



# Romancing the Foam No. 120



It's about 42 years or so ago from today – give or take a few weeks and I'm in Corpus Christi, Texas. I am the Farmworker Energy Conduit Coordinator for Federal Region 5. It is the longest job title I have ever had. I funnel federal energy grant money to

farmworker organizations in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota. I'm in Corpus for a National Association of Farmworker Organization annual conference and I have shown up a week or so early and I'm in a bar and see a map and realize that Mexico is about the length of my thumb away. I decide to go to Monterrey. I've spent time on the west coast – Guaymas and Mazatlan and some other small towns and villages whose names I no longer recall and my Spanish sucks but I got by fine. Monterrey should be piece of cake and the bus fare is minimal.

My bus goes from Corpus Christi to San Antonio (143 miles) where I change buses and drop down to Laredo (157 miles) and pick up a Mexican bus to Monterrey (140 miles). Monterrey is a beautiful city – surrounded by mountains and one of Mexico's wealthiest cities and in the late 70's one of the safest. The metro area is home to some 4 million people and unlike the tourist havens and small villages I visited on Mexico's west coast, Monterrey is a large industrial and financial center. I arrive when the city is waking up and I wander from the bus station looking for a hotel somewhere near the city center. I eventually find one, but I gradually realize that my lack of Spanish is much more problematic in Monterrey than in Mazatlan. I spend a couple of days wandering around and I know enough Spanish to take a bus, get food, beer and a room, but I meet nobody, barely get by and am happy to board the bus back to Corpus.

I take my seat and a commotion erupts on the bus – people are talking to me excitedly and rapidly in Spanish and I have no idea what is going on and I am getting nervous and confused. Finally, a young man comes forward – he is, thank God, bilingual, and he tells me that the seats on this bus are all reserved and I am in the wrong seat. He finds my proper seat and arranges so we can sit together on the three plus hour ride to Laredo. He gets nervous as we approach the border, worried about whether or not they will



let him into the US and says he is considering waiting until night and walking across the Rio Grande. I tell

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him that I will get him across by telling the people at the border that I am working for a farmworker organization and that I have traveled to Mexico to find someone bilingual to help me out and that he is bilingual. He thinks that might work. The bus gets to the border and we all get off to go through customs. I'm first and the agent asks me where I was, how long I was in Mexico, where I was born – all the usual questions – and then says I can go. I point to my friend – with my story ready – and say he is with me. The customs agent says fine and waves us through – no questions, no need for a story. My friend thanks me profusely as I board the bus to San Antonio and then Corpus. I ask him if he needs anything, but he says he knows people and he is fine now that he is across the border.

This was my attempt to smuggle someone across the Mexican border. While I don't remember his name, I will always remember his kindness and I am reminded of him now with all the talk of building a wall to keep people like him out and sending troops to the border to protect us from Honduran men, women and children desperate for a better life taking care of our children and doing our cleaning and yard work. In honor of my Mexican friend, this month I am recalling some of the beer his memory evokes.



Cervecería Cuauhtémoc Moctezuma Tecate (4.5% alcohol by volume) is a Mexican brewed American lager. It is the first beer I ever bought in Mexico. I was driving through Hermosillo late at night during the mid-70s and guys were under street lights selling Tecate from 1950's era floor model coke coolers along the side of the road. I think they were pirating electricity for the coolers from the light posts. I managed to buy a couple of six-packs for the drive. Tecate smells of light hop spice, light grains and white cracker. It pours brilliant straw gold with rapidly rising bubbles under a 1" white foam cap with fair retention. There is a trace of apple on the palate, light grains and very faint sulfur. The bitterness is mild. The beer is light with medium light flavor and medium high carbonation. It finishes crisp and refreshing. This is a very light beer without a lot of character but packed with memories. It is a good beer for drinking on a hot day and I often use it when grilling chicken to keep the bird moist. I rate it 65.

Whenever I would dine with my Mexican-American friends during the late 60's and 70's we would order Cervecería Cuauhtémoc Moctezuma Bohemia (4.7% alcohol by volume). Bohemia was the second beer I bought in Mexico. A restaurant on the road to Guaymas had pictures of its food – primarily seafood - and beverages painted on the window with poster paint and it had a very patient owner. I was able to stand by the window and point to stuff and say “¿como se dice este en espanol?” (how do you say this



in Spanish?). After he ran through the pictures in his window, I pointed and said “tengo este, este y este y un Bohemia” (I will have this, this and this and a Bohemia). I ended up with camarones al mojo de ajo (shrimp cooked in garlic), rice and beans and all the tortillas I could eat. The Bohemia I knew how to pronounce from my Mexican-American friends. Today, some 40 plus years later despite the craft beer revolution and considerably more experience with beer on my part, in a Mexican restaurant I instinctively order Bohemia to go with my food. It pours brilliant golden straw with a 1” rapidly dissipating white foam collar that leaves splotchy lace. Continuous streams of fine bubbles rapidly rise from the bottom of the glass. The nose is light grains, no appreciable hop, faint bread crust and a hint of apple. Bohemia tastes fairly dry with some light malt flavor, faint fruit, and a hint of sweet corn. The hop flavors are very mild. It is crisp, highly carbonated, and light. Bohemia is very easy to drink and

pairs very well with Mexican food and is a great beer for just sitting back and drinking with friends. I rate it 80.

My Mexican-American friends also introduced me to and taught me how to pronounce Negra Modelo and it is another go-to Mexican restaurant beer and a good beer to drink with any spicy food. The Vienna Lager Style practically went extinct in its native Austria but the Hapsburg Maximilian I of Austria who ruled Mexico brought his own brewer with him who brewed Vienna Style beers. Although Maximilian's reign was short lived - 1864-1867 - the beer lived on and many of the brewing families settled in Monterrey, Mexico. Grupo Modelo Negra Modelo (5.4% alcohol by volume) is one of the final survivors of the style in Mexico. It pours brilliant amber brown under a clingy, pillowy 3” cream colored foam cap with a slight tan tint. Streams of bubbles continually rising from the bottom of the glass refresh the persistent cap. The nose is earthy spice, herb, faint roast, kettle sugars, and chocolate. On the palate Negra Modelo is very creamy smooth, with some light toast, light caramel, and a faint hint of chocolate and malt spice. This is a very clean and smooth malt driven beer with a moderate hop accent on the finish. It starts with a light sweetness that fades a little by the finish. The body is medium and the



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carbonation is above average. For years this has been one of my go to Mexican restaurant beers. Too often clones of American standard lagers dominate their beer menus along with several light beer brands. Negra Modelo, although a slightly watered-down version of the original style, is still flavorful and very drinkable. I rate it 80.



I developed a taste for Grupo Modelo Pacifico Cerveza Clara (4.5% alcohol by volume) in Mazatlan. I was renting a palapa for \$2 per day which consisted of a cement slab, a thatched palm roof, a faucet, a table, chair, and no walls. I traded a calculator for a hammock and a used polaroid camera for a blanket and a sweater from vendors walking along the beach and I was all set. A Pacifico truck would pull into our camp ground every day or so and you could buy a 12 pack of Pacifico and a block of ice for a couple of bucks. About 7 years later, Nancy and I honey mooned in Mazatlan and San Blas and when we weren't drinking rum and lime out of coconuts, we were drinking Pacifico. Pacifico is an American lager. It has a light grain aroma seasoned with corn, spice and a trace of fruit. The hop aromas are medium low and the malt aromas are low to medium low. It pours brilliant straw gold filled with streams of rapidly rising bubbles under a 2" white foam collar with fair

retention. The flavors are medium low with some fruit, faint apple, some light grains, light corn and some hop floral and spice. It finishes dry and crisp with a pleasant mild hop accent. It is creamy smooth with medium light body and medium high carbonation. It is easy to drink, inoffensive and has a nice looking can and for me, every can is filled with memories. Other than that, nothing special. I rate it 65.

So to my Mexican friend – Salud – I hope you did well, and to those unfortunates in the caravan heading north – Vaya con Dios and I wish we could provide you with a kinder, friendlier welcome and could treat you as well as my friend treated me on the bus from Monterrey to Laredo.