



**Your on the  
Street Reporter**



**Uyless Black**

**Foreign Places:  
Mazatlan, Mexico II**

## Mazatlan II

June 24, 2017

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. This week, I returned to Mazatlan, Mexico, where I filed a report about my first visit twelve years ago (Available at Blog.UylessBlack.com. Scroll down a couple of screens to the list of links. Click on “24. Foreign Places” and then “Mazatlan I”).

During the first trip, I did not have a chance to explore a part of the city called Old Town. In addition, I did not have the chance to tell you about an extraordinary hotel and a swimming pool at this hotel. I will fill-in these gaps in this report.

In addition, unlike the other articles in the “Foreign Places” series in which I report on locales outside the U.S., this report amplifies some stories I began in “Mazatlan Report I”: three U.S. citizens who are the opposite of the stereotyped Ugly American. Shortly, I introduce them to you.



Figure 1. Mazatlan, Mexico

Mazatlan is located on the Sinaloa State coast, just across from the tip of Baja California, as seen in Figure 1. The word *Mazatlan* means “place of deer,” although I could not find much information about why the city is so-named, other than some comments from local citizens that the area was once populated with deer. Anyway, its local professional baseball team is called the Deers.

You will encounter Mazatlan citizens who look European. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a large contingent of Germans settled here, and their lineage is still evident. Much of the music that is considered indigenous to this part of Mexico is attributed to Europeans, but flavored with the nuance of Mexican lyrics and musical notes. During one of our evenings at a local restaurant, we were entertained with a two-man band. I asked them to play what I thought were conventional Mexican songs. They demurred, saying I was asking for mariachi music, which they did not play. During this visit, I did not hear one verse of “Guadalajara! Guadalajara!” Nonetheless, I was still entertained by the local music.

I am traveling with my wife Holly (Reporterette) and my mother-in-law, Jeanne (for this report, Reporterette Senior). Holly’s brother (Brad) and his wife (Tahnee) have a home here. They and their daughter (Britnee) will hang out with us this week.

The Mazatlan airport has been renovated. So have some of the sanitary concerns of the local government. In 2005, while queuing-up at the customs line, I encountered the sign shown in Figure 2. This sign and other cautionary notes about *classic pig fever* were not in evidence at the airport. I was relieved, and made it a point to have some pork the day after we arrived.

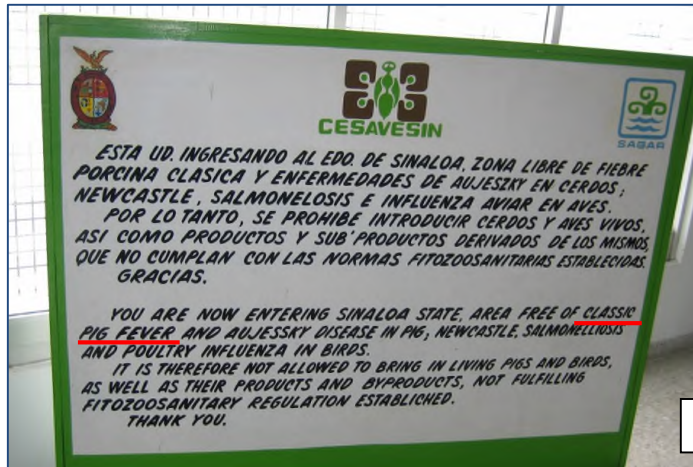


Figure 2. Sign of past times.

We were met at the airport lobby by the shuttle personnel of the El Cid Marina hotel, the place where we stayed on both visits. As recounted in the first report, from the time we entered the shuttle until we were safely inside our hotel room, we were once again assailed by time-sharing sales people.

If the El Cid Marina was not such a splendid place to stay (with its unusual décor, swimming facilities, and friendly employees), I would not stay there. However, I took the time-sharing bait some years ago, and purchased time for staying at several hotels located in western America and Hawaii. I've had mixed feelings about this purchase every time I check-in to one of these places. Their sales-pitch is unrelenting in their attempts to sell more time.

Thankfully, Brad, who has a home here, had met us at the hotel. In no uncertain terms, he dismissed a swarm of time-share locusts from our presence. I was thankful for Brad's intervention, and also pleased I had managed to drink a free Pina Colada before they left us alone. As Brad was finishing them off, I made it a point to finish off my drink...in case they decided to snatch it from my hands.

### Cement Furniture

The distinctive feature of the décor of the hotel's room is cement tables, desks, and sofas, all painted various shades white, as seen in Figure 3. The walls are also white, as are the tile floors, and the curtains are an off-white color. All this whiteness presents a cool image, a visual relief from the warm weather outside.

Nonetheless, the hotel rooms are quite comfortable. No one is saying, "This damned chair must be made of cement!"

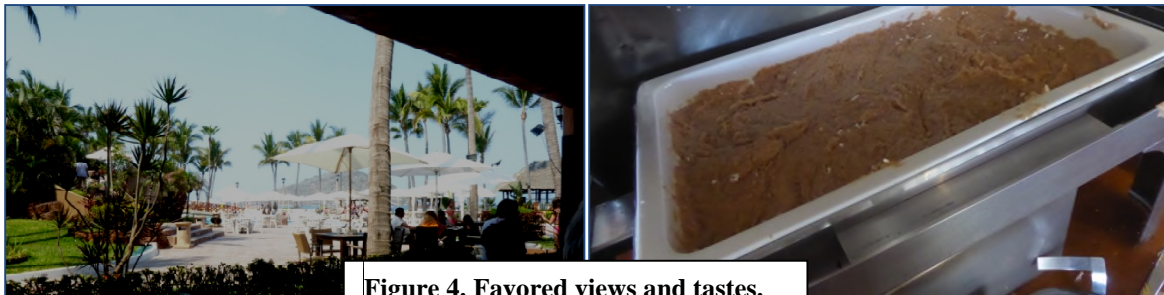


**Figure 3. Hard as cement furniture.**

### **June 25**

Today, Brad treated us to a buffet at the Pueblo Bonito hotel, another place I recommend for your stay in Mazatlan. In our first visit several years ago, we had stuffed ourselves at a Sunday feast, so we knew we were in for a treat. Our expectations were satisfied. Figure 4 shows two of my favorite views: the nearby pool and a tray full of refried Pinto beans.

Health enthusiasts know that beans are of great benefit to humans. On occasion, I cook a pot of Pinto beans. What a meal: a bowl of these beans, hot tortillas, and fresh tomato slices on the side, washed down with Sauvignon Blanc. Heaven on earth and in the kitchen.



**Figure 4. Favored views and tastes.**

### **The Grounds of El Cid Marina**

You might suspect that the El Cid Marina hotel is compensating me for my complimenting the hotel. Other than conventional royalties, I do not accept imbursements for anything I write. Although a couple years ago, the owner of the Prime Rib in Washington, DC had his chauffer drive me from his restaurant to my hotel, instead of my taking a taxi. Even more impressive, he had not yet read my positive review of his establishment.

Figure 5 shows some views of the El Cid Marina's facilities. Later, I will show photos of the pool and beach areas. Figure 5 (c) and its caption relates to the fact that Tahnee engenders so much friendship at this hotel that the bellmen hugged me upon my arrival. I will not repeat these scenes, as they are recounted in "Mazatlan I."





**Figure 5. Scenes from El Cid Marina Hotel.**

**June 26**

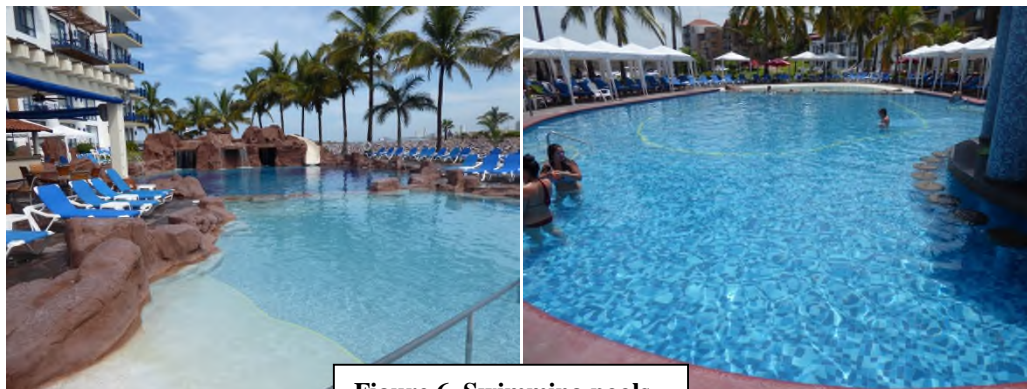
### **Mazatlan and Drugs**

Mazatlan is in the news often because of the prevalence of illegal drug trade in the vicinity of this city. The first four weeks of this year, there were 58 drug-related murders in the area. The deputy Attorney General of the Sinaloa state said rival drug gangs are fighting for control of trafficking and are behind the violence.

Unlike other parts of Mexico, it appears innocent Mazatlan citizens have not been targeted for killings and kidnappings. With that reassuring thought in mind, I feel safe enough to walk the streets and explore the city. As recounted in this article, I came across what I would characterize as a gentle culture, populated by people of warm and friendly dispositions. But, and for another time, all cultures have their miscreants.

### **Swimming Routine**

The El Cid Marina hotel has two swimming pools, shown in Figure 6. In order to compensate for the calorie intake of sumptuous meals (we had another feast today at the Los Flores Hotel, recounted shortly), I swim one hour each morning. The routine takes place upon the pools opening (9 am), and before they become crowded. Still, I occasionally swim into another person and offer a “Lo siento” to them.



**Figure 6. Swimming pools.**

Another person swims laps the same time as I. She must be from New York, as she ploughs through other swimmers as if she owns the pool. She claims the middle of the pool, and if I arrive after she begins her routine, she will not move to either side of the pool, a practice common among people who swim laps.

Today, she swam into a small boy and submerged the lad. His father was standing nearby and retrieved him from the dunking. The woman kept on swimming. No “Lo siento” from this impolite, arrogant ass. Before the week is done, I’m tempted to swim over her, just as she did to this child.

As the pool fills up, if I have not completed my hour of swimming, I resort to running on the pool bottom (the pool is shallow) so I can keep my head up and be able to sight other swimmers. Running through water still requires effort and burns off some of the refried beans I have been consuming each day. For the youngsters, who usually are oblivious to others, I guide myself around them.

I came across one boy several times today and diverted my path to avoid running into him. No big deal. Later, as I exited the pool and walked to my chair, he was sitting nearby with his parents. I glanced at them and said “Hola.” They responded and said, “Gracias,” I am sure for my aqueous deference to their son. I summoned up my antiquated Spanish vocabulary:

- “De nada. ...Eh, La aqua es para todo.”
- They responded in English (they could have been Americans, but not from New York), “Thank you. ...By the way it’s ‘el aqua’, not ‘la aqua.’ ”
- I responded, “But ‘aqua’ ends with the letter ‘a,’ which I thought conveyed the use of ‘la’.”
- “ ‘El aqua’ is an exception.”
- I received a free Spanish lesson simply for not being an Ugly New Yorker...Ugly American. Maybe I won’t swim over that New Yorker after all. It would be all-too American, and I’m in Mexico, not the USA.

### **Los Flores and another Friend of Tahnee**

Back to our lunch at Los Flores Hotel. Brad and Tahnee took us to lunch at this hotel. One reason for its selection was the view from the restaurant of the Gulf of California (also called the Sea of Cortez), as seen in Figure 7 (a).

There I consumed some of the best steak tacos I have ever eaten. Tahnee warned me that Los Flores tacos were not fancy, that they had only meat inside a flour tortilla. There were no tomatoes, onions, sauce, and thanks to the taco gods, no sour cream. What self-respecting taco eater would lower himself to put sour cream on his taco? Not this macho hombre. I take mine straight.



**Figure 7. Scenes from Los Flores Hotel.**

Figure 7 (b) shows the contents of my taco: Beef. That’s it. And it was sufficient unto itself as it was flavored just right. My digestive tract was aided by side orders of

guacamole salad and of course, refried beans. Notice the sour cream has been placed on the side in case wimpy taco eaters need some medicine to compensate for the spiciness of the meat.

I related in “Mazatlan I” that Tahnee has been coming to Mazatlan for 25 years. Daughter Britnee, since the age of two. Husband Brad, a late comer, but an enthusiastic one, for about two decades. I also described how many friends she has throughout the city and that the bellmen at the El Cid Marina Hotel hugged me upon learning I was kin to Tahnee. Yes, hugged...from a Bellman. Try that in America. It might get the Bellman shot.

The family is so well-known in parts of the city that on my first visit, I witnessed passersby on the street greeting us and commenting on how much Britnee had grown since the last time they saw her. Don’t mistake my sentimentality. The vast majority of Mazatlan citizens have no acquaintance with this family. But enough did that it gained my attention.

Take a look at Figure 7 (c). The man sharing a beer with us is another friend of Tahnee, Brad, and Britnee. He is a beach vendor named Miquel and sells his wares from the beachfront to tourists. It makes no difference to my kinfolk what he does for a living. They invited him to our table where he shared a beer with us and sold Holly a skirt.

I told him the story of my making the mistake with some vendors in a previous visit to a local market of saying goodbye. Not with “Vaya con Dios,” but with “Vaya con huevos.” We had some laughs, and he wise-cracked that at least I did not say, “Vaya con bolas.” During this time, I reflected that I wished more Americans who visit other countries would take on the countenance of my in-laws and my niece.

## **June 27**

This morning, I walked a short distance from our hotel room to a small convenience store to purchase some milk. During the exchange of my ID with the cashier, she noted my name:

- “Black?”
- “Yes. ‘Negro’ in your country, but that word does not fare well in mine.”
- “I know. I lived in Seattle for a while.”
- “You speak better English than I do.”
- “You from Texas?”
- “Sort of...and my first name is...”
- “U-less.”
- “You pronounced it right! You’re a rarity. Most people think it’s the name of a U.S. President. What’s your name?”
- I heard: “Serious.”
- “No, seriously, I do want to know your name.”
- I again heard: “It’s Serious.”
- “Seriously, Serious?”
- “Yes. It’s spelled S-e-r-i-u-s.”
- “Seriously Serious and seriously Uyless. What a combination!”
- “Yes! ...Anything else?”
- “No thanks. But why leave Seattle?”

- “Too much rain.”

### **Walking the City**

I am coming around to the idea that my spine operation last year, while relieving much pain, has not been the end-all. I find myself having trouble walking relatively modest distances. It could be that arthritis in my spine is holding me back. I have also developed inner ear problems and have trouble sometimes keeping my balance.

It is a bothersome aspect of my life. I have been intending to do some long walks these past few days, but my body says no. I’ll keep playing it by ear, so to speak.

Funny, I have been able to take up tennis again, although I often do not complete the hour and a half playing period. But then, doubles tennis with half-crippled old men does not encompass even the light rigors of streetwalking.

One of my tennis companions plays from a wheel chair. Another has pronounced Parkinson’s. Talk about bolas. These men will not give up in their determination to play their cards fully, even though life has dealt them a bad hand.

Anyway, at this stage of my life, playing doubles tennis entails mostly standing in one place waiting for the ball to come my way.

- “Move your feet, Uyless. It’s part of the game.”
- “Yeah, I know. It used to be part of mine. Serve’um up!”

Old man’s doubles is not a bad way to sleep while remaining erect. Last week, I mentioned to my tennis partners that cobwebs had formed between my body and my tennis racquet. One of my buddies offered that the webs were mostly between my shoes and the court. I silently added, *Yes, and between my mind and my muscles.*

### **Casa de Oro and Lucy**

As mentioned, Tahnee is friends with a substantial number of people in Mazatlan. We came across them every day during this trip. It is not just for this trip. Again, as told earlier, in “Mazatlan I,” I relate stories about our meeting her friends (and of course, those of Brad and Britnee) on the streets and beaches of the city.



**Figure 8. A fine friend.**

At the Casa de Oro restaurant, once again an old friend was encountered. Her name is Lucy and works as a waitress there. She and Brad are shown in Figure 8, during our initial meeting with her just outside the restaurant.

Lucy immediately brought us water and issued instructions to drink the water before we drank any non-water liquids. She also told us to get some exercise on the beach before imbibing.





**Figure 9. A fine beach.**

The suggestion was tempting, as the beach in front of the restaurant is lovely (see Figure 9). I pleaded my case for a Cuba Libre:

“Lucy, I’ve already had an hour of exercise at the hotel pool. I’m full of water.” Thinking she might be an all-inclusive caretaker: “And I’m lathered with number 70 sun block. Am I cleared for a Cuba Libre?” She said, “bien,” and brought me the drink. ...along with a bottle of water.

## **Cultures and Genes**

Lucy. A fine woman: a waitress and nurse, all wrapped up in the warmth of her culture.

With the incredible advances being made in discovering the role of DNA in everything we do, and in everything we are, geneticists agree that very small differences in humans’ genetic makeup have a large impact on our institutions and culture. I call the phenomenon, *a bigger bang for the (genetic) buck*. There is very little difference between, say, the genes (actually alleles, a subject for another time) of a German citizen and the genes of a Mexican citizen. Yet, their cultures, institutions, and way of life are markedly different.

As a more telling example, compare the Native American to the American European. An almost miniscule difference in the DNA strand leads to huge differences in life styles and life preferences.

These differences are much of what makes traveling to other parts of the world so interesting. We humans are bound to one another through the similarity of our chromosomes, yet often this tie is severed (sometimes with devastating consequences) by our creating and living in dissimilar cultural enclaves.

The ever-present challenge, one humans have faced since we walked this earth, is to not let these different environments and associated beliefs get out of hand and lead to aggressive actions toward one another. It is a tall order, one that goes against much of our DNA and our brain stem.

What diffuses and ameliorates these differences, created back when our race was one of small self-defending tribes? Contact with others, and with this contact, attempting to place ourselves into the shoes of others.

Idealistic? Yes. Obtainable? I am not sure. But we should keep trying. A small bridge here, a small bridge there. A look at our nature in relation to others’ nurture, and vice versa. A breaking down of those small DNA differences that have such a significant impact on the societies we create.

This idea has never been articulated to me by Tahnee, Brad, or Britnee. But it makes no difference. For this idea is what they practice. And the relationship between Mexicans and Americans, however small, has improved because of these three Americans bridging the cultural and institutional gap between the countries.

## Swimming inside Caves

I become transfixed while swimming inside caves and grottos. After tackling what might be heavy surf, finding refuge in the quiet waters of an aquatic cavern offers a fluid, peaceful security blanket. Several years ago, I was sailing with some friends in the British Virgin Islands. While my younger swimming companions made their way through underwater bridges, I came across a grotto. I recorded my impressions in *A Swimmer's Odyssey*:

As I entered the grotto, I slowed my momentum. I surfaced to find myself in a world far removed from anything I had ever seen. Except for the muted surf, my sphere was one of silence and solitude. I was inside an ancient rock cave, a ceiling of antediluvian stone, layered with a carpet of the finest water I have even seen. For a brief time, this place was there for me and me alone.

The artificial caves described next can never come close to the exquisite nature of natural caves I have encountered in the world's sea waters. But they can still bring out breathtaking sensations. In Figure 10, see for yourself. (Also see the left photo in Figure 6, which shows the front of the caves at the top of the photo.)

I would swim around the laughs and shouts of fellow swimmers outside these caves, avoiding them, as they avoided me. Few of my fellow pool mates entered into the caves. They did not know what they were missing, or perhaps they were not into caves that were half-filled with water.

However contrived, however artificial the synthetic caves, the water flowing through them was what mattered. The sunlight's rays found their way into this silent refuge from the outside world of sun worshipping tourists. The water, the sun, and the silence gave the place an aura of authenticity. The plastic rocks did not matter.

## June 28

### Mexicans and Chinese

During this week, Brad and I have again demonstrated why the two of us hold *a* key to knowing about the world's problems, but not *the* key to solving them. This mutual wisdom and at the same time, humility, keeps my brother-in-law and me engaged in a mutually satisfying and respectful dialogue.

Both of us lament the stereotype of the Mexican's "laziness" that is perpetuated by an ignorant U.S. media and a clueless U.S. President. From personal experience, we know the opposite to be true.

The situation reminds me of the initial scorn (in the 1860s) placed on Chinese who were gradually being employed on construction gangs to build America's ocean-to-ocean railroad link. Gang bosses refused to hire Chinese until it was revealed the Chinese were better workers than their white counterparts. They were more resolute than the Caucasians. Furthermore, the Chinese did not drink. Before long, the construction crews for this historic railroad were composed mostly of Chinese.

The demagogue who stereotypes people into false niches does not know he is prey to his own demagoguery. Of course not, he is too enamored by his own arrogant ignorance.



**Figure 10. A Silent escape.**

### **The Beach at El Cid Marina**

One of my favorite ways to spend time in the water is body surfing. The El Cid Marina hotel is located next to the Gulf of California. In addition to its two swimming pools, it also maintains a beach. Some scenes of the beach are shown in Figure 11.

Unfortunately, red flags were out, as were jellyfish. In addition, Brad mentioned that a beach not far from here offered better and safer waves. I deferred body surfing for this trip, but vowed to surf on my next trip. Besides, just sitting near the surf, taking in the wind and waves, was a pleasure unto itself.

### **Britnee: Then and Now**

For the first time in my life with my niece, Britnee, I discovered what a great sense of humor she has. Cutting me some slack, she has only recently reached the age to which she is cerebrally capable of exhibiting this trait. Nonetheless, she demonstrated it well during this week. I enjoyed her satiric and astute observations.

While at Pancho's restaurant, Britnee and I had our first adult encounter. For the past few years, as she was maturing into adulthood, and I was maturing into semi-senility, we began to talk in adult-like platitudes. This week in Mexico, it was a tequila-based episode. To set the stage for this transition, Figure 12 (a) shows Britnee, Milli, and me outside our home in Idaho. The picture was taken when Brit was six years old. Figure



12 (b) shows the two of us this week having our first “adult” drink together at the Playa Bruja restaurant. Fittingly, a shot of tequila.



**Figure 11. Beach scenes.**

Britnee graduated from high school this spring. She is headed for college shortly. I place my bets and give odds that she will succeed in life. Her parents did remarkable naturing and nurturing. Brit responded accordingly.

Figure 13 is a photo taken of this family. Tahnee is the lovely woman on the left side of the figure. Holly is enjoying looking at a website image with Brad and Britnee.



**Figure 12. Brit and me...and Milli.**



**Figure 13. iPhone mania.**



### One Last Plate of Beans

I had hoped to explore more of Mazatlan on this trip, but my spine did not have sufficient spine for the explorations. Maybe next time, or maybe I should look for more sedentary past times. No, unused engines do nothing but gather dust and rust. I'll keep plugging along. For now, we spent our last evening at Pancho's, one of my favorite restaurants in Mazatlan.

Brad introduced me again to Pancho, the owner of the restaurant. A couple decades ago, Pancho was a beach vendor, one who sold shrimp. Brad told me Tahnee's stepdad, Bill (who also comes to Mazatlan frequently) advised Pancho to follow his dream and to stay with it. Pancho did just that, and now serves some of the best food in town in one of its finest restaurants. His restaurant sign, shown in Figure 14, is a testament to his success.

Our table is shown in Figure 15 (a). Please note the becoming woman on the right side of this picture. She is Jeanne (Reporterette Senior for this report), and my favorite mother-in-law.

Miguel came by again, and I bought a tank top from him. He, Brit, and I posed for a photo as seen in Figure 15 (b). Another beach vendor has been plying his trade for many years. (Figure 15 (c)). We saw him during our first visit. We said hola. Holly bought a puppet from him.



**Figure 14. Testament to success and fulfilling a Mexican dream.**



**Figure 15. At Pancho's**

### **Time to Go**

It is time to leave Mazatlan with its plentiful water and food, and abundance of friendly natives. Tomorrow, we fly back north to Idaho, a land that is also populated with fine terrain and fine people.

I regret my body was not up to the task I had set out for it to do this week. Such is life. I've no regrets about this fact. My only regret was not going to the beach to talk with the puppeteer. I know he would have had fine stories to share. After all, his strings of life are not much different from the strings of life dealt to us by life itself.

It has been said that it is difficult to leave a place that is dear to one's heart. It was also said that distance makes the heart grow fonder. Yet the heart overcomes distance. However far away, our heart shrinks the distance with its yearning to return to that favored place.