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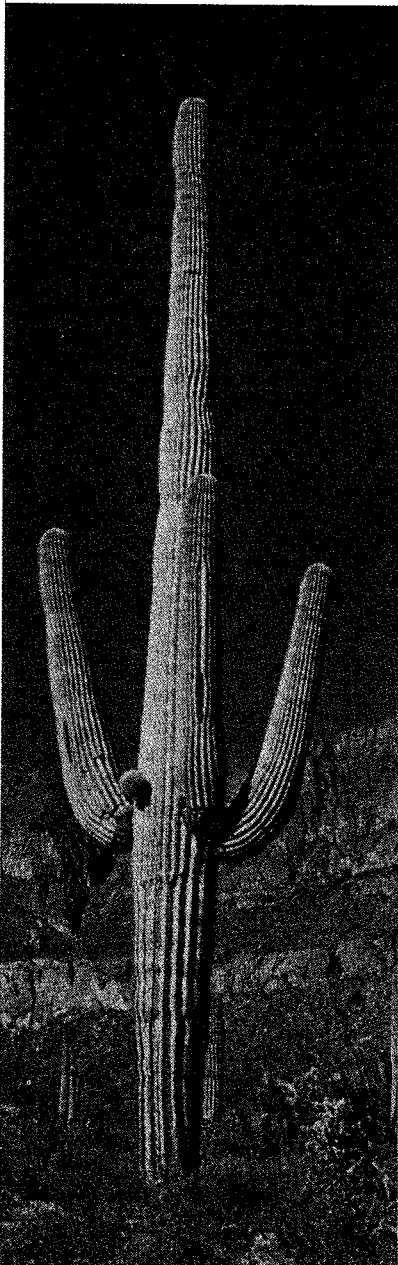
The Saguaro Harvest

Route 9, Box 513  
Tucson, Arizona 85705  
3 September, 1971

Mr. Richard H. Nolte  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
535 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10017

Dear Mr. Nolte,

I prepared myself for this visit among the Papagos by trying to form some useful expectations of what they would be like, what they would think of me, and so forth. I tried to get inside the head of a Papago, see the culture contact from his side. I cannot remember doing these things, but I must have. Otherwise, I would not now be experiencing surprise and disappointment. So I have begun thinking it through again.

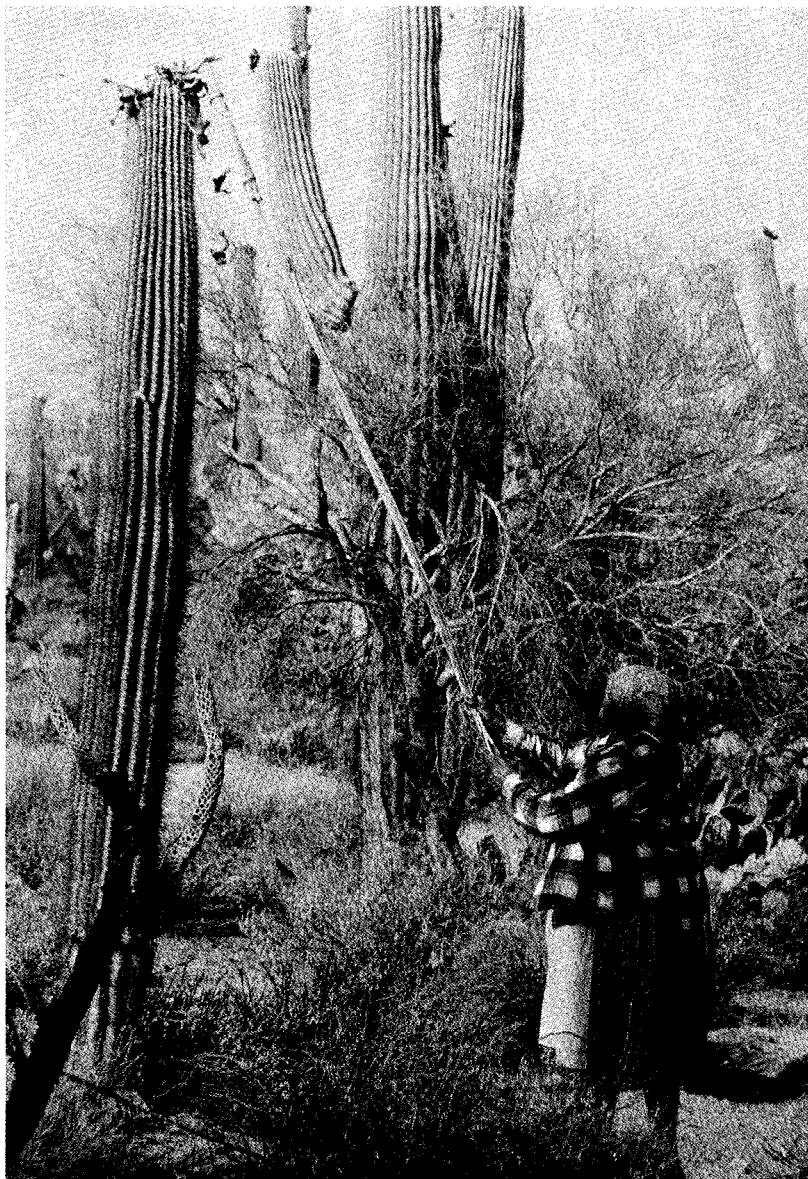


The laws describing the conservation of physical energy-- for every action an equal and opposite reaction, and so forth-- seem also to apply to culture contact. To the degree that we influence Indians, we are influenced by them. This mutual influencing of any two cultures has some violent manifestations, like war and exploitation. They occur because people feel that the contact of cultures threatens the validity of their own beliefs. The word culture has come to mean a people's stage of civilization or their characteristic behavior, but, like its Latin origin cultus, meaning "adoration," it implies shared beliefs. People involved in culture contact-- that is, all of us-- notice the difference between their kinship pattern and ours, between their form of government and ours, between their rites of worship and ours. We mistakenly conclude that these outward differences imply an ultimate difference in the essential nature of the men who make up these cultures. The fear that our belief in our own divinity might be eroded by the influence of another culture proceeds from ordinary human uncertainty in the search for universal truth. We fear that we may not really know the truth, or God, or what-have-you, that our shared belief is not good enough, and then direct our fear at foreigners. We cast outsiders in the role of enemies of our truth. In fact, what we fear in them is a questioning, nay-saying voice that resides within us.

When, in meeting a stranger, I feel threatened and anxious, my only useful recourse is to stop perceiving him and me as separate. If I can do that, my ego recedes from the space between us, lets us get together. He may then feel no need to keep his ego between us. We can stop stimulating and responding to ego-driven provocations. The genera-

Papagos, traditionally just the women, knock or pull the ripe fruit from the Saguaro cactus with a kuipud, a harvesting tool made from two Saguaro ribs. Mrs.

Enriquez, at right, is wearing several layers of clothing and long, heavy stockings to protect against cactus spines and the 106° July heat.



The kuipud is joined by two wrappings of wire (formerly cactus fiber). At the middle and tip are S-curved cross-pieces used to hook the fig-like fruits from the ends of branches and central trunks where they cluster.

tion of equal and opposite forces that keeps us from being one does not diminish until I surrender the idea that he is essentially separate from me, and that he has or knows something that threatens my self. As personalities and egos, we are distinct and separate. But our selves are not our egos. If our selves exist apart from our egos, and we know it, our selves are not threatened by the egos of others. If our selves are divine, as we sometimes sense and as religions declare, then another person's self cannot threaten my self, since those selves are One.

In the same way, two cultures remain mutually opposed until either ceases construing cultural differences as a threat to its belief in its own divinity, to its own shaky-- they are all shaky-- hold on the truth. Indians have seemed, from a distance, to be accepting the influence of the majority Anglo culture. I do not think this is enlightened mutual assimilation based on the recognition by both populations of the essential divinity of both. It is an advanced case of the domination of one culture by another, the two cultures being at once extraordinarily distinct and geographically close, destined to collide. The passive resistance that Indians present to Anglos exerts a force equal and opposite to the force Anglos exert trying to dominate the Indians. It is a powerful force. BIA and missionary workers have felt it. Some of them are broken by it. I have felt it, too, in the past six months. My expectations about the Papagos were not much good to me, of course, partly because they and I have been instruments of those opposing forces.

Last month I went with three Papagos to harvest the fruit of the giant Saguaro cactus. I had hoped to tag along at a distance, watch the archetypal gatherers draw their travois into a circle, do honor to the Spirit of the Mountains as they picked, and extract the golden Saguaro syrup in giant clay ollas over sweet mesquite fires. I would be a forgotten glimmer in the corner of their eyes, a non-reactive Mathew Brady at the edge of the campfire's glow. But, no. If I had not asked to come, they probably would not have gone at all. Without my car, they could not have. I became an active participant. In the course of it, I felt the separateness keenly, and I noticed the futility of trying to dispel it by second-guessing my friends the Enriquezes. Let me tell you about it, and at the same time answer all those requests for the Papago Cactus Syrup recipe.

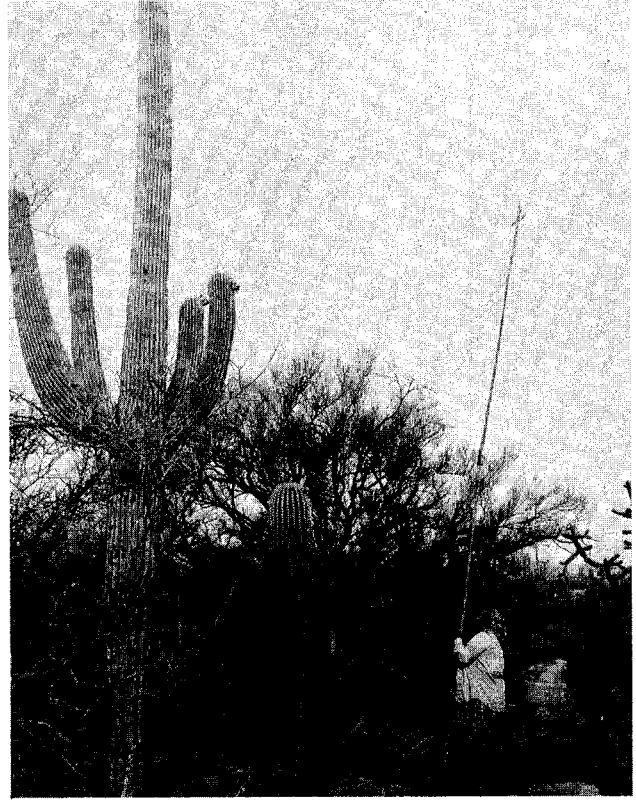
As I rounded Schuck Toak, a "black mound" of igneous rock in the easternmost district of the reservation, I saw the abandoned windmill of Queen's Well village four miles ahead. I ran through my six polite phrases of O'odham (How are you?, See you later, etc.). On horseback several miles off, Joe Enriquez saw the huge dust cloud my car kicked up. He wanted to stay out until dark if necessary, looking for the heifer with a rope around its neck, but he headed home, not to keep me waiting.

I stood in the doorway of the the Enriquez house, exactly on the jamb, obeying one impulse to stay outside until invited in and another to go in boldly as a gesture that I take my welcome for granted. Joe buttoned a fresh shirt over his barrel chest. He said a cow had run away from some kids playing rodeo, and he was worried. It would probably die over the weekend, wound up tight to the trunk of a mesquite tree. But he said nothing against the kids. In six months out here I have never heard a harsh word spoken to a Papago child, and I have never seen one crying.

"Why don't we stay and look for it some more?" I asked.

"No, I think we should go and make a camp before it gets too dark."

At Saguaro harvest time long ago, Papagos would pack up enough beans and dried jack-rabbit for a week, fill clay ollas with water for stewing the fruit, and trek all day to their hereditary picking camp in the rocky foothills where the Saguaro flourish. We stopped at the trading post for spaghetti and cold cuts and drove 45 minutes to the Saguaro National



At left, Susie Enriquez opens a fruit. At right, readying her kuipud to strike.

Monument, where the federal government permits the Papagos to pick.

We get up into the Tucson Mountains, the Saguaro thick around us, towering stickmen frozen in a babel of semaphore. My friends size them up, look for a dense growth to camp in. In O'odham, Joe's wife Susie and his mother exchange sighs and clucks and guttural expressions of disappointment. They warned me that it was a bad year for bahidatch bak, and now they see they are right. I don't. At the tip of most trunks and branches I see clusters of fruits and the flowers that come before and the dried casings left when the soft, fig-like flesh has fallen to the ground. Susie and Mrs. Enriquez grouse as I marvel. In this driest of years, the worst of the century, when many plants wither before blooming and rabbits eat prickly-pear cacti for moisture, when only the coyotes and black vultures prosper, the giant Saguaro has flowered and borne fruit. Largest of all cacti in the United States, the Saguaro survives by sending lateral roots near the surface of the earth 100 feet in every direction, catching even the lightest rains. They store water sealed in their spiny, leathern trunks and branches. A typical 50-foot, 14,000-pound Saguaro is about 85% water. When a Gila woodpecker punches his deep burrow into the Saguaro trunk, it exudes a self-sealing rubbery blood to prevent dessication.

The cattle, jackrabbits, and cottontails that inhabit this part of the desert relish Saguaro cacti until they grow needles, after the first 10 years, at which time they are ordinarily only six inches tall. Unless it is in the shelter of a thick shrub, a Saguaro rarely survives its first decade. After 40 years they reach 10 feet in height, start a first branch, and bear a horn-shaped blossom of white petals and a golden center. It lasts just 24 hours, usually pollinated by a white-winged dove or a long-nosed bat. The petals wither and fall, and the fruit grows to maturity in early July. For centuries this fruit



At left, Mrs. Enriquez removes one of the spines that complicate the harvest. Below she displays the preferred kuipud grip and appropriate set of the jaw.



Right, Mrs. Enriquez splits a fruit to remove the seeds and flesh in one piece. Above, note spines at tip of fruit.





was the Papagos' principal sweetener. Its light green outer skin is tinged with pink at the tip. It encloses a reddish-purple mass of small black seeds and stringy flesh. You knock it down, pick it up, and break through the skin with your fingernail. Your thumb slips into a warm, thick mush that oozes red and fragrant onto your hand. You eat the perfect ones on the spot, turning your back to the other harvesters. You chew the oily seeds into a thick syrup before you swallow. It feels luscious and wicked, but no one says anything back in camp. Everyone's mouth is pink and sticky. Wrapped in the sweet pulp, Saguaro seeds get wide distribution in the feces of rodents, coyotes, birds, and humans. On the average, of the 12 million seeds produced by a single Saguaro in its lifetime (usually over 150 years), only one grows to maturity.

We stopped several times. Mrs. Enriquez stood with her hands on her hips in a grove of cacti, looked up sharply at the fruit around her, and then marched back to the car unimpressed. Finally she settled for a flat area thick with fruit and free from the tracks of other Papagos before us. She motioned toward a palo verde tree that would do as a shelter and wandered off into the sunset. Joe and Susie and I unloaded the car.

Camp is blanket-rolls, pots, groceries, and water jugs piled under the tree. When Mrs. Enriquez was a girl, the whole family came to the Saguaro forest for a week's picking. Camp then was a ramada built upon arrival from the long, light ribs of dead cacti. Downwind of it they built a fire of mesquite and mounted a tripod over it for cooking and processing the fruit. This time Mrs. Enriquez and her family ate their spaghetti cold by the light of a flashlight because Joe has heard that campfires are forbidden in the National Monument. Here they build no shelter because he has to get back to his job in the village on Monday, just two days later, and it is not worth it.

In the faint light after sunset, Joe hacks six ribs from a Saguaro skeleton. They are light as balsa and strong. These he will fashion into kukuipud (singular kuipud, a harvesting stick) by joining two together with wire and attaching cross-pieces at midpoint and tip.





Susie Enriquez's fruit kept falling into nests of spines from dead cholla cacti, like the Y-shaped specimen above, left. At right, Susie at rest.

The whole kuipud is about 20 feet long, thick as a baseball bat at the harvester's end, but at the business end slim and flexible like a yardstick. He brings these back to camp, where Susie has been laconically setting things in order. I catch her glum resignation to the lonely darkness, the prospect of hot sun and a stingy harvest, the arduous weekend her husband has volunteered them for. Mrs. Enriquez walks out of the grove into the light of the flashlight, her apron full of dried fruit she has picked off the ground. She is impassive, doing this harvest like the ones before, efficiently, without Susie's weariness, and without the reverence I want her to feel in this timeless rite. Joe makes the kukuipud briskly. I think he likes being taken as an archetype, because he freezes when I raise the camera. He is a Tribal Councilman, the man in his family, a pious man. His mother takes advantage of the faint afterglow to gather some more dry ones. She gets all she possibly can in one harvest. Susie and I hang back. I have my sleeping bag, could snuggle up to the flashlight with them, but I joke about my fear of the dark and drive an embarrassingly short distance home.

The next day I arrive shortly after dawn. Joe is still in camp, finishing up his own kuipud. The women are half a mile off, in opposite directions, picking in the morning coolness. It is 88° under a cloudless sky. I spot a bobbing kuipud and walk to it. Mrs. Enriquez is standing back from a cactus, her hands well apart on the stick like a girl with a baseball bat, for control. She plants her feet, keeps her eyes on the fruit, and hooks with a slow rhythm. When she has cleaned all the branches within reach, she stoops to gather them up. Her face is always protected against direct sun. She puts the best fruit in a bucket and dried, hard ones into a plastic shopping bag. In good years these are rejected. The frost and winds of last winter hurt the hashani, she says.

Standing in a tree, I spot Susie's kuipud about a half-mile away. Lizards scatter



The fruit and water sit for about two hours in the desert heat. Slowly the juice turns a deep crimson. It is almost too sweet to drink. At left, Joe stirs and tastes, making sure it has not started to sour. It must be started cooking before it turns sour; otherwise the syrup is inedible. Below, Joe draws a peccary (wild pig) track in the sand just below and to the right of a coyote print. Both animals left tracks among fallen Saguaro fruit near the camp.



After harvesting, we loaded the kukuipud atop the car and moved to a site where fires were allowed. Joe checks the mixture before we leave, at left.



Susie stirs the mixture  
until the reddish  
liquid boiling up through  
the mush turns to a dark orange--  
after two to three hours of  
simmering. Then the mixture  
is ready to be strained.

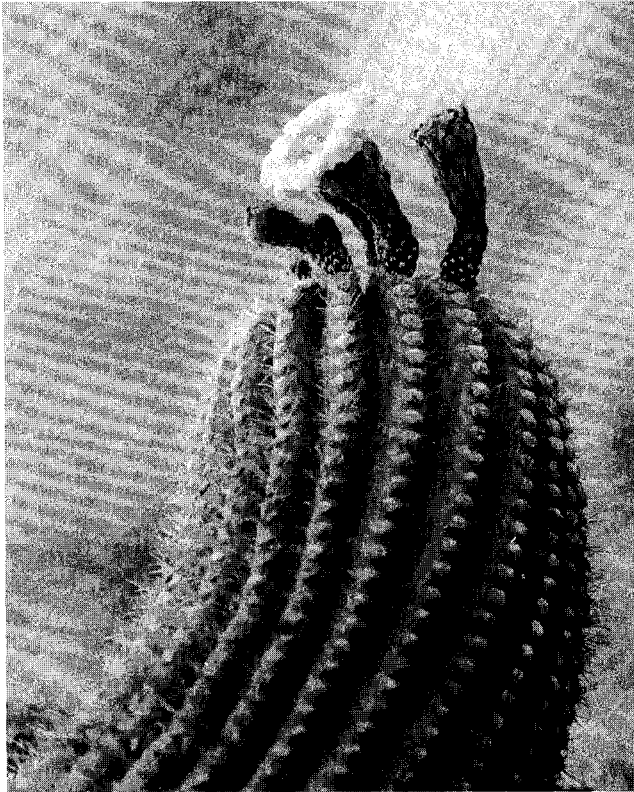


ahead of me as I walk. No other animals are out in this heat, though we see the tracks and leavings of nocturnal creatures-- peccary (wild pigs), cottontails, jackrabbits, coyotes, snakes, mule deer, and assorted mice. Susie, I sense, would rather be burrowing now, too. She has tried to beat the sun by covering herself in several layers of cotton-- skirt and blouse, long, heavy stockings, and a scarf over her head, one corner pulled down over her face, held there by its corner clenched in her teeth. When I walk up, she is gingerly picking fallen fruit from among the spines of a dying cholla cactus. She stops in her answers to my questions to draw her breath sharply between her teeth, hissing her annoyance and pain when the cholla needles stick to her wrist and the spines on the fruit jab her fingers as she splits it. "There are not enough fruits this year. It's too dry for them. You have to walk too-- hsssss-- far, and then you still don't find enough. Hsssss. What I don't like is these...." Her words trail off. It is nine o'clock now, almost too hot to go on picking. Joe is moving fast, filling his bucket and bag faster than the women, but without the economy of movement his mother has. He will not pick while I am standing close by, maybe because picking is traditionally women's work. The men used to stay in camp, tend the fire, and cook the fruit.

At noon I return to camp after a talk with the ranger. ("Nope, no fires except in our Designated Recreation Sites. Indians, too." He seemed sorry.) The fruit have been covered with water. Within a couple of hours they will begin to sour. We will have to move to a Designated Recreation Site for the cooking. The women prop themselves against the palo verde tree and listen to Joe and me talk. I thank him for his friendship. We are embarrassed. He explains that Papagos always welcome strangers, even photographers, as long as they are not trying to "get something out of it for themselves." I wonder whether everyone isn't out for just that. He talks a little about the difficulty of being foreman of the Tribal Work Experience Program in his village. Papagos are chary of young men who assume authority. Even village headmen and medicine men keep their authority only by exercising it rarely and discreetly. Joe's problem is the lazy men who goof off on the job because they know they will get their welfare checks anyway. Joe seems ashamed of them. He calls them coyote workers in O'odham, because the coyote is the animal-spirit of mischief. Mrs. Enriquez has rolled onto her side to doze. Susie is nodding. It is 106°, the hottest day of the year so far. Joe and I go looking for a Site.



Above left, Mrs. Enriquez pours the cooked fruit into a sieve made of burlap stretched over a mesquite wood frame. At right, Susie stirs while Joe pours. The brown-orange syrup that collects in the bucket is later used alone as a sweetener or mixed with the pulp to make jam. At left, Susie spreads the pulp-seed mixture to dry in the sun. Later she will separate out the seeds and grind them for oil and flour. About three pecks of picked fruit yield about half a gallon of syrup.



The base of the pollinated flower (the State flower of Arizona) swells to form the Saguaro fruit.

One picnic Site is crawling with Scouts, mixed Boy and Girl, but the next one is deserted except for a couple cooing in the stone shelter. They leave as we set up our field kitchen outside. Within the hour, the pot is simmering on the brazier. Against the law (only Papagos may pick in the Monument) I take up an idle kuipud. It turns out that hooking Saguaro fruit is miserably awkward and tiring. The stick wobbles, gets heavier, twists in your hands. Without benefit of well coordinated support from your torso, shoulders, and arms, your hands ache from the strain. You look straight up the cactus, bash at the fruit with the middle cross-piece. A few dried, useless ones tumble down around your arms and shoulders. Among them you see one perfect, soft fruit already split open by the sun. It falls in the dirt flesh down. Meanwhile Joe has cleaned two cacti and wants to move to another spot. He comes over and, acting as if he is just tidying up, picks your cactus clean while your kuipud slaps ineffectually against it. So many of the best fruit are open when they fall that a keen picker catches them on the fly. Joe can hook with one arm and from the half dozen that fall snag the two open ones. You smack three off a low branch, one of them wide open, its wet cerise flesh crying out to be saved from the dirt. Sweat drools into both eyes, the kuipud gets loose and falls beside you with a "sproing." You fail to make Onesies, again. Joe never seems to notice.

In the last hours of daylight, the Enriquezes finish boiling the syrup from the fruit, pack some dried ones away for the people back home— though Joe says they prefer soda pop, and spread the pulp and seeds in the sun to dry. I feel weary, but they have all done three times the work I have. Joe and I enjoy the outing, but we are stiff with one another. Susie is game but harried. Mrs. Enriquez and I have said almost nothing to each other all day. I have been enthusiastic, curious, serious, silly, but I cannot undermine their reserve. We have gone through heat and toil, cooked cactus and divided a watermelon among us, but the contact is still just polite, as between strangers.



Mrs. Enriquez was the final authority on techniques for cooking the fruit.

Winnie and I bring to the shelter that night a picnic neatly suited to the desert: tabula, a cool meal-in-itself from Syria. We dish it out with home-baked bread, cold drinks, and fresh fruit. The two of us eat with chopsticks. The Enriequezes enjoy the food, laugh, and thank us warmly, but we are not one with them. There is a long way still to go.

Sunday morning I drive them back to Queen's Well village. The kids report that the heifer is home safe. As I turn to leave, Mrs. Enriquez, still expressionless, puts a jar of the syrup into my hand. I tried to make the ceremonial cactus wine from it. Twice I failed and complained to Joe. He laughed and shook his head. The third time I stuck it behind the stove and forgot about it. When I remembered it, it had just ripened, a strong, clear, rust-colored home-brew.

Sincerely,

Woodward A. Wickham