Company had fired him after he had flipped a trailer he was moving to another site.

I learned a lot that summer and one thing in particular that has kept me in good stead for all these many years - never trust an Oklahoma oilman, or believe a word he says, no matter how convincing or sincere he may seem.