

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

Tepoztlan, Morelos
January 12, 1972

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

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Last night at midnight a great explosion of music shattered the quiet of our village. For several moments we suspected that a loud-speaker had been hooked up to our window. Then a salvo of rockets burst violently overhead, followed by frantic ringing of church bells, and we knew it was just another fiesta. The music (raucous military tunes interspersed with mariachi trumpet choruses), the rockets and the bells continued straight through a dawn that found us somewhat bleary-eyed. Later, a woman hanging out laundry next door informed us that we were celebrating the fiesta of the Virgin of Guadalupe. But we thought we'd already celebrated that, we said. She assured us that we had, but that now, a month later, we were celebrating it again.

The process of trying to arrange my experiences of Mexico into a meaningful pattern is difficult, with or without rockets exploding overhead. (They are still going on.) But I do have a number of clear images of this place--or 'space' as a friend calls it--and I would like to try to convey them to you.

Big, hairy pigs wander everywhere in the village. There are three names for them in Spanish, but usually people call them marranos. You hear them snuffling and squealing down the road, walk past big litters of them nursing from distended sows, and then see their

pink-plucked heads grinning stupidly down at you from iron hooks above the counter in the lecheria. In the countryside: herds of bulls and cows running together, calves in abundance, a sight I'd never seen before, and beautiful. They are big and healthy with many-colored, glossy hides and wear long, curved horns. They're often shaped like water-buffalos in Japanese brush drawings: delicate round humps above their necks, and long folds of skin draped beneath.

Up in the higher elevations the flowers bloom continuously. They come in intense, hot colors. There are trees with big clusters of orange blossoms, poinsettias eight feet tall, morning glories for the morning and calla lillies for the evening. The rhythm of reproduction is heightened and the processes of birth, life, decay and death more visible than I've ever experienced them before. It seems as if everything that can is giving birth. The dog population out-numbers the human in Tepoztlan, and two out of every three females is obviously carrying milk. Children, puppies, marranitos, the young of every species abound--an endless parade of fecundity.

Just before crossing the Nogales boarder, we paid a visit to the AAA in Tucson and purchased some Mexican auto insurance. The lady who sold it informed us that liability insurance was very expensive for tourists, and mentioned that, since it isn't required by law, a lot of people didn't bother taking it out at all. Hardly anyone bought more than \$5,000 in liability coverage. "Some people say life isn't worth as much down there" she told us.

Naturally we thought her remark was horrifying. It seemed to express all our society's latent prejudice against the cultures of the South. The fact is, though, that in this region of incredible abundance and rapid life cycles people's attitudes towards life and death are more casual. They seem to have a more organic connection to the natural cycles of things which enables them to view that part of the cosmic drama with greater detachment.

Because life teems and blossoms all around, people have less anxiety about it. Our friend Erlinda is twenty-four and has two hijas, Judithe, four years, and Fahis, thirteen months. I think her children are extraordinary. The baby has been what we would call toilet-trained for three months. It was simple: she never wore diapers. Judithe is a complete person at four. She can run anywhere without falling, and carry anything without spilling. Neither child has ever seen the inside of a play-pen or stroller, and Judithe has several times spent the night curled up at the foot of my bed, while her mother and sister slept in the next room.

The other night at the movies, Judithe sat next to me through a double-feature, four seats away from her mother, and never took her eyes from the screen. Towards the end of the second film, after a particularly bloody Indian massacre, I looked over to find her quietly crying to herself. "Es una pelicula, no mas," I told her (it's only a movie). "Si," she replied, "yo se (I know)."

A psychoanalyst friend of ours who was vacationing in Mexico over the Christmas holidays, heard us marvel about these children's

competence and independence, and suggested that a long period of dependency is good, even necessary for a child's development. Later I thought I remembered that Fruedians believe childhood dependency fosters creativity. But the amazing development of these children seems to be intimately connected with their mother's freedom from anxiety, and it is difficult for me to believe that they could do anything but flourish in the climate of peace and love she so naturally surrounds them with.

The children seem to be getting what they most need: the physical and psychological strength to deal with a tough and continually changing environment. They may never write poetry. But I do not think they will find themselves victims of the fears and discomforts that more dependent children experience, from which they have to insulate themselves by constructing worlds where change is excluded and real growth difficult.



With my very best wishes,

Winifred Rosen

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Received in New York on January 17, 1972.