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PACHUCA
1935

The family remained in Pachuca for only about four months. Laib immediately purchased a store where, as in Monterrey, he sold candy and refreshments. (He was even able to have the onyx front from the store in Monterrey shipped here and installed in the Pachuca store.) Now, however, his business was located on a small side street away from the main activities of the town, so not too many customers came by. Pachuca was an extremely poor area, and business activity at the store usually remained slow.

As soon as they arrived in town, Rachel set out to enroll José in the best pri-

¹ Years later in Philadelphia, José would become acquainted with a couple named the Earles. The wife, Becky, who was Mexican, bore an amazing resemblance to Señorita Pulido, and her appearance continually reminded José of his sixth grade teacher in Pachuca, whom he always recalled with affection, even though he had been in her class for only a short time.

vate school that she could find. She arrived for an interview with the headmaster, and immediately announced to him, "If I pay this money for a private school education, I want you to assure me that my son will pass with honors!" The headmaster, astonished, declined to make any such commitments. A heated argument ensued, and José was promptly removed from the premises and enrolled in a public school. Here, as in Monterrey, he was the only child in any of his classes who had no Indian ancestry.

Although they remained in Pachuca for only a very short time, José still remembers well several of the things that he experienced there. It was in Pachuca that he first learned to play Mexican football (what they refer to, in the United States, as soccer). Since he was the tallest child in his class, he got to play in the position of goalie (*portero*, as they call it in Mexico.)

Pachuca was also the place where girls were first present in José's classes. He remembers them as being exceedingly rough, the majority as rugged as most of the boys there, with no femininity in their bearing. Their presence, at that time, represented to José merely a novelty, and he had little to do with any of them.

A great deal of poverty existed in Pachuca. José was in the sixth grade at the time (he had already been skipped when he had lived in Monterrey), and he was then only about eleven years old. The average age of most of his classmates was twelve or thirteen. In the same classroom, however, there also attended several students who were at least sixteen or seventeen. Many of them worked in the silver mines, coming to school only part-time.

About forty-five pupils were in his class. Most of them behaved roughly, some almost brutally, and the discipline that the school administered was harsh. The educational aim seemed to be to develop an "esprit de corps" by toughening the students through rugged, almost military methods. Penalties for sports infractions, for example, were excessively severe. Pupils were directed to arrange themselves into two lines, one facing the other, with the tallest at the beginning and the shortest at the end of the line. The student who had committed the infraction, which often had been only a slight violation, was directed by the teacher to run between the two lines, hands clasped behind his neck, while the other students pummeled him from above. The blows that he received were often quite savage. José vividly recalls that, when it was his turn to be punished (he once delayed the game by fooling around with the ball), the tallest fellows in the line would usually only tap him lightly when it was his turn to run through but, as he advanced further and further along the line, the smaller boys would attack him ferociously

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with their fists, administering the fiercest blows of all.

At the end of each day in class, a quiz was given on that day's material. Pupils unable to answer were kept after school. Soon, word spread among the students that no one was to answer any of the questions. In this way, the entire class had to remain. Many times, José knew the answers, but he would not dare to speak up for fear of the punishment that would surely be meted out to him by his classmates if he were ever to break the code. Tall boys carrying large knives would also patrol the bathrooms, forcing payment from anyone who sought to enter.

José's sixth grade teacher was Señorita Pulido, an Indian lady.¹ When José left Pachuca to move to Mexico City, it was Señorita Pulido who insisted that he receive full credit for the entire sixth grade although, at the time that the family moved, the school year was still far from over. Señorita Pulido even went out of her way to make special arrangements for José so that all of this could be correctly processed on his records.

In Pachuca, the family had a neighbor who was a Polish MD. His name was Dr. Furman Brasilowsky, and he had a son named Alejandro. (Alejandro would, like his father, also become an MD, and would later go to work for the United States Consul in Mexico City.) José recalls a couple of unusual incidents concerning Dr. Furman Brasilowsky.

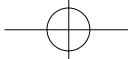
The walls of several rooms in the doctor's house and office were lined with shelves, on which were stacked bottles of formaldehyde. Inside these bottles were stored specimens of tumors which the doctor had saved after surgically removing them from some of his patients. They were a ghastly sight, and José was sickened every time he happened to pass by. On one occasion, when he had been kept waiting there while delivering a message from his mother, he whiled away the time trying to imagine what shapes the samples resembled. One sample, in particular, looked to him exactly like a meatball. That night, back at home, José found that his mother had decided to serve meatballs for supper. With the image of what he had recently seen still fresh in his mind, José refused to eat. Rachel flew into a rage and sent him to bed without supper. Usually, one of the rules of the household was that food must always be finished. What was refused at breakfast would be offered again at lunch time, then again at dinner, until the food would eventually disappear into the rebel's stomach. The one exception that José can remember proved to be the case of the meatballs, which he finally got away without ever finishing after he had, at last, explained the full situation to his mother.

On another occasion, José happened to be near the office when Dr. Brasilowsky was giving instructions to an aged patient. The doctor was forcing on the old man ten different prescriptions, and he began to tell the patient, who couldn't read, when to take which remedy, and when to avoid the others, depending upon how the patient felt. It was an exceedingly intricate and complicated set of instructions. The old man (an Indian) continued to bow and reply to the doctor, "Yes, my dearest boss!" Then, finally, José observed the old man leaving the office and, when he got a short distance away, José saw him tear all ten pieces of paper into shreds, drop them into the gutter, and continue slowly shuffling along.

Around this time, there was a scandal in Pachuca. A young woman, who had been left pregnant and jilted by her lover, murdered him. The body was found by the police and, since no family of the boy came forward to claim him, his body was placed into a large box lying in a nearby lumberyard until it could be buried. This lumberyard was where José and several of the neighborhood boys used to play. (Their favorite game was to select one of their number to climb into just such a box, after which the others would close the lid, pretending that the victim was a corpse.) Upon hearing of the murder, Rachel deliberately sent José to the lumberyard with instructions to stare at the body, telling him, "This is what can happen when you get too involved with girls!"

Although Laib and Rachel had been thinking about leaving Pachuca soon after they realized how poor was the economic situation there, the event which finally triggered their move to Mexico City was a flood. This completely inundated the entire town. José clearly remembers that, at the time the flood struck the locality, he was working in the small library three or four blocks away from his house. Suddenly, a tall, husky Indian appeared at the entrance to the library. "Suñeleh," he called out repeatedly in Russian. "Suñeleh! Suñeleh!" (This was the diminutive of the Russian name *Suñeh*, or Joseph, which was the way that Rachel always addressed José during his childhood.) Intrigued by hearing a Mexican Indian calling to him in Russian, José looked up. The Indian explained that he had been paid and sent by Rachel to find José and to bring him safely back home.

Water in the streets had already reached a level of three or four feet, although the library, which was located on high ground, still remained untouched by the rising waters. José, fully immersed in his work, had remained completely unaware of the situation building up in the streets outside. Upon at last finding him, the Indian led José out of the library, then hoisted the boy up onto his shoulders and, in that position, carried him piggy-back all the way to the house sever-



al blocks away. By then, the water in the street had already reached the level of the Indian's chest, and conditions were worsening by the minute. The house and the adjoining store (the family business) were already both overrun by floodwaters. Merchandise throughout the store, as well as tables and chairs, floated all over the first floor of the building, and just about everything was ruined. Once again, the family, defeated by circumstances beyond their control, made the decision to move away, again far from their present home. This time, as Rachel's brother Mottie had suggested earlier, they finally settled upon Mexico City as their new destination.

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