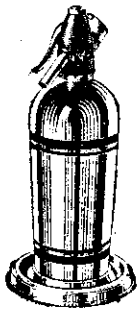


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### A COUNTRY LIKE HOME

## Un-Mexican Activities: Teach and Joyce

JOYCE was a Californian kid from a broken home who kept a lot gayer than some products of broken homes. When she felt bad she chewed her fingernails, cracked the joints of her hands, ate peanut butter and got fat, but she still managed to raise a grin most of the time. When she was fat she looked like a dark, cheerful seal, her skin glistening as the peanut butter seeped out of every pore. She was sloppy in her dress and with her personal belongings, even more sloppy than the usual Californian kid, whose fashion at present is to take endless pains over dressing the hair and making up the face, and then hurriedly throwing on a check shirt with the tail out, jeans, and a pair of canvas sneakers. This is good business for the beauty parlours and Sears, Roebuck, who sell a lot of jeans, but bad for the Robes et Modes places. Joyce was bad business all round. Some days she even neglected to put on lipstick.

The result was that Joyce was poison to the other kids, and to older U.S. women for that matter, but she got on well with the Mexican *muchachos*, who were neat themselves, but valued friendliness above appearance in others. And she did so well with Mexican boys that they were warned off by El Profesor Szekely's wife, who was American, and used to worry about the effect things like that would have on the guests. But there were, after all, other Mexicans outside La Rosa who were not under Mrs. Szekely's influence, and Joyce managed to get to occasional parties with friends in Tecate. The day she had one of these parties on she always made a tremendous effort, spending hours in scalding hot water practically boiling the surplus peanut butter out of her skin, and even longer locked in her casita going through agonies of grooming. She would emerge excited, darkly glowing, well turned out, and naturally, late. Joyce looked very Mexican at times, but she still kept a few illusions about the time sense, and particular code of politeness of Mexican men. A gringo girl can take it for granted that a Mexican will be late when he calls for her, up to two or three hours late. Or he may not show up at all. When he made the invitation he was being galante and it pleased him to see that he had made the lady happy. Even if he hasn't the money or the transport or even the desire to carry the matter further and keep the assignation, he has still provided the lady with a moment of happiness. Mexican men are deeply aware that any lady honoured with such a moment of happiness is receiving the dearest gift life has to offer. Most Mexican women are content to agree, but gringos, even Joyce, do not take quite the same view.

When Joyce was stood up in this manner she used to go and beat on Teach's door. Teach was an old lizard-skinned fellow who'd lived around the furnace hot Imperial Valley most of his seventy-odd years. He talked endlessly of deals in metals and minerals, and he had a stock of wise saws on health and behaviour. He was inclined to call Joyce "daughter." She used to type business letters for him, which he interspersed with gems from his collection

of wise saws. She called him Teach and thought he was kinda cute and probably a millionaire. He drove a well-preserved Model A coupe, an unusual vehicle for a millionaire, but Joyce figured he liked to be inconspicuous. He didn't sleep well, and used to talk half the night if he could find anyone to talk to, and so he didn't mind when Joyce came beating on his door in her finery, but without an escort, cracking her finger joints and chattering like a monkey with frustration. Usually he'd rise to the occasion and they'd drive off in the Model A fifty miles to San Diego to see a late night movie. They'd stop off for a supper of tacos or enchiladas in Tijuana on the way home, and it would be pretty late by the time they trundled into the La Rosa gate. Joyce would go straight to her work in the office and back to her sloppy living. After a few days the make-up job would wear off her face, which would again take on its vegetable oil finish.

One morning they didn't come back. The Commandante of Police drove in to report they were both in the Tijuana hospital, under police guard. Joyce had been driving the Model A and had swiped a parked car. She was a very poor driver who always hoped to improve with practice.

Some of us went to see them in hospital and inspect the list of charges against them. Joyce had a long, broken-glass cut in her forearm, but was far more cheerful than Teach, who was slightly concussed, had lost his upper set of teeth, and was pessimistic about his car. We gathered he was certainly no millionaire, but well in debt, and unable to pay fines. Unless someone paid the fines, he'd stay in jail. El Profesor's lawyer went to work and they were sprung quickly. Someone paid. Teach said it was his relations. El Profesor, who had also harboured enough illusions about Teach's credit to let him run up a large bill, said only that Teach would have to leave the country or the police would be at him again. The Commandante approved of his expulsion, saying in effect that no right thinking Mexican could agree that such an old and ugly gringo was a fit escort for Joyce. Joyce went back to peanut butter with redoubled zest after the spare rations in Tijuana hospital.

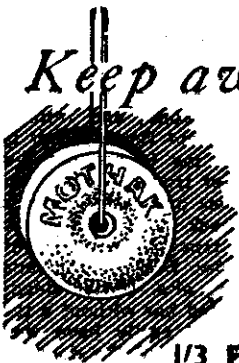
—G. leF. Y.



"Joyce looked like a cheerful seal"

N.Z. LISTENER, APRIL 6, 1956.

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