

Chapter Three of the Unwritten Chronicles of the NAFTA Committee.

Wayne Brubacher

The third Formal NAFTA meeting was hosted by Mexico in the touristy Mexican city made famous by the Tijuana Brass, Tijuana itself. The report should cover no more than a couple of paragraphs but I could write volumes about the stories behind and during the meetings. This volume is a glimpse into what occupies men's minds when frustration and boredom chip away at the pure and noble reasons for serving their colleagues, for traveling to the corners of the earth at great personal expense and significant commitment and then wondering and even doubting if the sought after goals could actually be achieved.

This was my second trip to Mexico, having decided against the one to San Luis Potisi last September, an international meeting for topographical engineers but NAFTA was not on the agenda. That meeting was an opportunity to develop and strengthen a bond of friendship and trust between the representatives of the NAFTA countries, an opportunity not missed by the American delegation.

The Mexican meetings are structured similarly to those held by ACSM or CIG with papers being presented, exhibitors plying their wares and a short business programme dealing with elections and budget. No mention of NAFTA is made on the programme however, because the national organization, FECITEUM¹ tags along with a state or Colegio² annual general meeting.

That the NAFTA meetings should not conflict with other scheduled meetings became painfully clear. Let me set the stage.

The cheapest way to get to Tijuana is to fly to San Diego, then take a city street car to the border city of San Ysidro for a \$2.00 fare, I flashed my senior's card and traveled for 75 cents. Either good luck or good planning found the Prescotts³, the Wrights⁴ and the Brubachers⁵ staying within spitting distance of each other in San Diego so we took the streetcar together to the border. On the way, fellow travelers shared their opinions with us as to the best way to get into Mexico. The winning suggestion was to take a taxi with international privileges. It would take us through the border directly to our hotel for a total fee of \$40.00 and no hassle.

The next hour was like being a passenger in a demolition derby as trucks, busses and cars of all sizes vied for the same patch of highway. Vehicles cut across ditches and concrete dividers to gain a thirty second advantage. Survival was not a "*given*", it was a reward.

After a tasty Mexican meal we retired to the bar to unwind with a few drinks and wait to find out what lay ahead. Tomorrow the ladies would go on tours and the men would start the NAFTA meetings sharply at 9:00 am. We learned the next morning that adverbs were not intended to be taken literally. Suddenly, however, the official delegates were summoned to the meeting room. Should we change into a suit? Emphatically yes, we should.

We were marched to the head table to take part in the opening exercises, which was well attended by jubilant and enthusiastic participants. Cameras flashed everywhere while a brass band started up a fanfare the like of which I had never heard.

Then followed a troop of singing, chanting, marching militia, bearing weapons and flags. The leader barked out orders and the troop responded with precision movements. They marked time

and the crowd joined in with a deafening rendition of the Mexican National Anthem. I was chilled and thrilled with the devotion of the citizens of this foreign power to their country and government, an experience I have not witnessed in Canada since the Second World War.

I was conscious of the pride of the Mexican people from our visit to Colima two years ago. I saw law and order working in the smaller cities and areas away from the tourist centres with the police patrolling in open backed trucks carrying assault rifles. They didn't have to use them although I believed they could and I was reminded of this as I watched the spectacle of the disciplined soldiers marching and singing before us in that opening exercise. Bronzed muscles shone brighter than the steel of their weapons and I wondered quietly which was tougher. I would not misbehave in Mexico. I would respect this proud people.

The second part of this story takes place on the third and last day of our visit. For these three days, the Canadian and American delegates sat in a meeting room, sometimes by themselves, sometimes with Mexican representatives. The Mexicans' annual meeting was interfering with the NAFTA meeting to a degree not imagined by us or the Mexicans to the point that they were embarrassed to keep us waiting and we were forsworn not to draw attention to this. Polite indulging of the situation ensued for two days but on the third, panic set in. We could see the distinct possibility that we would not accomplish that which we planned to do.

Besides the formal meeting we and the Mexicans hoped to complete the answering of several pages of questions put forward at Ft. Worth in November, 1998, the first Formal Meeting, questions designed to reveal the business and practice of surveying in the three NAFTA countries. Translation was painful and slow and in the end a few answers were left for later so that time for the Formal meeting could be assured. About mid day, when doubt plagued us most strongly, Malcolm Shaw, a gentleman from New York and a member of the US team, turned to me and asked with a voice as innocent as a seven year old schoolboy if I thought that the Mexicans would be able to write the minutes for this the third formal meeting and provide translations in time for the fourth meeting planned for Ottawa in February, 2000.

My stomach lifted a little as I realized the improbability of a favourable answer to his question whereupon he then asked if they would be able to spare anyone to take the minutes in Spanish since the vice president had been assigned that job and he was busy with his meeting. I gasped but could not summon up a reply.

“Maybe this is really an off-base suggestion but do you think that the minutes could be prepared ahead of time and then simply edited to perfect the minor variations that might crop up?” he, mused?

“If they don't have time to work through the informal meetings, how do you expect they would have time to pre-write the minutes”, I asked thinking I had put an end to that banal suggestion. “Oh”, he replied, “I didn't mean them.”

“Then who?” The words choked in my throat dreading the obvious. I could hardly form the grammatical correction, “whom?” Visions raced through my mind. The militia singing and shining like gods, the police with their kaloshnikovs, the crowd singing proudly about their nation.

“Don't you have the Portland⁶ minutes on your computer?” He had me. In my desperation I had forgotten the primary defensive ploy - lying.

“But it is THEIR MEETING! They are the HOST Country”, I blurted. “We can't presume that they will conduct the meeting exactly like you did in the US!”

Malcolm tilted his head back and studied me through the lower half of his glasses. “Look, Wayne, you gotta understand. These people, God bless 'em, have their own show to run. How can we expect anything different? The president and vice president have duties at their annual meetings which are going on right now downstairs. Can you imagine Prescott or Dick Wright sitting in a room with a bunch of foreigners, trying to tweak the translation of some survey questions and answers while their annual meeting crowd is waiting for them downstairs?”

I mustered my most resistant attitude, stood tall and replied, “Malcolm, this is their Formal NAFTA Meeting. They are the Host country. We can't presume to set the agenda and write the minutes before the meeting actually happened!” I reflected on softwood lumber and salmon fishing⁷. “The Americans were not going to beat us on this one”, I chuckled to myself.

“We need to talk about the Agenda,” Malcolm rejoined.

“We're not going to write their Agenda,” I stammered, beginning now to feel a little like Joe Clark⁸.

“No, no, no,” he reassured me, “we just want a list of things that we want on the Agenda when it is introduced. - so we don't forget anything.”

Satisfied with that I sat down at my computer to make a list. Finding last years Agenda, I soon modified it appropriately, at least enough to serve its intended purpose. I dutifully added the list being slid under my elbow and then printed a copy.

“You've got last year's date on here” came a voice from somewhere so near and so familiar that it might have come from inside, my own head. “And you have Tijuana spelled wrong!” I knew then that it was Malcolm's voice. I would have said “wrongly” or “incorrectly” and my inner voice doesn't have a New York accent.

“Don't worry about it. It's just for our convenience. And if they don't have time to make one up they might welcome it. Besides it has to be approved - you're just a typist now, not the Canadian Representative. Let's just have it ready in case it's needed. God knows there's nothing else to do while we wait till they come back”.

“Just a typist indeed,” I thought, holding the job for only five minutes and already sensing discrimination.

“There, is that better?” I pouted handing him the now perfect Agenda.

“We'll just keep it available” was the reply. Had Øsop's camel⁹ successfully inserted its head into my warm tent?

More hours passed. Warm breezes swayed giant palms just outside the room and pressed filmy curtains against our faces as we watched with envy those who were free to roam at will in the idyllic setting of the hotel courtyard. We wondered and hoped that our ladies were having just as good a time on this, the last day as they had on the first two. Their hosts had been marvelous and the incessant joyful chatter, which erupted from the returning ladies each evening, was a pleasant distraction even if incoherent to our time-numbered brains.

“Are we going to get out of here tonight?” The words interrupted my reverie.

“I don't know! What's the alternative?” I blurted, not realizing the opening I had given him. Malcolm can be like clay backfill against a concrete block wall. He keeps up the pressure and then occupies the gap created if you budge.

“You could write the minutes while we are waiting. You know the order of business, the motions are all ready, - you even know who will be present, including observers. And if there is a change, you can edit the minutes on the fly. Think it over. Let's get dinner now. We don't have to come back for two hours. That leaves one hour for the Formal meeting because the president's ball starts at 8:00 with cocktails and he has to be there!”

Two hours passed and word came that the president would start the social activities on time and then slip out for the meeting during cocktails. Could I do the minutes as a favour to our good friend, Mexican Presidente Braulio¹⁰ and not have it appear that the whole concrete block wall didn't actually fall down under Malcolm's pressure - that I took it down myself? “Malcolm would let me do that!” I rationalized.

And so it came to pass that the minutes for the impending meeting were finished as far as possible. Only the time of opening and closing and the names of the movers and seconders of the motions had to be entered. Time would not permit any deviation from the Agenda. THE AGENDA! I had forgotten about that until I saw a paper come out from the bottom of the pile (sort of like the bottom card from a deck) and heard the comforting tone of a voice suggesting that if the Mexican delegation didn't have time to prepare one, the Canadians had put together a sample which might be useful at this time.

Time was on our side - finally. Presidente Braulio was so harried by his busy schedule that he gladly accepted any help offered. With my talented two fingers I kept up with the minor changes, entering the names to be added to the motions and filling in the times and a few attendees. Vanished were the thoughts that plagued my mind. No one would be offended. There would be no international incident. As the participants gathered up their papers, a confident and smug Canadian handed the finished minutes over to an impressed Mexican vice president¹¹.

¹. FECITUEM *Federacion de Colegios de Ingenieros Topografos de los Estados Mexicanos, A.G.*

². Colegio *The Colegio appears to be an administrative branch of the University that deals with licensing, ethics, discipline and continuing education containing a fraternal element that keeps university social life in the forefront for professionals in Mexico.*

³. *Robert and Lucy Prescott. Robert Prescott is the National Society of Professional Surveyors (NSPS) Chair of its NAFTA Committee, a past President of NSPS, and a past President of the New York State Association of Professional Land Surveyors (NYSAPLS). He is currently its Executive Director.*

⁴. *Richard (Dick) and Linda Wright. Dick is a Past President of the Canadian Council of Land Surveyors(CCLS) and a past President of the Corporation of British Columbia Land Surveyors. He is currently a member of the CCLS International Committee dealing with NAFTA.*

⁵. *Wayne and Sylvia Brubacher. Wayne, the author of this Chapter is a Past President of the Canadian Council of Land Surveyors(CCLS) and a past President of the Association of*

Ontario Land Surveyors. He is currently the Chair of the CCLS International Committee.

^{6.} The second Formal Meeting of the three NAFTA Committees was held in Portland, Oregon, March 5th, 1999.

^{7.} Softwood lumber and salmon fishing were disputes between business interests in Canada and the US that were referred to a NAFTA panel for resolution. Canada fared badly on both accounts.

^{8.} Joe Clark holds the distinction of holding the second shortest term of office of any Canadian Prime Minister. The Canadian press found him to be an inexhaustible source of ridicule.

^{9.} One of Aesop's famed fables describes how an Arab's camel begs to be allowed to stick its head into the warm tent to get some small protection from the cold desert night. Eventually, by unremitting persuasion, the camel is inside the tent and the Arab is out in the cold.

^{10.} Presedente Brualio Mercado Gutierrez was the first President of the FECITEUM.

^{11.} The Mexican vice president was Lino SolisLopez and was given the task of taking minutes for the Mexican delegation.