

Chapter 5.2 -Guatemala and My Return

I departed San Francisco January 6, 1959 at 5pm on Pan American #515 to Los Angeles, then to Guatemala City. The one-way ticket was \$143.56 and required a Guatemala tourist card for \$2.

I had sent a telegram saying that I would arrive at 6am. Mom, Garry, and Bev met me at the airport. Dad was out in the jungle working. Mom sensed that I had something to tell her and was not surprised when I gave her the news. She said, "Why didn't you bring her with you?" It had not occurred to me. She said she expected LaRue to get off the plane with me. They used to run into each other in Salmon while I was gone, and mom always liked her.

Brother Garry was in high school and sister Beverly was about the first grade. The folks had a decent two story house with a big wall around it with a gate and had a maid. Guatemala was getting two or three big earthquakes a day and it was rather unsettling. They shook the house really good. There was no doubt that it was an earthquake. Guatemala was too much like Turkey and I decided I would not stay as long as I originally thought.

Dad spent all week out on a big mountain in the jungle where he had established a small lead producing mine.

He found this location after covering Guatemala on horseback and on foot. We decided to go visit him and got on an old DC-3 and flew to Huehue Tenango and landed on a grass field. Dad met us and we went to the hotel and got rooms. That evening we were sitting in the courtyard and dad asked if I would like a beer. I had never drank in front of them so I declined. Garry said he would have one and I changed my mind in a hurry.

I had written earlier to LaRue telling her I was going to Huehue Tenango and that it was sure an odd name. I wrote, "maybe we should name our first child, Huehue Tenango, ha, ha." Funny attempt at humor at the time, I guess.

The mine was about ten miles from town through the jungle. Then it was a steep road up the side of a mountain that dad had someone make with a D8 Cat. He had a Jeep station wagon for going back and forth and hauling supplies. Where the new road started up the mountain we were going up through a big wash and a boa constrictor was hanging across a tree in front of us.

The mine was located in pine trees at a high elevation. It consisted of dad's adobe shack, a diesel for electricity, and a kiln for melting lead out of the rock brought out of the mine. The mine itself was a small hole that went in and snaked around following the veins containing lead. I could not stand up in the tunnels as

the Indian miners were small and not over 5ft tall. It worked for them but not for me. It was really claustrophobic. After the lead was melted from the rock it was poured into wooden molds resulting in heavy lead bricks that dad had to haul out. You had to be dedicated to live there and operate a primitive mine like that.

We decided to take a jaunt in the Jeep up the Transamerica highway to Mexico to buy items that were very expensive in Guatemala. Carlos, who is Guatemalan and dad's interpreter and assistant, drove the Jeep. The highway was a dirt road and a spring broke on the Jeep, but we were able to keep going. I kept seeing bodies laying beside the road and Carlos said they were Indians that had consumed too much tequila and passed out.

We got soap and a few items, had a late lunch, and headed back to the border. We were worried about the border crossing as Guatemala and Mexico were in a border war with each other. We got to the gates and the two sides were having a party together and paid no attention to us.

We flew back to Guatemala City on the DC-3 that was really loaded. I remember people standing in the back and crates of stuff in the aisle. I also noticed that the fence posts were cut off low at the end of the grass runway so the plane could clear the fence.

I went to Guatemala thinking that I would stay two or three months. LaRue and I were exchanging letters almost every day, and we were not happy being apart. We were anxious to get on with a life together. A lot of decisions had to be made about getting married, getting a job, and where to go to college. She was wanting to know what we were going to do and when were we going to do it. At this point I had no idea. She wrote that she was acquiring dishes and stuff for married life. She even asked what kind of pillow I like. I wrote back, "it doesn't matter as I am not used to having a pillow." I never had a pillow in Turkey.

She wrote that rain was leaking in the back window of the car getting the back seat wet. Max was going to help her put some clear caulk around it. She had also found front floor mats for \$5 as she was concerned about the rainy weather and the carpeting.

After two weeks I was ready to get back to the United States and LaRue. My return ticket was on Pan American for \$159.87. I paid an additional \$16.65 excess weight charge. I still have the receipts. It was Pan American flight #516 departing at 6:15pm on January 22, 1959.

We had to take the back streets to the airport as a revolution was underway to overthrow the government. Tanks were rolling on the main avenues and sealing them off. I was glad to be leaving.

My Return to the United States from Guatemala

I arrived in San Francisco at 4:30am Friday, January 23, 1959. I had sent a letter when I would be arriving and was hoping LaRue would be there to meet me. I waited for a while and decided she wasn't coming as she might not have received the letter yet. I caught an airport bus from the airport to the bus terminal in San Francisco and got a ticket on Greyhound to Walnut Creek. I arrived around 8am and got a taxi to Max and Loa's. I saw LaRue briefly before she went to work.

Dad had told me to call his old boss, Tony Mecia. He was now the President Of Utah Construction based in San Francisco. Tony had told dad that if I needed a job when I got out of the Air Force that he would have one for me. I called Tony. He was in a board meeting but came out of it to talk to me. Utah Construction had a project in Rock Springs, Wyoming. All I had to do is show up and I would be put to work. I had been spending a lot of money and figured this was the best thing to do until I could start college in the fall.

Our Plan for the Future

We planned to get married as soon as we could work it out. Since her folks were in Salmon we felt we should get married there. We decided that LaRue would quit her job and we would move her back to Salmon. I would go on to the job in Rock Springs. LaRue and her

Mother would get the wedding planned and I would return from Rock Springs. That was the plan.

LaRue gave notice and we had two weeks to kill. We went to see the newly released movie "South Pacific" in San Francisco and did tourist things. We visited Golden Gate Park, the San Francisco Zoo, China Town, and Fisherman's Warf.

End chapter 5.2