

# PHENOMENOLOGICAL JOANNE XYGER

a curriculum of the soul

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THE INSTITUTE OF FURTHER STUDIES

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NEMESIS DISTRIBUTION CO BOX 685 CANTON, NY 13617 In February of 1985 I traveled with Donald Guravich and Diana Middleton-McQuaid, our neighbor in Bolinas, to the Yucatan Peninsula to visit the pyramids of antiquity and to acquaint ourselves with its contemporary culture.

My dear friend of many years, Bill McNeill, was in the hospital suffering from the last terminal stage of his illness. Bill, painter, poet, and student at Black Mountain College when Charles Olson was teaching there, knew he would not live much longer. We made an agreement that we would somehow 'meet' down there, 'between the real and the apparent.' This is a record of that journey...

# February 14, 1984

Tuesday 10PM Bolinas Looks like we're ready And now to bed.

# February 15

Just sitting down
at cafe in front of the Hotel Caribe
First time alive in evening Merida.
Cervezas on top terrace
Romantic full moon accompanied by frenzied
jack hammers
drowning out conversation.
Diana loses her bag
(with everything in it)
but finds it back by the table
We all vow to be more
Careful.

# February 16

Merida is hot and muggy and full of rushing cars. We're still trying to find the 'right' hotel room, price and all.
300,000 inhabitants.

Our room has an overhead fan which Donald and I bend to walk under--looks decapitating. I make notes--5:30PM 160 pesos to the dollar. The Mexico City newspaper says Ethel Merman has died.

Going to Santa Lucia Park to hear a poet lady we see 'the government' pressing into a new white columned building next to an old stone cathedral. Everybody is dressed in white short sleeved shirts. We think they look like dentists.

full Moon thru Acacia Merida Music

--Santa Lucia Park

# February 18

I notice a pretty girl tripping and falling and it's Sara! with Joe. Back from Palenque and right on time! We all go On the Town and have two lunches and one dinner.

# February 19

The four of us meet in Progreso, the port town on the Gulf 20 miles away, and drink rum and fresh coconut milk on the beach, stretching out and looking around.

Is this a good place to stay for a while? A German man who has the well muscled legs of a walker gives us the name of a good hotel here, with a proprietor who speaks English.

# February 20

Note to Bill McNeill

from Miss Kids.

Me, I just sit in my place
by the newly laid shrine
on blue bandana with banana
and Monte Alban Mezcal really early
from noon now 2 o'clock chat chat.

Waiting thru purple bougainvillea blue cloud sky windy afternoon I feel

for Bill's new birth.

My phenomenology waits. The wrath of Juana' and tears from colonial times in Mexico, Juana Ines de Asbaje, the great poet.

Born of a Spanish father and a Creole mother in the middle 1600s near Popocatepetl she is the first truly Mexican poet of New Spain, blending the Old World and the New.

In her miracle play, *The Divine Narcissus*, she argues that the sacrifice of the Mexican corn god, and the ritual in which his image shaped in corn dough is eaten, anticipates the Christian symbolism of the death and resurrection of Christ and the Sacrament of Communion. This idea which favors the native Indians was a big no-no to the Catholic Church. She struggles thru her life with compassion and talent in intellectual pursuits, not granted to women.

'I began studying grammar, and my eagerness was so intense that I cut off four or five inches of my hair, which is a natural adornment in women.

I measured how far it had reached before, and made a rule that if it grew that much again before I knew some particular thing which I had determined to learn while it was growing, I would have to cut it again as a punishment for my stupidity...

for it did not seem to me reasonable that a head should be clothed in hair and naked in knowledge, which would have been a more becoming adornment.'

She becomes a nun, but runs into trouble with her mind, 'I thought to flee from myself but wretch that I am
I took myself with me.'

She writes many many poems, but the Bishop tells her it's all anti-Christian vanity and takes away her books and papers. She dies nursing plague victims at the age of 43 on April 17, 1695.

Her poem "To A Linnet" tells the story of this little bird who gets eaten by a hawk for breakfast:

Sweetest linnet, mournful little wing: scarcely had he seen the enchanted dawn than, at the first full throttle of a tune he discovered death, and lost his song.

# February 21, Tuesday

At Uxmal, 8:30 AM, in front of the Pyramid of the Magician.

The sky is filled with swallows catching early morning breakfast.

Every one zoops up the impossibly steep steps to the top and Don does too-and now he is down again in a fine mist of appearance.

As legend has it, this pyramid, Adivino was constructed by a dwarf with supernatural powers.

The temple's now inhabited by swallows, iguanas. A black bird with scarlet-orange wing and head markings.

At the Temple of the Phallus Quietly 11:15 with my Japanese fan

The jungle here indeed exotic: ferns, cactus gumbo limbo, bromiliads, mimosa, and gold flowers on dark unleafed branches

Chac gives us some afternoon rain and we wait in the Temple of the Turtles
And under a spreading tree.

# February 23, Thursday

We are on the way to Dzibilchaltun, a very large and very partially restored site of approximately 20 square miles, occupied continuously from 1000 BC until the Spanish conquest. Dzibilchaltun means 'where there is writing on flat rocks.'

2PM in front of the 'Temple of the Dolls' with its most peculiar restoration which plops in two front windows.

On a most fortunately overcast day which shields us from the heat. A large cenote near the entrance continues a long way underground. Supposedly all the large cenotes in the Yucatan mysteriously connect up underground.

Iridescent green snakes in that scrub won't kill you, but they'll make you very sick, says fat American lady carrying a stick.

# February 24, Friday

Reading *Serenade* by James M. Cain, a fast moving classic, which has the famous iguana stew recipe. And worry about my funky wardrobe falling apart.

T-shirt on bearded gringo in Progreso:

'Kill everyone and let God figure it out.'

Skull, crossbones and green beret float under that slogan.

# February 25, Saturday

I read Olson's Mayan Letters and fall asleep. We all go to a funky cantina and have a beer and some very strange little snacks made from intestines and beets.

Returning to the hotel we prepare for Sara's going away party, by drinking tequilla and soda water. Several hours later and about the time I am explaining the meaning of religion to Sara, Donald announces that the room is 'borracho.' His voice sounds very clear and illuminated. We are all vastly amused at our condition and carefully go out into the night for supper at The Rodeo, a small place decorated in American Cowboy style, with a big poster of Tonto.

# February 26, Sunday

And everyone looks a bit wan this morning on the beach...We've moved downstairs to a normal room which doesn't look like a good idea from Bucky Fuller. I finish rereading *Mayan Letters* and muse about the Yucatan 30 years ago, when Olson was here. So much emptier, no big tours from Florida.

Sara packs and leaves for Merida. Anxious today, a little inferma, Bill McNeill?

Dreams last night were hideous nightmares in which I am evil murderer. I kill three or four people. All the negative aspects demonically crowding to the fore.

# February 27, Monday

And what nightmare dreams last night againenough to wake me up I am so awful. All these mad, bad dreams are destroying! I must take refuge!

Returning to sleep I dream I am at Dotty and Ray's where I am using their typewriter on the bottom shelf in the kitchen as a little toilet. Dotty has shouted at me from the dinner table about the planning commission meetings. She is very angry at me.

Talking to Ed Dorn who is speaking of brevity and directness--a nearby critic points to his cynical direction.

Small groins off Bolinas Beach. Gwenn Spangler in front of new glassed-in beach eating establishment has nervous breakdown. The Coastal Commission has obviously been paid off to allow this. White linen tablecloths. A salad is being served to an elegant black couple. 'Look how sloppy it is' she says critically, 'the watercress is falling off the plate.' The new partners, a young man and woman, are very direct and energetic. What's to become of Bolinas?

Early morning coffee, glad to be rid of dreams, followed by walk on beach to west of Progreso's mile long pier, picking up shells for Art Okamura's birthday. We see rushing clouds come in from the gulf to cover the sun and it rains while we pack to return to Merida.

# February 28, Tuesday

To go to Chichen Itza. First read about in Richard Halliburton's book in Upper Darby Pennsylvania Junior High School 1940s when he jumps in the Sacrificial Pool and is knocked deaf and dumb for three days.

The first class bus is very comfortable behind the driver's seat and we cruise there in two hours.

The site was brought to world focus when visited in the early 1800s by John Stephens

and Frederick Catherwood. Edward Thompson, U.S. Consul to the Yucatan and an archaeologist, at one time was the sole owner of the entire site, reportedly bought for \$75. He does excavations there from 1895-1920 and dredges the Sacrificial Pool finding many gold objects and bones of women and children.

Sylvanus Morley and Eric Thompson convince the Carnegie Institute and the Mexican Government to restore some of the ruins from 1924-1937, labor coming from the Mayan Chamkom.

These temples were classic Mayan until about 889 and then the 'Barbaric Toltec Splendor' of the Itzas arrive to take over.

The day is very windy and cold. Thousands of tourists from all over the world unload from buses for a quick tour.

It starts to become hilarious. People with their comments in many languages. An elderly German couple: 'The pyramids in Egypt are much better.'

Constant flow up and down
Kukulcan's Pyramid
A norte blowing and Don blowing
his nose.

Like human karma chain
with U.S. help in restoring
this greatest of Mayan Toltec attractions
Teenagers of U.S. galloping
up and down on
history's past conquests.

I immediately challenge myself to El Castillo's top

And once there, weak legged, wind blowing terrified to walk around the temple at the top for fear I'll fall off

want immediately to descend while I can. What vertigo! Holding on to the chain, praying and trembling I descend backwards down the narrow steps, remember the human sacrifice practiced by the Itzas.

I have rubber legs for the next four days.

The Sacrificial Well is crowded with tourists. Plunk!

We sit down at a refreshment stand and write a postcard to Gin John.

At the Platform of the Jaguars and Eagles, stone carvings of the famous eagle with heart in his talons, and jaguar with heart in his claws, and on top of the hearts, a flower.

Treading softly behind the Nunnery In old Chichen Itza I meet Leslie Scalapino

Blue and white flowered dress and webbed plastic shoes, she's flying with friend Tom for four days before she flys to Bard in New York for readings. I tell her to say hello to Alice Notley and Anne Waldman.

Returning to Casa Bowen we have early bed and easy fiction.

# March 5, Monday

Means waiting from 1PM to 11PM hanging out in Merida until our train leaves for Palenque. Spent in the Cafe Express, the Zocalo, Hotel Caribe courtyard, Los Alemendros the great Yucatecan restaurant, and finally the train waiting station with a romantic novel set in the last century China and England with oodles of jewels and costumes and affluence.

Our sleeping compartment, an old American Pullman, is very self contained with sink, toilet, undrinkable water, a nicely made pulldown bed, and no springs! Do we ever bounce thru the night!

# March 6, Tuesday

Morning on the train, with service of hot coffee. A herd of white cattle, countryside thatched cottages. Across the aisle from Bob and Andrea from North Carolina.

Early morning dream has Lucy Rose taking Nancy and Dotty and I on a special ride to the Bolinas Beach in her Volkswagon Bug-- right on to the sand.

And we board a ferry boat and arrive in North Carolina. She's a little worried that her charge card maybe won't cover it all, but we are her guests over there in the river woods

black faces pressing to the window. She has a new baby with red hair-- how did that happen Lucy?

I try to call Bill McNeill's mother who lives there, but remember she has died, even tho I see her face.

--Little Villages and rolling hills on the way to Palenque.

#### 12:40 PM

At Palenque now, having visited the Amazing Temple of the Foliated Cross in all its flowering fecundity-etched on stone in the back wall panel is the Young Corn God.

Donald is striding around, and blowing his nose, while I envy his agile enjoyment of this green mist beauty.

Well True Confessions Teenage History No Artist, No Personality.

Proud gorgeous history of Amnesia fat fellows

Little Releases in time-space personal to all, I suppose, and where are the iridescent beetles.

This afternoon the attendant
with his peaked cap at the Temple of the Sun
is studying some lessons
when the Germans shake
the lemon tree vigorously at the entrance
of the path into the jungle
So white fragrant blossoms fall
to the ground

He jumps to his feet and blows his whistle sharply. They wave their hands, shouting merrily and go on in.

(I can't figure out his motives for blowing the whistle on those loud souls. Don't shake the trees?)

#### March 7, Wednesday

The great ruler Pacal is buried in the Temple of the Inscriptions. He ruled from 615 - 683 AD and died in his eighties. His tomb with its grand sarcophagus was discoved in 1956.

It is raining.

We have our straw hats
and our clear plastic capes.
We have gone
to the top of the Temple
of Inscriptions and down
to the Tomb of the Great Ruler
Pacal.

I am making a place in the doorway of the Jaguar Temple in the jungle.

A river runs below the foot of this place and the trees and vines are deep and lush and green.

Monstera, birds nest fern, bromiliad, ceiba tree, and an arm thick vine reflect my attempt to display them in the form of this body watching The Temple behind my back
The room in which I sit flashes gold thru the satiny silver air

And the iridescent blue

Butterfly is folded

up today under umbrella leaf

The room is reflecting
Looking thru this mind
Listening, tidying up, seeing
Top rustle of leaves as big snake
Rushes down to the stream
in rain time.

Don has walked to the top of the jungle ridge to a clearing and a little settlement of Mayans. 'What are you doing here?' 'Well, I'm a Botanist.'

Seated by the side of the Count's Temple fourteen toucans fly by black in grey sky and

Black head, white eye band Chestnut back, gold chest Insect catcher

A real Meditation Temple Garden

As we get ready to board the jitney back to town five o'clock closing time, an American camper truck pulls up and a pleasantly plump white haired lady jumps out asking excitedly

'Where are we! What's the *name* of this place!' March 8, Thursday

Morning Temple of the Cross

The Guardian of the Temple is a Butterfly we call the Ambassador

The Ambassador greets us sits on my hand then Don's where he stays while Don takes several pictures of it on his finger with Sun Temple backdrop. Eats a grain of sugar from sweet bun gets its proboscis stuck and goes sugar stoned for a while

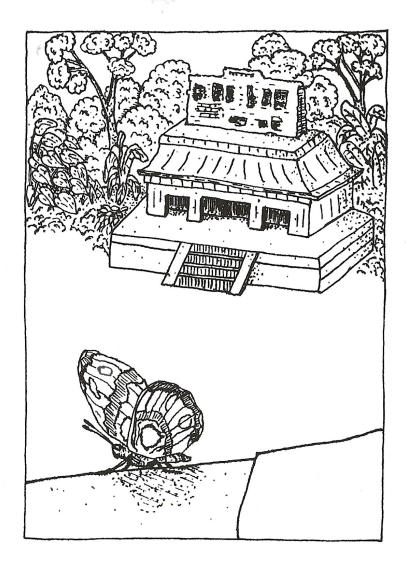
A wonderful jeweled ornament on the light straw hat, on the very finger that writes this now.

The continuing embellishment of Life in this ancient Epitome of grace

Our eyes are blown up

Long human calls
away in the jungle
repeated over and over dying
wails, mournful,
elder

And then the Germans
come loudly taking over
the territory and enter into
the jungle path, their voices
first muted by
the trees make loud sound to cover
their unfamiliarity to
keep together a noisy
assertive bevy.



Then friend butterfly is back in brown and red and yellow the most beautiful guard of this Temple.

Get in line for tickets at 9 PM. We don't get the last of the pullman reservations because of those 'pushy' Germans and are content with First Class Especial. Except that Don looks grumpy and tired sitting on train platform in straw cowboy hat since the train doesn't arrive until 11:30. Lucky me with an adventure book.

March 9, Friday

#### Morning 6:30 AM

Coffee comes thru and we have survived the night! This is first class *especial* and you've *got* to have the air conditioning on, and it's insanely *freezing*! We put every piece of clothing with us on, and wrap our rain plastic over us, and try to drowze thru the night.

The rural countryside, thatched roofs of palm, little piggies under freight trains permanently stopped.

Dreaming about Ebbe and Don as I awakewho have just made love to this lady--A great and profound experience says Don. 'Nothing,' thumbs down, says Ebbe. And so goes the world and beautiful memories of Palenque

living ruins lichen growing walls

always another

turn brings perfect vista

March 12, Monday

Wake early, have coffee, and get bus to Chixulub, 3 miles east of Progreso on this Yucatan coast. Mile after mile of fancy empty beach houses. Two beautiful wooden galleons under construction for lagoon tours somewhere.

A few miles on we find an empty sandy place to sit down for a while on this hot sunny day.

# She-shi Chixulub

Bright white sand
Dark blue sky
Thin band of blue
green
aqua marine
On horizon
& light green
olive stretches
Soft low waves
at our feet are white
And long white streaks
in the sky.

'I bet Larry Eigner

would like it here' and Bob Grenier and Kathleen too for this day at *this* beach.

Just let that gold butterfly wing from Palenque fly away from notebook pages down Chixulub Beach.

Walking back to town along the road, a few peeks at lovely thatched roofed houses tucked in coconut groves, stick fences, white sand ground, swept all around.

Grand architectural mansions, cement bungalows. Development on its way.

March 15, Thursday

# Isla Mujeres

At Merida bus station waiting for 7 o'clock bus to Cancun. Rising at 4:10 with dreams of broken down Mexican courtyard and building at night. Two kittens keep getting tied up to be in front of firing squad which consists of Duncan McNaughton and Jon Bradley.

--Firing squad for the kitties.

Keep memory compassionate of all the interconnections of people one has loved and known.

March 16, Friday

At Garrafon Reef
Swimming with mask and snorkle
and fins on coral reef in clear
glass like water to see
gold and black striped fish
flit by.

We find our own little niche of sand and coral amid the masses of snorklers on this tiny famous reef.

Tour boats from Cancun empty and load up Americans for a stop I see an avenue of 30 swimmers go by...

Charles! Use some imagination...
Well it's hard to have imagination when you're getting so many first impressions

Our Lampara de Mesa Lampshade is a conch shell

The island is littered with caracol shell, must be no protection for them

Little streets of toy town Isla sand and brick teeny boutiques, & homes with T.V. sets and hammocks

Super torta from happy young lady in lime green hole in the wall.

We sit in two chairs on the empty roof top and view the moon and town all so close together

Very few cars on Isla Mujeres, mostly motor bikes and bicycles.

6 PM in our Room--Reviewing this early morning's dreams...

#### In Memorium for John Wieners

A beautiful inner atrium rotunda domed room with Steuben & Art Deco glass on tall stands in shades of green, white walls, His favorite things --A fitting memory, says a visitor.

In the hotel across the street like a hymn the gringos sing Happy Birthday Dear Karen with its dying falls and harmonies Happy Birthday to You.

Bill's room: Bright, Cheerful
with plants. The great Japanese
flower arrangements.

The Stud. The Ambush. The studios.
I'll be keeping care
of your memory

No, you are not free from the memories of others, Ted Berrigan...

Jeannie Maxey shows me a pin
of dove wings
she will copy into a design
for a book cover
for a young boy who has diedSo sad. Write something
for his book.

# March 17, Saturday

The remains of the little Mayan temple to Ixchel, moon goddess this morning in the rain-- a dramatic perch on the southernmost end of the island.

The taxi driver stops on the way to pick up a knife on the road.

Full moon rose 7:30 irregular orange behind cloud confused with horizon lights becomes dramatic red gold vehicle for Sun's reflection, rising swiftly

# March 18, Sunday

Like the past two mornings we have huevos rancheros (always different) and coffee beside the tiny mercado of Isla.

Our last stroll along the island's windward side, we found some sun glasses, just fine for Don, made in Korea.

When we board the 10 o'clock ferry for the mainland I see Orientals, so I make Don take his glasses off, in case they're Koreans who will say, 'What are you doing wearing my sun glasses!'

The bus to Merida hurls along the road past the cunningly thatched Mayan houses, with sweet little doors--walls of sticks neatly lined up, stone or white plaster, set in palm groves; chickens, pigs, little gardens; and Mayan ladies in white skirts and overblouses embroidered round the neck.

Long dark hair never cut. Rebozos always with woven flecks of white.

Arriving in Merida all the markets and shops are closed up tight with streets empty of the usual busy press of people and vendors.

Until we reach the Zocalo with Sunday strollers and buy the English *Mexico City News*. Board the bus to Progreso and get a little plastic bubble room at the Miral Mar -- everyone is at the Beach today out here.

Muchos Gentes.

Diana is out visiting on a boat nearby for dinner, leaving a note.

She gets back after eight, & I wake up and go to her room to read the letter from Sara saying Bill died the Morning of March 10, in his sleep.

Go out with the dream. A sweet and generous gentleman.

March 19, Monday

Running parallel thoughts over Bill's last days and ours in Palenque-the Butterfly Guardian, transcendental clarity

A visit to a new restaurant with glaring florescent lights clean and hideous and we vow *never* to return again.

# March 21, Wednesday

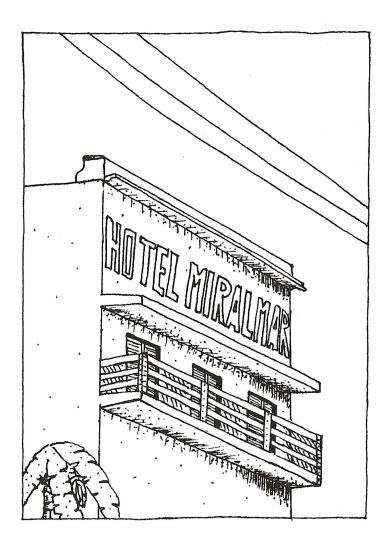
Spring Equinox when everyone flocks to Chichen Itza to see the royal snake descend the huge pyramid.

Dreams have me visiting with Nancy, and Gin John who is entertaining Magda. And two gay ladies who run a bookstore in their home but seem to have dropped the poetry section. Trying to find a place to put a small bundle of gardening tools. Leave them in Margo Doss's Bolinas basement, where Sandy has left his bed unmade. Sister Margaret around there. Simone has some sort of accident with a Mexican truck, drawing lots of attention to herself and gets Bill Kornblat, the Bolinas painter, to help her translate. I must return to my car to pick up Gin John--

And get a wonderful ride on the back of a shining black horse behind a handsome Mexican whom I hold on to. The horse moves so easily. Galloping, the motion is superb, I shift my weight slightly.

We pass emerald green fields, interspersed with dry yellow grass fields that are to be burned. An adjacent dry grass field might catch fire, and the rotund mustachioed Mexican foreman rushes over to see it doesn't spread. Near the Olema Cemetary. We are on the way from Pt. Reyes to Bolinas.

Marcelo, our hotel keeper, says there are white long-haired monkeys here in the wild jungles of the Yucatan, like Orangutangs, called Saraguato.



Diana: 'I've fucked up again.' Cleaning a spot on her wall it gets bigger and bigger. 'They'll have to repaint the entire room.'

March 24, Saturday

Swimming at Progreso Beach, the day is hot. Cool coconuts. Top is thwacked off, straw inserted, taken from cooler at stand run by three little boys today. Who never go to school?

Diana gets letter from Shao, he can't afford to leave. Ed P. having big party March 18 at 'Joanne's'. Bill McNeill's funeral to be at RCA first week April.

'I don't want to go back.

I want to go on.'

What really to pay attention to.

What drivel in the 8:30 pent up evening Donald reading the spy story holds him hard as life now the rain has stopped and there isn't much else to do. Charles Olson line back to *Mayan Letters*, Allen Ginsberg on the Adivino, Bill McNeill's Red Tori,

Vermillion the gateless gate.

We lay on the Beach a long time and swim

March 25, Sunday

They're parked in a big
semi rig across the street, no load on
the back Sunday night courtship
a hand pats the back of her brown
white bloused body, later her head
of black hair lies on the open window
ledge of the truck door; immaculate white

clad Sailors with night sticks walk by in night patrol stroll across the street from this table which peers now over the balcony...

Little Yucatan parrot on the Unicorn today a 32 foot sailboat at Puerto Abrego's dredged out harbor at Yucalpeten, the northern tip of this peninsula. Bonnie and Steve getting their boat worked on,

to sail on with their bright green bird friend. They lost another one at Sea, nowhere to rest when it flies off and they find its body 20 minutes later floating on the waves

-- big water, small bird...

March 26, Monday

See Bill McNeill

talking to Dr. John Doss last night in my dreams, he is heavy, almost fat, but his eyes are dark colored, like someone with hepatitis. In good spirits he is showing a canvas painted in two parts

of a Moon light path across the waters in silver and gold, from one existence into another.

He is very proud of this painting.

Adolescent futzed the delightful fish Don brings to someone in shrunken white pants, El Salvador's election newspaper Monday morning coffee gringo's search for meaning of Spanish in between septic smells and Yankee California dope grown dollars that allow the privileged school of Mayan Yucatan English textbook Wa Wa brain.

A longer desire for Spanish still, to take me down to the politics heart and tongue of books I still pass up.

Pop! Pop in the 9 o'clock hotel door small Alligator Leg from young boy this morning looking to open beer bottle on inside Volkswagon door at beach front road for his father.

So Cool Donald quickly offers his Swiss Army knife opener. The boy looks up annoyed, Amazed! Thanks a lot as he flips off the top and Pop on the wall says Otra Mas and passes it on to us as we walk the round cold Corona back to Room #2.

# March 28, Wednesday

The heat seems almost fatal as Panama hat and Margo Doss's tablecloth are walked thru the noon sun where Diana meets us at Casa Bowen table with Tequilla. Farewells are said amid Caribe's outside patio dinner and two senseless plastic bags purchased for packing non-existent objects. A little wooden violin.

# March 29, Thursday

We depart via taxi, plane up and down to Mexico City, Puerto Vallarta, Zihuatanejo, San Francisco. Zip thru customs and Immigration and wait for Edward who takes us straight to Bolinas and house as we left it.

Dream this morning has my Mother and I having dinner. My Mother asks, How is your little daughter, did she get better?

No, she died. Ah! Tears fall.

Bill Brown is having fun, driving around...

