

Panama

Hernán Contreras

Bothered by the juxtaposition of poverty and wealth, the plight of the poor and other weighty world problems, Abee, in civilian clothes, walked slowly on a side street in Panama City, Panama. He hadn't noticed the car speeding toward him until it was almost upon him and as he looked up, the passenger stuck half of his torso out of the car, shook his fist, yelled, "Gringo, go home!"

Abee turned to see who he was talking to. He was alone! He was talking to him, Abee!

He had never felt so American. This was the first time he had been addressed as a first class citizen! It buoyed his spirits. He was riding a new high. It matched his worst depression and he was subject to depressions, monstrous depressions, abysses so profound that if he had not taken the precaution of equipping himself with a harness and bungee cords, he would never have recovered. Even then, he had groveled in the very bowels of the earth for so long, that he suffered from the bends when he resurfaced.

Matched? No, surpassed! He was in the angelic range of the cerebral cherubim and reaching for the seraphim. He was so high he was dizzy from lack of oxygen. It was a catharsis, a fever paroxysm shedding the disease.

A new vision of purpose opened before him. No longer was he the wanderer shouting into the sibyl cave of destiny and getting echoes for an answer! No longer would he apologize for American success. He would feel guilty no more, forever.

The strangest lesson he took away from this was that it didn't matter that English was his second language, that he had a Spanish name. He was American and somehow it showed, at least in Panama.