HONDURAS in the "GOOD OLD DAYS"
La República de Honduras en los "Viejos Días Buenos"

Part III – 1972-75

In Nov. 1972 I boarded a flight in Nashville to head south to Honduras where I was to begin working as an exploration geologist for the New York & Honduras Rosario Mining Co., a storied outfit that had operated in Honduras since 1878. Needless to say, I was excited at the prospect, and found some excuse to make conversation with the guy in the seat next to me, and tell him where I was headed. He was a bit older than I, and he counselled me to "be careful that I didn't become a T.T.T." I had never heard that term before, so he had to explain: "Typical Tropical Tramp". At the time he said this, I thought, "That's ridiculous." But having over the years seen quite a few T.T.T.s and found myself daydreaming about an easy life in Honduras, I came to take the comment more seriously.

I had been hired as an assistant to Vern Garton, Rosario's chief exploration geologist in Honduras, and would work out of the company's office in Tegucigalpa. But company higher ups thought it would be a good idea for me to first spend some time in the El Mochito Mine, to get a hands on feeling for the geologic complexities of an ore body, so I flew into San Pedro Sula (rather than Tegus) where I was met by a Rosario representative and driven two hours up into the mountains to the mining camp of El Mochito.

Mining camps are strange little worlds unto themselves. Typically they are in remote locations, in the mountains and/or jungles, and populated by an international crew of engineers, drillers and other mining specialists, chemists and other milling specialists, accountants, doctors, teachers and, yes, a few geologists. The nationalities most heavily represented among the actual mining specialists in these communities are Canadians, Brits, Australians and Americans. And upon arrival a new employee --unless he is a novice as I was-- will find people he knows from previous stints at mining camps in other parts of the world. It's a remarkably small global community of mining professionals.

About the camp: the foreign population and high level Honduran staff lived in a cluster of houses on a hilltop, surrounded by a fence. Married employees had pretty nice homes. Some singles like me had decent apartments, but some of us lived in single rooms on the 2nd floor of the bachelor dining hall. It was pretty substandard, but I did not worry about it, since I expected to be here only a few weeks. After some weeks in transit, my household items arrived from Tennessee and I was able to personalize my room somewhat. Among my effects was my waterbed, which I learned from a witness who roomed across the hall from me, gave the maid who came in with fresh towels and sheets quite a scare. She had never seen a waterbed— she touched the bed, set up a wave rolling across the surface, and ran screaming out of the room.

A second portion of the camp, known as *Mocho Arriba*, was where the Honduran miners lived. It was a large cluster of wooden houses on stilts (due to the steep topography) where the miners and their families lived. The houses were not large nor beautiful, but they were painted, had electricity and running water, and represented a step up when compared to the homes of laborers in ordinary Honduran towns. The company provided schools and the best hospital in the region. Wages were low by U.S. standards, but high enough that people flocked to El Mochito from all over the country seeking employment.

The third portion of the overall camp complex was the town of Las Vegas, not officially part of El Mochito camp, but economically an integral feature of the mining community. Las Vegas had been a tiny village when the mine opened, but had grown to a population of several thousand by the time I worked at El Mochito. The mine was a magnet, and the town provided essential services: grocery stores, gasoline stations, bars, dance halls, brothels, and so on.

I have a long term interest in mining history, and I love visiting mines. But I had zero training in mining geology and had to learn on the spot from the other two geologists working at El Mochito. The work turned out to be mostly boring: visiting the working faces to map details such as joints and small veins in the freshly exposed rock. The routine went like this: the morning siren went off at 5 AM and we were expected in the engineering office by 6 AM, and went to the mine not long after that. Back out of the mine by noon, lunch, and then back to the engineering office for the remainder of the day to update maps or do whatever. After supper there might be a movie at the clubhouse, or a bridge game, or other forms of entertainment, but the most common entertainment was drinking at the bar. Mine camps are never short on alcoholics. Of the several at El Mochito, the most notable was a Scot by name of Jock, who when really in his cups would break out his bagpipes and provide the camp with a screeching wailing midnight serenade.

Although I found the detailed geologic work in the mine uninspiring, other aspects of working in a mine were not boring. One day I walked out the 3 km long Raices Tunnel to see the geology along the tunnel walls. This was a drainage tunnel (Mochito is a very wet mine, with pumping being a significant cost). I was walking in wall to wall water a foot deep, but, fortunately, not deep enough to over top my rubber boots. As I paused to make some notes, a turd floated by me…some miner had relieved himself without bothering to go to a latrine. A few minutes later I walked on down the tunnel and happened to catch up with the bobbing turd; yes, I recognized it as it was studded with beans. But when I stopped again for notes, it passed me. And so it went for a considerable while…a race with a turd. Certainly not an inspiring experience, but at least not a boring one. On another morning on my way to a working face to see fresh clean rock, I rounded a turn in a drift and ran right into a face full of burning fuses. I didn't know whether to have a heart attack or dirty my pants…until I saw the Honduran miner squatting down on the floor calmly lighting more fuses. Then I began to breathe again. But this should never have happened. By the rules a man setting up a blast would have a lookout posted further down the drift who would prevent anyone from walking into the blast area. That no lookout was posted was a dangerous violation of safety rules.

In spite of regulations and safety training sessions, several miners were killed while I was working at El Mochito, a safety record that would not be acceptable in a U.S. mine. A significant proportion of the fatalities stemmed from miners ignoring the company's safety regulations. An egregious example occurred when two miners got in an argument about what actually happened in a stope when ore was shot. To settle the disagreement they built a little fort of rocks and stayed in the stope during a blast. But the simple fact remains that mining is a dangerous occupation, always has been, always will be. In spite of the best efforts of the miners charged with scaling down the back after a blast, an undetected piece of loose can drop out and maim or kill a man in a second.

Mina El Mochito portal. *"Seguridad Ante Todo"* did not always pan out.

My life at El Mochito became more interesting when the company decided I should make a general geologic map of the company's entire mining concession, which covered most of the Santa Bárbara quadrangle (which adjoins my dissertation quad on the north side). Among other things, this meant I would have to spend some time on top of Montaña Santa Bárbara (MSB), the second highest mountain in Honduras, topping out at 2744 m. MSB is a huge fault block and rises like a wall over a mile vertically above El Mochito. In certain times in the early morning sun the mountain looks like you could reach out and touch it, though it is several kilometers away. The upper portions of MSB are covered by cloud forest –tall hardwoods and conifers with gigantic boles, limbs draped with epiphytes. Elusive and fabulously beautiful quetzales, my all-time favorite tropical birds, live here. Unfortunately for the geologist, there actually isn't a lot of bedrock visible due to the plant cover, but being up there in this verdant pristine karst forest was thrilling.

Another fun adventure was a circumnavigation of the huge MSB block, a three-day ride by muleback. Being raised in Texas, I had an inborn preference for horses, but my work on and around MSB convinced me that a good saddle mule was superior in rugged terrain. On this trip I had some long days and I learned the true meaning of the phrase "*allí no más"*. It translates literally as "there, no more", as in "just a little ways more". When said in reply to the query "How far is it to such-and-such village?" makes it sound like you are just about to arrive. But I found on this trip around MSB that I could ride for hours on "*allí no más"*. I came to loathe the phrase.

If memory serves, it was on this three-day trip around MSB that I had a sad encounter. It was the last long day of the trip. I was trying to make it back to El Mochito before nightfall and was uncertain of my route. I stopped at a hut where I saw a woman with a couple of very young kids, hoping she could confirm I was on the right trail. As I talked to her I realized, with some horror, that this bedraggled, forlorn looking creature was none other than Sofía. To be certain, I had to ask her; it was indeed Sofía; she was now aged beyond her years by a hard life in the *campo*.

Mapping the western part of Rosario's large concession gave me the opportunity to spend some weeks away from El Mochito, working out of the small city of Santa Bárbara. As noted earlier, Santa Bárbara is the capital of the *Departamento de Santa Bárbara*, which makes it a town of some importance. I guessed it had a population of around 5000. In spite of being at a low elevation and as a consequence having a hot climate, it was a pretty nice town with picturesque cobbled streets, a couple of OK restaurants where one could get an edible *carne asada* and decent *Cuba libres* or gin tonics, a movie house (the movies were mostly awful, and the audience boisterous, but I went anyway), and a nicely planted central park. On one side of the park stood the obligatory Catholic church, this one with a façade that included an old wind-up clock that was driven by weights which happened to be stubby decommissioned cannon barrels. On the opposite side of the plaza was a medieval-looking *cuartel* complete with a crenulated parapet across its façade, loopholes and corner turrets. Though it looked medieval, it was built in the year of my birth, 1943, and I have outlasted it—alas, though such a fortress served a legitimate military purpose back when revolutions were led by ambitious generals on horseback, in modern times it was obsolete and the powers that be failed to recognize its historical significance or potential as a tourist attraction…it was torn down. Other town attractions included a graceful old stone arched bridge across the *Río Cececapa* just outside town. This small river featured a couple of nice swimming holes where some of the local kids did some impressive cliff diving. Finally, set high on an eminence overlooking the town was the ruin of the *Castillo Bográn*, i.e., the once impressive country estate of President Luís Bográn (1883-1891) a local boy who made good. I'll always consider Zacapa my "hometown" in Honduras, but I have to admit that I'd rather live in Santa Bárbara. Nice town!

Though I expected the "big city" inhabitants to be more sophisticated than the people of Ceguaca, nonetheless, being the only gringo in town meant I got some focused attention. The first time I stepped out of my vehicle wearing shorts I got whistles and cat-calls from the men. In these days Honduran men did not wear shorts except to play soccer. And later when I let my hair grow long and wore it in a ponytail the kids would all point at me and exclaim "*La colita, la*

The old *cuartel* of Santa Bárbara, constructed in 1943, razed sometime in the 1970s.

colita!" But no matter, folks were friendly and I had no problems interacting with them. One teenager, by name of Hugo, "adopted" me (somewhat like Chus and Mariano in Zacapa), and this was useful in various ways—e.g., it was he that took me up a non-public stairwell in the church and showed me the cannon barrel weights to the clock.

It was in the Santa Bárbara area that I first encountered a typical Honduran *balsa* or ferry. In contrast to the sparsely populated and roadless area south of the *Río Ulúa* from Zacapa, several decent sized towns --San Nicolás, La Unión and San Vicente Centenario—lay across the river from Santa Bárbara, which warranted a road and a *balsa*. The *balsa* is a ferry cleverly designed to use the force of the river itself to power the craft from one side of the stream to the other. Here's how it works: A heavy steel cable is stretched from a big tree or other anchor point on one bank of the river, across the stream to a similar anchor point on the opposite side. The *balsa* --a wooden barge with identical squared off ends, the bow and stern being interchangeable according to which way the ferry was moving—was connected to this main cable by two shorter and smaller gauge cables, so that when the ferry was out in the river, it would not be swept downstream. These two cables were not attached directly to the main cable, but each was tied to a trolley that ran on the main cable by means of grooved wheels (like the wheels of a pulley); this allowed the ferry to move along the length of the main cable. The opposite end of each of these shorter cables was attached to a windlass on one of the upstream corners of the ferry, one in the "bow" and one in the "stern". So, to cross the river the ferryman or his assistant would crank the "bow" windlass, drawing in enough cable to pull the "bow" in the upstream direction. After poling the ferry just enough to get it away from the bank, he might let out a bit of cable from the windlass at the "stern" end. With the ferry now aimed with the "bow" pointed upstream at an angle to the current, a component of the force of the current pushing on the side of the boat would drive the craft toward the opposite bank. Upon arrival at the opposite shore the windlasses would be adjusted to straighten the craft for docking and perhaps a bit of poling employed to bring her home, but *voilá,* with no motor, no sail, no oars, and only a minimum of human muscle effort, the river is crossed! After the ferry is docked and secured, the wooden ramps are lowered and the vehicles on board drive on their way. An incredibly clever arrangement! I later learned that back in the "good old days" in the U.S. such ferries had been well known there.

A *balsa* crossing the *Río Ulúa*. The muddy river bespeaks the rainy season.

Clever as it was, the river-powered *balsa* could have problems. Once in the dry season I saw a *balsa* stranded mid-stream. The water was deep enough, but there was a breeze blowing upstream that was stronger than the river current, completely negating the push necessary to drive the ferry across the river. Luckily, a second vehicle arrived at the bank from which the ferryman had just departed and he was able to pole back to shore, load the additional vehicle, which sunk the ferry deeper into the water, reducing its exposure to the wind and increasing its exposure to the current and the trip across was made, slowly, but surely.

After some six months or so working out of El Mochito, I finally got transferred to the exploration office in Tegus, which is what I had originally signed on for. This meant working for Vern, who was a pretty cool boss, meant more varied work in different parts of Honduras, meant an improved social life (I made friends with various Peace Corps members) and meant a delightful place to live. I had to wait some weeks to get it, but I took over an apartment in Colonia Walther when Terry Moore, a PCV I was acquainted with, finished his tour and left the country. The apartment was worth waiting for and several of my neighbors were PCVs and became long term friends.

Colonia Walther was a large, old stone mansion with several outbuildings and associated houses of more recent construction back behind the *casona*. The main house sat a short distance behind *Parque La Leona*, a small public park that overlooked the city. My small apartment was originally a guest house or outbuilding of some sort to the *casona*. It consisted of two rooms-- a bedroom downstairs (the building was dug into the side of the hill) and a living room upstairs, with a tiny kitchen and bathroom added on to one side. It had a great view out over the city of Tegucigalpa. It was a charming place to live and I loved living there. However, there were some inconveniences: the hot water supply for the shower was an *electroducha.* This appliance had an electric heating element housed inside the shower head; to avoid burning out the element you were supposed to turn on the water first, then throw the switch to power up the element. The on-off switch was a naked blade switch, the current was 220v, and it gave one pause to stand there in the stream of water, one foot on the metal drain cover and throw this switch and hope for the best. The temperature of the water was controlled by the rate of flow—high flow, not very hot; low flow, pretty hot. I did not take pounding hot showers. Another inconvenience also related to water: prior to the construction of *Los Laureles* reservoir, Tegus was perennially short of water during the dry season. My personal supply was limited to a 55 gallon drum mounted on the tile roof of my apartment. But by installing a float valve in the drum I could at least be reasonably assured of getting some water when it was routed to our part of the city.

My *casita* in Colonia Walther, with the historic *casona* behind it.

My landlady was *Doña Chinda*, widow of Dr. Gustavo Walther, who built the big house in 1902-04. [Walther was a German doctor with ties to the Manuel Bonilla government; he died in 1935 (Chinda was very young when she married the doctor).] She lived on the second floor and rarely came down. When I went to pay my monthly rent, she would lower a small basket on a cord down from the 2nd floor balcony, I would put my rent money in the basket, and then she would haul it up! But one day she did invite me in and I was privileged to get a short tour of a portion of the historic mansion.

At one end of *Parque La Leona* was a tiny store of the type known as a *pulpería*. Here one could buy some snacks, *frescos*, cigarettes (which could be bought two at a time, if you couldn't afford a pack), matches, soap, toothpaste and other odds and ends….IF they happened to have any at the moment. The *"pulp"* (as we gringos said) exemplified aspects of the low-budget side of the Honduran economy. Although certain items were always in demand, they weren't always available, perhaps because the proprietor couldn't afford to buy enough to maintain a stock on hand. If you asked for a particular item and it didn't happen to be in stock, you would be told *"Fíjese, no hay!"* This was so consistent that all you had to hear was the first syllable "*Fi-"* to know you weren't getting what you came for, at least not at this store.* And if they did have what you wanted, you better have small bills and change. Often I found that the storekeep at a *pulpería* could not change a Lps 5.00 bill (just $2.50 U.S.) after a full day's business.

To work for the exploration office, I needed to drive a company vehicle (at El Mochito when I went anywhere in a company vehicle, I had a driver), so I needed a driver's license. And this meant learning about *tramites*. Whereas in the U.S. you go to the driver's license bureau and get the license yourself (after passing a driver's test), in Honduras you would not do this yourself because you would lose several work days waiting in some official's office only to return again the next day to wait some more. So you pay a sort of legal intermediary whose business is *tramites,*

*A PCV acquaintance somewhat sardonically suggested that *"Fíjese, No hay!"* should replace the motto on the *escudo nacional.*

i.e., dealing with government paperwork. The difference is the *tramitador* knows people and has connections, so he doesn't have to do the hours/days of waiting that you would if you did it for yourself. It's a crazy system, but it worked: I got my driver's license without having to wait in any government office or take any kind of test.*

Speaking of driving, one rule of the road in Honduras (and which really applied throughout Central America) was DO NOT DRIVE THE HIGHWAYS AT NIGHT. There were plenty of reasons not to drive at night: 1) Cows and horses often broke through poorly maintained fences and were on the roads at night; cows in particular, it seemed, liked to bed down on the sun-warmed pavement of the few asphalted highways. 2) Drunks not infrequently laid down or collapsed on the roadway. 3) When a vehicle broke down the driver typically would not pull off to the side of the road, but simply stop his vehicle where it was in the road until it could be hauled off or repaired on site; all too commonly such vehicles had no tail lights or reflectors.** 4) The Honduran highway repair people had a habit of painting rectangles on bits of bad pavement to show where they needed repair; weeks later a crew would dig rectangular holes through the pavement and down into the gravel base; only weeks later would the holes be refilled and re-paved. In the meantime, they were marked by big boulders set immediately in front of the holes.

In spite of the don't-drive-at-night rule, we sometimes did it. It was hard not to when you were headed for home and your own bed in Tegus.

As for reason no. 1, Vern and I were returning to Tegus from a company staff meeting at El Mochito. He was tired and asked me to drive. Night caught us in the Comayagua Valley. On a long straight stretch of road I encountered an on-coming convoy of vehicles. A military convoy, I thought; perhaps there's been a coup. (As it turned out, it was a convoy of new vehicles, probably coming up from the Pacific and headed to dealerships in the north.) Thinking the convoy was military, I pulled off to the side of the road. Vern awoke, asked what was going on, and then told me to continue driving. A short distance down the road a cow stepped through a gap in the convoy and I just clipped her muzzle with the left front fender. The fender was bent and the left headlight cocked up into a skyward angle, but the brakes and steering tested OK, so I drove on…stopping would have meant paying for the cow if the owner found out (not likely at night). We were lucky she wasn't a foot further into our path.

As for reason no. 2, one night in Guatemala I almost ran over a drunk; I braked and swerved around him, then pulled into the very first motel I could find.

And as for no. 3, a mining engineer at El Mochito and his wife and kids were all killed when he drove –at night-- into the back of a broken down lumber truck on the highway between San Pedro Sula and the mine. They were decapitated by the lumber hanging out the back of the truck.

*Actual driver's licenses were a relatively new concept in Honduras. Back in 1967-68 when Fak and John were working on their dissertation maps, they were provided "driver's licenses" by *Coronel* Luís Aguilar, the commandant of *Tránsito*, who pulled out two of his personal cards and signed his name on the back of each card. A colonel being a powerful and feared man, Fak and John found their "licenses" to be virtual get-out-of-jail-free cards: if they got stopped by a cop, one flash of the colonel's card and they were free to continue on their way.

**It was common practice for drivers of vehicles stopped dead in the road to place green pine boughs in a cairn of rocks a ways down the road, especially if there was a curve, to warn on-coming drivers of a dead vehicle in the lane ahead. In the daytime one learned to judge the condition of the pine boughs: fresh and green, better slow down; old and brown, don't bother, the vehicle is probably gone now. Unfortunately the drivers rarely removed the rockpile or pine boughs when they finally got the vehicle moved.

And there were other hazards as well. I was carrying a Japanese geologist back to Tegus after showing him one of Rosario's mineral prospects that we wanted an investor to join in developing. We were less than an hour out of Tegus when darkness fell. I should have slowed down, but I probably sped up to get on into the city. What's that ahead? My eye caught just a hint of an object? To my horror, I discerned a woman and two kids trundling down the pavement behind a wooden pushcart*. I was too close to successfully brake to a stop, and there was a truck on-coming in the other lane. But I had to chance it. I could not just plow into this woman with her children. I swerved left, jammed the accelerator to the floor, and swerved back in ahead of the cart just in time not to have a head-on. I wondered if the woman had any idea how close she and her children had come to dying.

One of my assignments while I was attached to the exploration office was to take over the management of the La Vueltosa prospect. For better or worse, this took me away from my cherished little home in *Colonia Walther* for weeks at a time, but it put me back in the beautiful Santa Bárbara area, an area I liked very much. The prospect was located on the southwest flank of MSB, right on the face of a spectacular fault scarp separating the soaring mountain from the lowlands of the Ulúa valley. To reach La Vueltosa I would drive to the town of Santa Bárbara, then go by foot or mounted to Rosario's camp at the prospect 8 or 10 km away and much higher.

La Vueltosa prospect was on this dramatic fault scarp separating Montaña Santa Bárbara from the Ulúa lowlands.

The camp, formerly managed by geologist Dave Welsh, consisted of a fairly large, two-story wooden main building, with a separate *cocina*, and flower gardens around the building—Dave liked zinnias, straw flowers, roses and others. The upper floor had a *dormitorio* for the work crew and an apartment for the *jefe*, i.e., me, now that Dave was gone. My apartment had a single bed,

*Many street vendors had these wooden pushcarts that had a front axle that could be angled this way or that to make turns. The turning mechanism was a rope wrapped around the wooden roller that was also the bar by which the cart was pushed. The pusher rolled the bar one direction to take up the rope on the left side and turn the cart to the left, and rolled it the other direction to turn to the right. Such carts were commonplace in city streets and even out in the *campo*.

a rocking chair, and a table and chair that served as a work space. And wonder of wonders, it also had a private bathroom with a flush commode and a shower that featured hot water, provided I asked in a timely fashion that one of the boys fire up the woodburning firebox under the 55 gallon water drum set on the hillside above the building. There was a *bodega* for equipment on the ground floor, plus an apartment for Porfirio (the *guachimán**)* and his wife Marta and their cute little son Osmán, about 2 years old. Marta was our cook, and I tell you that waking up to the smell of freshly brewed Honduran coffee and the sound of fresh corn tortillas being patted out by hand, is a wonderful way to enter the day. The camp was equipped with a generator so we even had electricity some nights. All in all, it was pretty plush, given its remote location. The camp was sited at about 1350 m elevation, over 3000 m above the *Río Ulúa*, and the view out over the Ulúa valley was stunning, especially at sunset. Little did I dream during my first visit to La Vueltosa, back while I was still working on my dissertation, that I would ever wind up living here!**

The camp at La Vueltosa prospect.

*"Guachimán" is my very favorite bit of Honduran Spanglish! In case you are uncertain, it is pronounced "wah-chee-máhn" and means night watchman.

**My first visit to La Vueltosa had been in 1971 at Dave's invitation. We had set a date for the trip and I was to meet him at his rented house in Santa Bárbara. Due to a miscommunication, I thought we were meeting in the town and going to La Vueltosa the following day. When I arrived at Dave's house that afternoon, I learned he intended to leave for the camp that same day, and he was aggravated that I was late. He was also drunk. Dave kept his scotch in the freezer of his refrigerator, and when he poured a (generous) glass, the cold scotch would frost the outside of the glass from bottom to top as he poured (a testimonial to the humidity in the tropic air). I had my doubts, but he was insistent that we leave for the prospect, so we mounted up and headed out. The trail was rough and steep in places and Dave so snockered that at one point he rolled out of his saddle onto the ground with a thump, luckily not landing on rocks or the pointed stobs of machete-cut saplings along the trail. It was also a lucky thing that the mules knew the way perfectly, for darkness overtook us and I hadn't a clue where we were going...and Dave was beyond caring. I'm afraid Dave was an example of a T.T.T. Rosario ultimately let him go, finding employment for him at another mine somewhere in Mexico, and that was the last we heard of him.

My job at La Vueltosa was to oversee the systematic sampling of a mineralized skarn zone that occurred in clastic beds very near the top of the Todos Santos Formation, which underlay the Atima Limestone. Channel samples were cut into exposed beds and a small drill was brought over by muleback from El Mochito to sample a few meters into the subsurface. Rosario didn't really need me for this: my assistant, Santos Castellaños, was capable, reliable, 100% trustworthy, and knew more about the sampling process than I did. But of course, the company bosses back in NYC felt they needed to have gringo in charge. I wasn't totally useless, as I understood the geology better than Santos, but he really ran the sampling program.

Sometime late in 1974 I received a major surprise: an unsolicited job offer. A position as an assistant professor of geology teaching introductory geology and structural geology (my specialty) to undergraduates was open at Tennessee Technological University. It was just what I was planning to look for, but only after I had completed three years' work in industry.* Furthermore, it was in a part of Tennessee I knew and loved, and at a relatively small university in a relatively small town, just the kind of setting I grew up in and wanted to work in. I wanted to accept the offer, but felt I could not leave Rosario at this point in time. My contract with Rosario did not specify a time limit, but it was generally understood that employees were expected to work at least two years for the company, and I was a few months short of that. Fortunately for me, the chairman of the TTU geology department was willing to hold the position open for me for a quarter, allowing me to complete my minimum obligation to Rosario before taking up a career in teaching.

My last job for Rosario was to do some mapping in the area of the old Rosario Mine. Here, where the company had gotten its start in 1878, Rosario now had a project searching for minable base metal deposits at a level below the old silver and gold workings which had been shut down in 1954 as the ore values dwindled. I was to enlarge the coverage of the surface geology map that had been done years past. I was assigned a field assistant by name of Mercedes, but known to everyone as "*Pata Fierro"* because he never wore shoes and could walk any path, be it rocky or muddy, faster than anyone else. It was a fun job for me, but not easy as the terrain was incredibly steep and at high elevations good outcrops were incredibly hard to find…and obviously a scarcity of outcrops is a serious impediment to geologic mapping. My field headquarters was in the old mine manager's home where Don Bork, the current project manager, was living with his wife Barbara

The famous old mine camp of *Mina El Rosario*, today part of *Parque Nacional La Tigra.*

*I was acutely aware of the slanderous old saying "Those who can, do; those who can't teach." I wanted to have some practical experience in geology before entering teaching, and I couldn't bear the thought that someone might think that old trope applied to me if I went straight into teaching from graduate school.

and their four kids. I was part of the family for a few weeks. Next door to the house was the old engineering building, built in 1912, and we took advantage of it for office space and drafting tables. In ways this mirrored much of my experiences in Honduras…like going back in time.

As the date for my departure from Rosario approached, there were many matters to attend to. I arranged for Peter Deinken, a dear friend I had known at the Univ. of Texas and who was now a PCV in Honduras, to take over my beloved little apartment at La Leona. This was a boon to Peter, for it was such a great place to live. And a boon for me as well, as I knew I'd be hospitably received when I returned to Honduras—which I was already planning to do in the summer of 1975 (summer vacations were an important aspect of my new teaching position).

And then there was all my stuff to pack. Peter took over some of the furniture in the apartment, but I did not want to leave behind my mahogany waterbed frame or my big hanging basket chair (far superior to anything I could possibly have replaced it with from Pier 1 Imports back in the U.S.). These big items meant I had to have a big shipping crate. And tales I had heard of people losing boxes of personal effects due to crates being shipped to the wrong port or to pilferage en route inspired a plan: I would put everything in one BIG box, too big to lose and too big to steal. The box I designed was 8 ft long, by 5 ft wide, by 4 ft high. When I learned how much the carpenter was going to charge for a plain pine box, I decided to splurge and have it built of mahogany. The final product was a beautifully made box, all of mahogany boards a full inch thick and up to 14 inches wide (none of the "nominal" measurements you get from U.S. lumber yards), and all put together with screws. It weighed 300 lbs empty.

For obvious reasons I had the empty box delivered to Rosario's office, and then brought my possessions down bit by bit from La Leona and loaded it up over a period of days, and ultimately screwed the top on. Now came an amazing thing: the freighting company sent a truck and a crew over and they loaded this monster box onto the truck by hand, using only levers and other simple tools. After the box was delivered to SAHSA's freight office at Toncontín I learned that it weighed in at 2200 lbs!

The SAHSA freight agent also gave me some unsettling news: the box would not fit through the doors of an Electra, the type of aircraft SAHSA was using to move most of its freight. But, I was cheerfully informed, they had a DC-6 that it would fit into. A single DC-6 it seemed, and that ancient craft was undergoing repairs in Miami. But "not to worry" they'd send the box on to me just as soon as possible.

A few days before my departure, Vern threw a farewell dinner for me, complete with roast suckling pig…only it had an onion in its mouth instead of the traditional apple (apples are scarce in the tropics!). A mariachi band serenaded. There were toasts and Vern presented me with a carved wooden plaque. And a few days later I was back in Tennessee preparing for a new career and lifestyle and, incidentally, wondering when I might see my household goods again, if ever.*

I had moved to Tennessee, but Honduras had a powerful grip on me; it truly had become *mi segunda patria.* For the next 35 years I returned to Honduras annually (save for two years) for vacations, visiting friends, cave exploring, geologic research and occasionally money-generating consulting work with the GOH, Los Alamos National Lab, Amoco and others. Good times and experiences continued, but Honduras was changing rapidly and for me the true "good old days in Honduras" were memories.

*Remarkably, the box arrived at Nashville's airport in a relatively brief time. U.S. Customs agents there took one look at it and said "You tell us what's in it, we don't want to mess with it." That surely would not happen today. And after allowing the mahogany to cure several years I had a beautiful dining table made of it.

EPILOGUE

During the last half century, the world has changed almost beyond imagining --and to some, beyond comprehension. In Honduras, where a half century ago rural life was largely stuck in the 19th century and Tegucigalpa was a big overgrown village largely devoid of modern amenities, the changes are particularly dramatic. As is to be expected, some changes are beneficial, and others not so much.

In 1970 the population of Honduras was 2.7 million; today it is 9.9 million. To me, this is the worst of all the changes, with the many negative implications of this terrific increase in population: massive slums surrounding major cities, unemployment, and violent crime.

On the positive side, there have been major improvements in communications. Honduras has a network of paved roads that covers most of the country (La Mosquitia excluded), a change absolutely necessary for a functioning economy. In place of the *baronesas* there are now air conditioned executive class buses each with a hostess serving refreshments and a movie shown during the trip. And in place of the 1880s telegraph system, the inadequate phone service and radio messages of 1970, today cell phones abound and also internet. In 2005 I visited a tiny village that still was not tied into the national electric grid, but had a solar powered internet cafe.

In the *campo* I have noted that people seem better dressed and better fed. And there are more schools and medical clinics (how well staffed or supplied these facilities are, I know not). On a related matter, family planning seems to be more accepted now than in years past and women have more access to appropriate services.

In regard to women, one of the first visible instances of the professionalization of Honduran women that I noted was their incorporation into the police forces in the cities, which happened in the early 70s. I believe (hope) that the traditional *machismo* attitude of men is on the decline (it's been a long time since I have seen a Honduran man riding on his horse with his woman trudging behind him in the dust).

Other positive changes are the nascent environmental and indigenous rights movements in Honduras. At present environmental groups have little power to affect major change, but raising environmental consciousness is a start. An indigenous rights movement has boldly attempted to stop the proposed Agua Zarca dam on the Río Gualquarque in traditional Lenca territory. This protest led to the tragic assassination of the group's leader, but may have succeeded in its objective: in 2017 funding for the project was withdrawn.

Possibly the most highly visible changes have occurred in Tegucigalpa. The capital city today is a sprawling metropolis of gleaming modern towers, full of international chain hotels and restaurants galore. One wonders how all this development was financed, where the money came from. The commonly given answer, right or wrong, is the international drug trade. Honduras is said to be an important drug transit country, with drugs from South America passing through Honduras to markets in the U.S.

When I was living in Honduras I experienced one war with a sister republic, one election replete with shoot 'em ups, and one *golpe de estado.* Since that time regular and peaceful elections have become standard fare (with just a few exceptions). Popularly elected government does not, of course, guarantee good government, and corruption is an inevitable consequence of the powerful drug trade.

Many other dramatic changes, both positive and negative, could be cited, but my so-called "good old days" in Honduras are gone for good.

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