

December at Yaquitepec

By Marshal South
Desert Magazine – January 1941

In the remote desert home of Tanya and Marshal South, Christmas is no less a festive occasion than in Beverly Hills or Park Avenue. Some of the artificial tinsel is lacking perhaps – but sparkling foils and colorful streamers do not make Christmas. The desert landscape provides adequate decorative material – of things that are genuine. In this story, the last of the Yaquitepec diaries which started in the *Desert Magazine* last January, Marshal gives a glimpse of the true meaning of Christmas – as it is understood on Ghost Mountain.

DECEMBER! And another desert year winging to its close. All too swift they flit, these desert years of solitude and silence and peace. One could wish that they were twice as long. The span of them is not great enough to accommodate all the joy and eagerness of life. Happy years – close packed with a simple happiness that is free to all for the taking. Yet a mad world sets its hands only to robbery and slaughter.

Far down in the dim lowlands the sun rose this morning from a spreading pool of molten gold. It was as though the thin line of a vast flood of melted metal lay upon the far horizon. On the blue line of the distant metal desert it spread to north and south, glinting and flashing, a torrent leveling from some overturned crucible. And in the very midst of the wide thing spreading flood the sun rose, and upwelling bubble of dazzling fire. The desert foreground lay dusky velvet before its blinding rays, and in the shadowy robes that wrap the dim mountain bulk which we call the Sleeping Squaw, darting sun her eyes to the miracle of dawn.



This is Victoria – newest member of the South family at Yaquitepec. Others are the mother, Tanya South, Rider and Rudyard.

Today I took the sand screen down to a point beyond the tiny rock hollow which we call Lake Yaquitepec and began to sift sand for the final coating of a new cistern. Rider and Rudyard came too, and while I worked, shoveling the rough sandy earth from the little watercourse and throwing it upon the inclined screen they fished in the tiny rock pool. It was still brimming from a recent shower and into its mirror surface they toss handfuls of the short-broken lengths of golden yellow bunch grass stems. These were the “fish” and they are “caught” upon the ends of slender sticks of juniper, to which they adhere. A serious and intent business. But punctuated with much merry laughter. Good music by which to work.

A desert solitude? What are wealth and possessions? What can they buy to compare with such priceless things of simple happiness?

Today’s coat of cement plaster marks the finishing touch to this last cistern. Mostly trowel and brush work, for the uneven portions have to be trowel-smoothed – and much of the cement is laid on with a brush. It gives a better surface and it is easier to reach the hollows in our rough rock construction.

In our early days at Yaquitepec – when we had no trowel, or money with which to purchase one – our cement work was done with a tool fashioned from an old automobile license plate. And we did a lot of good work with it too. Good tools make for good and easy work. But there are many times when one need not neglect work just for the lack of them.

Fires roar merrily in the big stove these nights for there is a crisp snap creeping into the air. And it is a crispness that is enjoyable. After all, Winter when it comes brings it special gifts. And not the least of those gifts are fireglow and story-telling. There is a new iron top to the stove this year as well as a new and much appreciated damper that works with a lever. The old one was a tin slide, of sour disposition – at times, a sore trial to cheerful temper. But it served long and faithfully and we forgive it its faults in remembering its virtues. There is a new adobe arch too, that closes in the north end of the kitchen. It will be warmer and cozier here this year – even though Santa Claus will maybe have to pause a moment and figure out the changed arrangement before he comes stealing in with his pack. “You ought to put up a sign to make it easy for him,” is Rider’s practical suggestion. But Rudyard, guided less by logic than by anxiety, is chiefly concerned about the time-honored chimney route. “Daddy, I t’ink you ought to wemove that new damper! I t’ink Sanda Klaws catch his neck on it an’ choke to deaf! Yes, I t’ink so!”

There is fuel to collect against the possibility of savage snowstorms, there are Christmas trees to select and cut and carry home – diminutive, cheerful little trees that are in reality big, berry-laden branches of mountain juniper. There are sandals to repair and wreaths to make – evergreen wreaths to trim the windows with. And there is an extra supply of flour to be ground and tall candles to make so that Christmas eve may be ushered in with no stint of cookies and candlelight.

And to top it all there is Victoria! Victoria grows and grows. Her eyes are blue. The little desert mice squeak and scurry in the night hush – and she listens to them wide-eyed and speculative. For this her desert too, and her land to which she has come. The boys perch about her bed and watch her with worshipful eyes. “An’ we’ll hand a stocking up for little sister too, won’t we, Daddy,” Rider says proudly. “Yes, old-timer, we sure will,” I tell him. And Tanya smiles. Two little sons and a daughter! The Great Spirit has indeed shed his blessings upon Yaquitepec.

It is night now and the house is hushed, save for the soft rustlings of the friendly mice. There are dying coals glowing in the fireplace, and beyond the shaded glow of the lamp the shadows are soft upon three little heads, sleep-wrapped, upon their pillows. On the other side of the table, where the yellow lamplight falls in a pool, Tanya sits sewing. As she pauses a moment to thread a needle she looks up. “Listen to the wind whispering up the mountain,” she say. “Do you remember”

Yes, we remember. And for a space, while the old, old wind whimpers about the outer walls and talks to itself through the junipers we go back into memories. Memories of dear, happy days that have fled. There is much to remember. And more to be humbly thankful for. Above the desert the stars gleam. The footsteps of the Great Spirit are in the rustlings of the wind and the promise of His infinite mercy is written in the glow of circling worlds and in the testimony of the granite rocks. Peace! Faith! Assurance! These are the messages of the silence and the solitude.

And so we come to the ending of the year and to the ending of the year's Diary of Yaquitepec. It has been a year of friends and of good wishes. And if, to the ending of the chronicle, we were to attach any special thought or message it would be the message of Faith. In a world that is grim and shadowed by the blackness of war and of greed and of brutality let the lamp of Faith be kept burning brightly. Faith in things that are good; Faith in those simple, fundamental things that have been so much neglected. There are not many things in life that really matter. And he who would seek peace and contentment of body and spirit must seek it among the simple, fundamental, "old-fashioned," things which the blind, roaring rush of a greed-crazed age has so largely thrust aside.

Wealth, possessions and mechanical gadgets do not make the man – nor the nation. These are just the gilded bubbles flying in the wind, the chasing of which leads too often into the morass of destruction. Neither is greatness to be measured by weapons of war and conquest nor by marvels of science. These things go down into the dust and are the sport of the winds in all the deserts of the earth. For there have been "others" – others in the past who have built upon these same perilous foundations. Assyria and Egypt and Rome ... and, further in the shadows, Atlantis and the ghost-memory Mu. Nor were these the first. Nor will they be the last.

“For heathen faith that puts its trust,
In speaking tube and iron shard.
All valiant dust that builds on dust
And guarding calls not Thee to guard...”

These be the breed of the World Conquerors – and of them so grimly wrote Kipling. These are they who build on Steel – and Progress. Things that crumble into rust and perish in their own madness.

But there are other things that do not change; things that endure and spring in eternal rebirth to uphold every age and every race, be it "Savage" or "Civilized." Simple, these things – and fundamental. A simple faith in the all-guiding beneficence of The Great Spirit is the chiefest of them. And next to that a simple life lived in close contact with the earth. From these things alone spring nearly all of the worthwhile joys of life; peace, contentment, and the glad laughter of little children. For him who sets up for himself other ideals these words are not written.

And so, in farewell from the Diary of Yaquitepec, we would say to those who are weary of turmoil and of sham: Return to the earth. Return to planting and reaping and the raising by personal effort of those things for which life calls. Return to the peace of the soil, which is not to be found in cities. And return to Faith. It matters not what the label of the Faith, so long as it is sincere Faith. For faith is the chiefest of the fundamental things. And it is the chief thing that our Age lacks. For a long time our "clever" people have enjoyed themselves poking fun at the "God myth" ... And they have made their doctrines a sorry mess of our times.

So hold fast to Faith – to an implicit faith in the mighty shadowy Power that not only tints the wing of the butterfly but also steers the hurtling suns upon their pathways. For him who holds thus fast to Faith there are no doubts nor terrors.

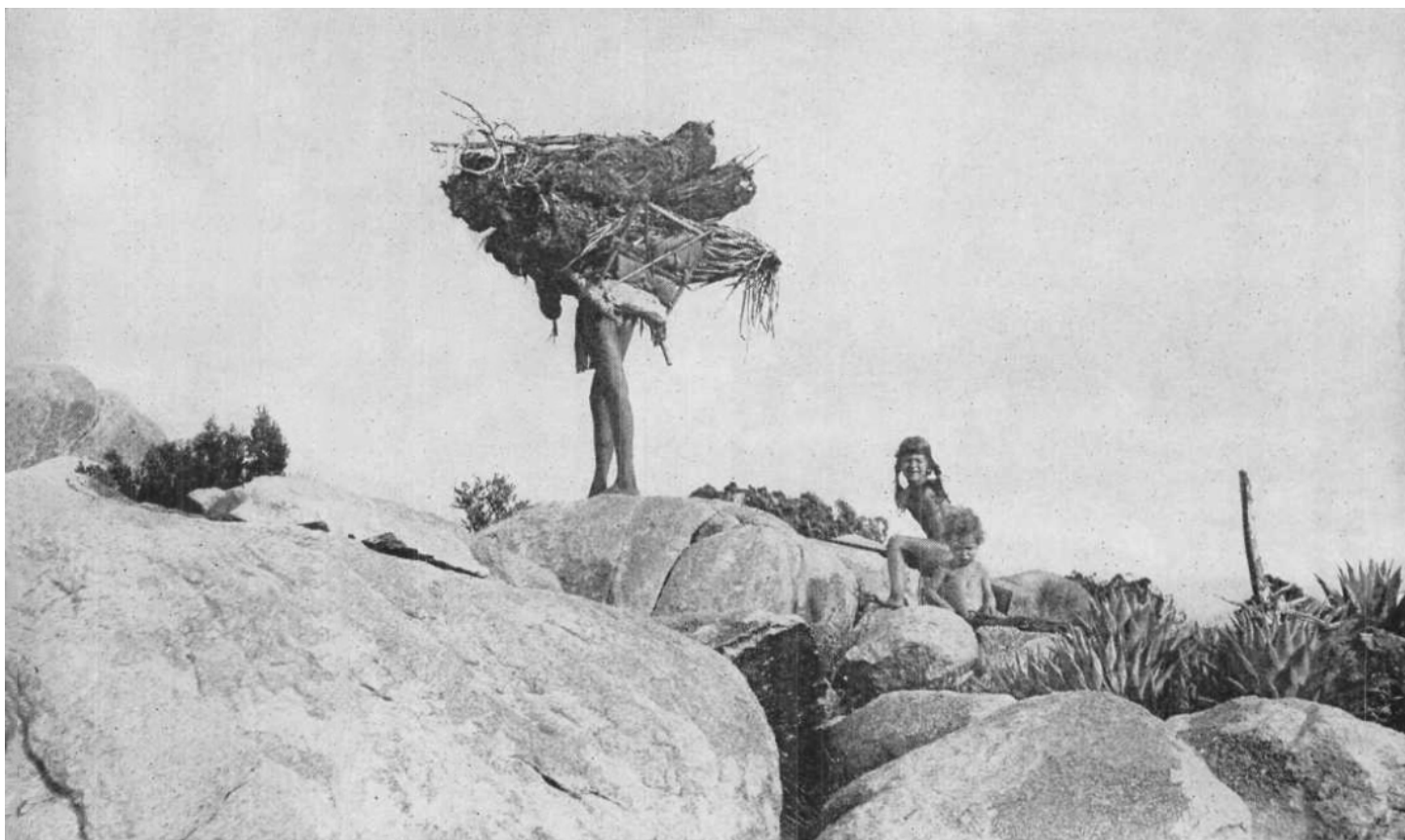
And in this thought, from a mountain in the desert, we bid you farewell: May the peace of the Great Spirit be with you always:

MARSHAL, TANYA, RIDER, RUDYARD and VICTORIA

Desert Home

By Marshal South
Desert Magazine – May 1941

Here is the first of a new series of articles by Marshal South, whose *Desert Diary* won wide-spread favor with *Desert Magazine* readers during 1940. The Souths - Marshal and Tanya left their city home nine years ago to find freedom and content on a homestead on the top of a remote desert mountain in Southern California. They have found happiness in primitive living and close association with Nature – but it has not been an easy life. Today they have three children, and a comfortable adobe home built with their own hands. In this series Marshal gives some interesting glimpses of their daily life on Ghost mountain.



Marshal South and his family scout the hillsides for long distances to secure dead yucca and agave and juniper for their cooking – and in the winter, heat.

SO it is spring again at Yaquitepec. But the free desert knows little of set seasons and cares less. It has been spring on Ghost mountain for a long time. Everything is early this year. Some of the mescals had begun to thrust up shoots by the very first days of February. And there were ocotillo flowers too. As we tramped up and down the trail, carrying loads of supplies for fuel, it was 7-year-old Rider's game to see how many new ocotillo blossoms he could pick out.

The ocotillo is a temperamental thing. It will flower when it feels like it and it cares nothing for precedent. Resolute little banners of scarlet flame wave from the tips of bare, grey wands that still seem held in the torpor of winter. We never cease to be amazed at the tenacity of life and the indomitable purpose that seems to dwell in all desert things. A lesson here that is well worth pondering over.

The life of all desert organisms is hard – not soft. For them there are no cushioned corners or easy short cuts. They have to fight – to steel themselves against adversity, to carry on in the face of seemingly hopeless odds. And it has done something to them; to their spirit; to their very fibre. Perhaps this is most strikingly illustrated in the mescal.

A mescal never knows when it is beaten. Chewed off by rodents and toppled over, hanging by the veriest thread, the bud shoot will still right itself with unbelievable tenacity and go on to flower. Even if entirely beheaded the shoot will often thrust out flower buds from the ragged stump. Purpose! Determination! Do you think it an accident that, all down through history, desert peoples have builded mighty civilizations?

The heavy rains of winter have left their mark on Yaquitepec. In front of the house the whitewashed adobe is scarred with patches of brown where sections of the lime plaster have crumbled and fallen away. And the mescal-and-mud facing of a rear wall is a forlorn skeleton of bare poles. Surprisingly little damage though, in actuality, and until new plastering and whitewashing cover the scars we shall rather enjoy the comfortable, warm look of the brown adobe patches on the walls. There is something sterling and heartening about the appearance of honest adobe. Some deep reminder of man's fundamental kinship with the earth. For, after all, that is where our roots are, in spite of our airy flights and vain imaginings.

Along the house walls where the sun pours its warmth chia sage and delicate branching little yellow-flowered plants are growing. The tender baby-blue of the tiny chia flowers glints fresh against the dark green circles of their ground-hugging leaves. Chia and filaree crowd along the base of our terrace walls. The lavender pink of the filaree flowers glows against the grey and orange stones. Among them are white flowers too – the delicate little morning-glory-like blossoms that open only at night and in the early morning. A host of varied desert flora, gay with life and promise.

The squaw-tea bush in front of the house is sprinkled thickly with clustering chrome yellow blossoms; and down by the yuccas the white and yellow headings of my tiny desert daisy bushes nod beside the budding beavertail cactus. The barrel cacti too are crowned with flower circlets and the lone creosote bush by the great rock is already dressed in its bright new covering of varnished green leaves and is sprinkled with yellow blossoms. New pink and cream heads nod on the buckwheat. The whole world of desert growth throbs to spring.

There was corn to grind this morning, for we had a craving for corn hotcakes – and the meal can was empty. It is such a satisfaction to grind cornmeal from the glistening whole grain; one can almost see the strength and health spill from the crushed-yellow kernels. There is no "separating" and "grading" and "sifting" – and robbing – of the meal here. We get all of it without "improvements." It is too bad that man's chief commercial ambition seems to be to devise elaborate means to spoil and rob the simple, healthful foods that the Great Spirit provides in such abundance.

How well I remember, when a child, being solemnly told how, in less fortunate parts of the world, many children did not get fine white bread such as we ate. The poor little things had to eat coarse black bread. And naturally I was at the time, in my childish ignorance, duly sorry for them. Well, we know better now. But sometimes knowledge is long in coming. Bread, whether corn or wheat, is perhaps the staff of life." But all too often it is a staff upon which the termites have been working. Bread at Yaquitepec is made of meal ground from the whole grain, and it is made without even yeast. No, it is not as "impossible" as you might think. Try making it that way sometime. I think you would like it.

The mornings these days are still chill enough for a little fire. Rider and Rudyard like to squat before it while breakfast is cooking, cheered on and encouraged in their tribal plottings by Victoria, who lies on her bed nearby and burbles an unceasing string of weird comment. We have gone back to using mescal butts for fuel. Winter has made tremendous inroads on our juniper pile; it is almost gone. And now, with the lesser need for great fires, the butts serve splendidly. Tanya and Rider go almost every day, searching over the rocky hill slopes, and bring home great loads which Tanya carries in a basket poised on her shoulder while Rider totes long mescal poles with the dry, dead butts still on them.

This season was so early that most of our mescal roasting is already over, a month ahead of usual. But that is the desert. It is delightfully unpredictable. You never know what sort of a year you are going to have or even what sort of a day it is going to be. No two days or two years are just alike. And changes from calm to storm come with staggering rapidity. Therein, I think, lies the fascination of the desert – and its healthfulness. For one must constantly be on the alert; it is this that keeps one young.

Stagnation is a deadly thing. And so are routine and monotony. Some day we as a nation will learn this, and, learning, will embark on a new lease of life. A nation that has perfectly mastered the art of moving in perfectly ordered lock-step is "perfectly" lock-stepping itself down into oblivion. But this is drifting aside from the matter of the mescals. They are not all gone. There will be enough latecomers for several April roasts.

Winds roar in plenty over Ghost mountain these days. But sandwiched between is enough brilliant spring weather to make one rejoice in just the simple fact of being alive. Work is constant – there is always more of it piled up than we can ever hope to accomplish. But perhaps that is what makes the charm of it all. Out under the turquoise arch of desert skies, where the very silence seems to throb with the peace and purpose of the infinite, work ceases to be a drudgery. It slips into its rightful place as a joyful diversion.

When work is something which one does for oneself and from which tangible personal benefit to life and home can be discerned, it is no longer a slavery. This was the keen joy which the pioneers knew – and was the soaring force of spirit that enabled them to accomplish almost super-human feats. Work! – work in freedom and in intimate contact with the earth.

Somehow everyone at Yaquitepec is singing these days. Tanya's pencil is busy as she snatches odd moments between tasks to capture verse from the chasing cloud shadows and the rustle of the wind-stirred junipers. Three-year-old Rudyard expresses the joy of life in long, rambling chants, half mumbled and half dramatically declaimed. Distinctively savage creations which cease instantly and self-consciously if anyone is so unwise as to let him know that he is being listened to. The chant won't end until someone interrupts. Rudyard is like that. When we have story telling competitions Rider always firmly rules Rudyard out from competing. Rudyard does not tell stories. He tells serials. They go on and on and on and never stop.

The bright warm days that we get now with increasing frequency are ideal for yucca shampoos. And now that we have plenty of good soft rainwater, we are reveling in them. You take the fibrous interior soapy-sapped wood of the yucca, preferably from the butt or lower portion of the trunk, and pound it. Then work the spongy mass up and down in water until you have a creamy lather. Then shampoo the hair with it. It is wonderfully cooling for the scalp and leaves the hair wavy and with a gleaming glint that no civilized soap can give. Yucca root is reported to be a hair tonic too. It is beneficial, beyond question. But I have no personal data to enable me to pass judgment on the story of an old prospector who solemnly assured me that an Indian squaw, of his acquaintance, being challenged to the feat, produced a luxuriant crop of new hair on the head of a white miner

whose cranium was previously "as bare as a billiard ball." This she accomplished by repeated washings with yucca root.

A number of the squaw-tea bushes around Yaquitepec are already generously sprinkled with young seed cones. These green, immature little cones boil up very nicely as a vegetable, provided you get them young and tender enough. As they ripen they develop a quinine-like bitterness. But young and tender and put through the food grinder, which hastens the cooking process, they form a vegetable that is something of a cross between peas and spinach. A quite satisfactory dish. A little limey-bitter in taste, as are most desert plant foods. But it is this very ingredient that carries health with it. The desert animals know these things. You will find the pack rats and other rodents chewing extensively on the bitter yucca leaves at certain life seasons. The wild creatures that are close to the earth as the Great Spirit intended life to be, do not need experts on diet to tell them things.

Rain! A sudden hammering drive that scuds in the wind and bangs upon the roof with the lash of flying buckshot. Startled I glance out of the window to see that the sun is gone and the sky is roofed with grey. All the valleys and canyons deep clown below are blotted by a smoke of driving, rolling cloud. This is Spring.

FAITH

Lose not your faith. Whatever may befall,
Your Faith alone can carry you through all,
And give you inspiration to renew
Your life, and guide you dearly what to do.
Count every other loss a paltry thing
Compared with Faith, to which your soul
must cling.
Faith is our special candle in the night,
Which, burning, guides our wandering
steps aright.

TANYA SOUTH

Desert Home

By Marshal South
Desert Magazine – June 1941

On their remote desert homestead on Ghost mountain, Marshal and Tanya South have for the past nine years been conducting a glorious experiment in primitive living. They and their three children are trying to harmonize their lives as closely as possible with Nature's universal code. In his story this month, Marshal tells some of the things they have learned about Nature - and suggests lessons they have learned from the wildlife neighbors.



Lesson time. Plenty of air and sunshine in this desert classroom where Rider and Rudyard South attack the practical problems of education.

THE plaintive notes of the kildeer dose around the house in the grey light before dawn. The sun rising out of the cloudbanked distance of the lowland desert to fade into the greyness of an overcast sky. Wind! Down on the cliff edge this morning as I scrambled among the boulders and junipers collecting fuel the wind roared up out of far down emptiness with a fury that threatened to hurl me from the rocks. Desert wind is a living thing. There is mystery in it and elemental, untamed freedom. A tiny sharpshin hawk, wings close furled against its

sides, dropped like a whirling plummet over the cliff edge and away into the churning gulf below, planning and drifting expertly into the gusts. Wind and threshing trees!

But here is the sun, bursting suddenly from overhead and blazing leagues on leagues of wasteland to a pattern of dazzling silver. Cloud shadows race like scattering coyotes across the writhing course of sandy washes and over the towers of cinnamon-colored buttes. A white-rumped shrike whirring down from the crest of a tall dead mescal stalk to snatch an unwary bug from a granite boulder. Yes, the chances are good that it will be a brilliant spring day after all.

There is always something electric and vibrant about desert in spring. You sense so plainly the stirring of the mysterious Force in all Nature; the mighty, unceasing throb of Earth-life that goes on and on, steadily and purposefully. Always it gives a fundamental sense of security. Wars may rage and nation battle against nation and turmoil and bate shatter the edifice of human frailties. But the steady, unruffled beat of the Great Heart goes on. You have only to pause in the silence of the desert peace to hear it.

Nighthawks are abroad these evenings, flitting and whirling through the dusk like dark, silent leaves. Masters of camouflage too, these ghostly wingers of the night. By day they sleep upon the ground, near bushes or among the open scattered stones of ridge slopes or in the lee of huge boulders. Low huddled to the earth, their heads sunk into the hollow between their folded wings, they look, with their sooty and faintly white penciled plumage, so exactly like sun-bleached ancient mescal roots that it is hard to believe that they are birds.

I have almost trodden upon them sometimes. And even then standing over them and peering at them from a distance of three feet, it is often impossible to say with certainty that they are living things, until, abruptly, they take wing. Camouflage in Nature is a marvelous thing. There is a law behind it that is not well understood. Like everything else in Nature it has a definite reason, and one not quite so obvious as is popularly supposed. Like the airplane and other applications of natural forces man makes use of what he knows of camouflage – for destructive purposes.

The warm, bright run of the very best season of all the desert year is ahead of us. Golden sunshine, just right in temperature, and the caress of soft winds. Not that there will be no gales and storms and other brief interludes that make our Ghost mountain climate interesting. But spring is now no longer an infant. She is a bright maiden who is blooming towards the queenly womanhood of summer. Wrens sing in the juniper tops and carpenter bees bumble along the eaves' troughs of the house in the warm white mornings before sunrise. Pinacate beetles amble on their philosophic journeys and lizards flash across the rocks in pursuit of unwary flies. And Rider and Rudyard hold boat races on the new lake.

Oh yes, Yaquitepec has a new lake. It is tiny enough, it is true. But it is the biggest body of water that has ever collected and stayed in one place on Ghost mountain for some centuries. Some day the "lake," when the side walls are raised and the top put in, will be a cistern. Now it is a spoon-shaped excavation lined with chicken wire and cement. When the wind swoops over the mountain crest and strikes down among the junipers real ripples and waves heave in the lake.

Constructed hastily, working against time and with the lower level of it already full of water before the upper cement courses were laid, the lake has already justified itself a hundred fold. For we did not have to turn precious rain water to waste this year – the first year that we have ever been so fortunate. Always, previously, with our limited cistern capacity, there would come a time in the rainy season when, with everything brimming,

we would have to switch the down-spouts and let the precious fluid run to waste. Always a bitterly heartbreaking thing to do, knowing full well that we would, later on in the year, be in need of that very water.

This year we switched the rainspouts from the brimming cisterns into the "lake." And the rain gods filled it full, almost to peril of overflowing. Now waterbeetles play and boats sail where but a few short weeks ago mescals spread their spiny daggers. Many and weird are the boats that sail the stormy waters. The latest is a round dish pan equipped with a stern wheel driven by a tiny steam engine that Santa Claus left this Christmas for Rider. Rider is proud of this boat – the result of his persistent begging of daddy to make a Mississippi river steamer. Rudyard has boats too. They are of strange shapes and material sometimes. The other day he tried to sail a hammer – and was scandalized to discover that it would work only as a submarine.

Our resident chukka partridges have hatched their broods. Three days ago as I went down to the lower terrace to replenish the grain in the feed pan, which we keep beneath a juniper tree for the chukkas and the wild birds, warning cluckings and scooting chukkas drew my attention to one little hen bird crouched beside the steps in the shelter of a tine bush. She was sheltering under her wings a downy yellow and brown streaked brood of chicks. The cock bird strutted guardingly near by.

Hastily I withdrew. There had been such darting and scooting of little down covered atoms when I blundered into the group that I was afraid some were lost among the rocks. This must have been the case. For when I cautiously returned some time later the little hen bird had gone, very evidently to round up stragglers. But she had left her main body of chicks still in the same place. Huddled close in a cleft of a rock and partly sheltered by the bush they were packed one upon another in a motionless, downy mass, glinting here and there with tiny, bright watchful eyes. They were almost invisible in their protective coloring which blended perfectly with their surroundings. They made no sign or stir of life. Only their eyes watched my every move as they waited obediently for their mother's return. Tender little atoms of life in a hard fierce world of rock and thorn! So many perils! As I tiptoed softly away I remembered a certain little quail and her mate. That had been stark tragedy of another season. The little desert quail and her mate had been quite tame, calling and talking to themselves all around the house and coming regularly for food. After nesting, the little hen bird came back attended by but a single tiny chick; her mate and all the rest of the brood had disappeared, victims of some wildlife tragedy. Lonely and disconsolate she hugged close about the house for some days, keeping well beneath the juniper shadows and followed always on her stealthy comings and going by the tiny, uncertain little ball of fluffy life that ran like a shadow at her heels and over which she cooed and clucked in pitiful solicitude.

A skunk or some other marauder of the night got them both. For, one morning, going out across the flat for fuel, I came suddenly, not far from the house, upon a litter of freshly torn quail feathers beside a tiny cave under a big rock. Stooping down I peered into the little hideout. Feathers! – torn feathers and down. Nothing more. The lonely, courageous little mother and her chick had gone together down the long, long trail. There was gloom over Yaquitepec when I came back with the news. Rider cried. And his were not the only eyes that were damp. For the little mother and her chick had somehow become part of the scheme of things. We missed them.

This afternoon one of the big, black scaly lizards got into the house – after flies probably. I swept him into a deep can from which he could not jump, carried him to the open window and dumped him gently on the ground outside. He lay there looking at me a long time - outraged. Then, when I went outside to plug up a little chink in the adobe wall that suggested danger as a snake entry, he suddenly took to his heels and scooted off in such a wrathful fury that I had to laugh. There are some people who tell you smugly that animals have no souls. These are the people who think the whole starry universe was made just as a picture frame for man. No souls?

Rubbish! If you really want to understand humans study animals and birds and all living things. Their reactions throw much light on the antics of the human family. You will find the dour natured ones and the misers, the investigative ones, the hail-fellow-well-met type – and the plodders. They go by clans and classes too. The red racer snakes on Ghost mountain belong to a guild of comedians.

There is a new adobe arch finished at the north end of the kitchen. But there is still a lot of wall to build to replace temporary structure. There is this about personal building – you are always adding something or enlarging. On the principle of the sea creatures that build their shells bigger and bigger as they grow. If it were possible I think that every family ought to build its own house. A house is a personal thing – or it ought to be. Houses acquire souls. They absorb the spirit of the builders – and also the personality of those who live in them. It isn't necessary to be super-sensitive to realize the truth of this. Almost everyone can recall certain houses that carried with them an air of depression and gloom. And others that seem to be always smiling. The Indian knows this. You will find, if you will go to the trouble to dig beneath the surface of silly superstitions that they are usually founded upon concrete fact.

Mourning doves calling from the ridge somewhere. A pair of them comes here every year. We have never found their nesting place but it is somewhere among the rocks and junipers. Wild creatures have fixed habits. They take likes and dislikes to certain spots. And, outside of birds, desert creatures do not as a rule range very widely. Home is home, and they take root. The coyote is an exception. He is a wide ranger. But then he is a sardonic brigand, anyway. An example of polished roguery that can bring scant satisfaction to those who prate loudly of the "broadening influence" of travel.

LIFE

*Pause, listen to the heartbeat of the Earth.
See how the seeds so slowly bring to birth
Rejuvenating Life. Yet still we find
How senseless doubts becloud the human mind
That takes no heed of truths which earth and sky
And all God's world display to every eye.
Life is reborn. And, like the seed,
Each soul renews itself to greater deed.*

– Tanya South

Desert Home

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – July 1941

When a kitchen utensil breaks at Yaquitepec, the remedy is simple. Marshal South and his two sons take the trail that leads to one of their clay pits and bring home the materials for new pottery. In their remote desert home on Ghost mountain the Souths have found that Nature supplies nearly everything essential to human life. Their experiment in primitive living has brought them health and happiness.

BENEATH the ramada, just outside the house, the carpenter bees are booming and bumbling amidst the thatch of dead mescal poles. Away to the east is the morning star, soaring upward like a shining angel above the whitening paleness of the far horizon.

Why is it, I wonder, that on these hushed, early desert mornings I think so much of my father? It is as though the mists roll away from an old, old trail that leads back to childhood. I see him again as he used to be; with his team and buckboard, driving on lonely roads, silent, keen-eyed for the trail in the faint light that wraps the world long before sunrise. Again I hear the slur of wheels through the sand, the strike of steel tires against a stone, the squeak of singletrees and the creak of leather. The swiftly moving hoofs of the team drum back the dead years in memories that bring, now, an odd, choked tightening of the throat as I see again the shadowy forms of the horses – and my father, his eyes upon the dim road, driving on and on into the star studded dawning.

But the droning of the busy carpenter bees breaks through the mists of childhood memories. Busy fellows, these big, shiny black bees. With all the swelled pomposity of some petty official, impressed with his own importance. They are always blusteringly officious. They take possession of the long channels cut in the pithy, dry stalks of the mescal shoots by the big butter-yellow, amber-headed grubs which develop later into the slender, scarlet-winged, dashing handsome, mescal beetles. The carpenter bees move into their dark, abandoned tunnels. And fall busily to their own carpentering.



Tanya South gathers twigs of ephedra or squaw tea. From these a healthful refreshing beverage is made.

From the thatch of the ramada these warm days there drifts a fine scatter of sawdust. And every once in a while, from a neat round porthole in a dead, overhead stalk, some shiny black artisan dumps an extra big accumulation of wood waste down on our heads. It is all right, so long as it does no damage. But at intervals we get an eyeful. Then we say violent things about the carpenter bees and wish heartily that we had not provided them with such an abundance of pithy labyrinths to work in.

This last week we have transferred our breakfast allegiance from wheat to corn – in the Yaquitepec version of the Pueblo Indian *piki*. We make a water-thin batter of home ground yellow corn meal, with nothing added but a little salt, and spill it out on a very hot griddle. The result is a paper-thin, much perforated, lace-like wafer which, as it crisps stiff enough, is whisked from the fire. Cooking *piki* is fun. And eating it is better. With a little butter and honey it is hard to beat. Crunchy and with the delicate flavor of the fresh grain. I don't know if you can make this sort of *piki* with "civilized" corn meal. Maybe so. But *quien sabe*. Civilized corn meal – like a lot of other things – seems to have acquired something of the hard, tinny brittleness of the modern age.

Yesterday the salt-cellar went the way that all things go - eventually. Being home made pottery and not hammered from a block of solid silver (as was the one fashioned in the early days of an Arizona mission for a visiting bishop) ours went quicker and more completely. So it had to be replaced. Investigation of the day bin revealed that our supply of prepared clay was entirely exhausted. "Not even 'nough for not even one very *small* salt-cellar, daddy," Rudyard reported solemnly as he leaned far into the bin and studied its vacancy intently for at least two long minutes. "But I think that in *this* corner there might ... " Then his little brown heels went wildly into the air as he leaned too far. He disappeared into the box with a startled yell.

After he had been duly rescued and comforted we set out for our "day mine." This is some distance from the house. There is plenty of clay on Ghost mountain, as is natural in a district of much weathered granite. But it is patchy. Some deposits are too full of impurities, or too shallow, to be of any use. Every once in a while we run across a good spot. Then we mark the place and draw our supplies from there until we have worked it out.

The three of us – Rider, Rudyard and I – carried containers in which to pack home the clay. Graduated according to the size and strength of the bearer – after the time honored example set by the Three Bears. Rudyard cannily selected an empty baking powder can. Hefting it appraisingly, and with much wrinkling of his pudgy little nose, he declared he would "bring home plenty heavy enough for Rudgy." Rider, however, had to be dissuaded from toting along a basket as large as my own. He is doggedly ambitious to be all grown up and it is hard sometimes to keep him from overtaxing his strength. We compromised finally on a smaller basket – and my allowing him to carry the light shovel as well

The trail was thick-bordered, and in places almost obliterated by the herbage that was the result of this year's exceptional rains. But the grass now was all dry and tawny brown. It rustled beneath our bare feet and in the thin shade of it foraging ants hurried busily upon their duties. The wind that came down from among the rocks and junipers was warm and drowsy and the yellow flowers of the late mescals swayed against the blue desert sky like the last tattered banners of the retreating hosts of Spring.

Away up on the ridge somewhere a sleepy road-runner intoned at intervals his puppy-like whining call. A buzzard wheeled overhead and two garrulous desert ravens flapped heavily. And down by the old mesal roasting hearth, where the trail skirts the blackened ring of stones where we usually fire our clay pots, we came upon a plump little horned toad fast asleep upon an ant nest. But no ants were visible. Those that had not

already been picked off by the artful little marauder were keeping discreetly underground. Sun warmed and drowsily content, with a full tummy, he had succumbed to pleasant dreams.

We reached our destination and dug our clay, first carefully clearing out the accumulation of dead sticks and gravel that the winter storms had piled in the shallow depression. Then homeward. The human head is a good, and natural, place to carry a burden. In Indian file, so laden, we made our way back, Rudyard in the middle of the line, Rider bringing up the rear. Presently a stifled chuckle made me look back. Rider was sputtering with suppressed laughter and pointing. But Rudyard, oblivious of the merriment, plodded stolidly on. He had hoisted his tiny baking can full of clay to the top of his head and, with plump little arms much too short for the job, was holding it there. His face was set in lines of grim determination, as of one who performs a serious duty. And there was satisfaction there, too. Was he not doing exactly as we were? He looked so funny that I turned away quickly. To have let him see me laugh would have been unforgivable.

And so we arrived home with our clay. And duly ground it and sifted it and made us a new salt-cellar – and several other things as well. Rider made a special little vase for himself. And so did Rudyard – or at any rate he got himself nicely mussed up with mud. Which is almost the entire joy of "potting" when one is three years old. So everyone was happy.

The garden grows. It is a tiny garden – the most of it protected by muslin covered frames. The beds are microscopic. But we have more water in our cisterns this year than last and the green stuff forms a welcome addition to the diet. Right now we have chives and pinto beans and bush beans and lettuce and scarlet-globe radishes growing. In the warm, sunny days one can almost see the plants grow.

We spend much of our time beneath the shade of the ramada these days. Here there is shade without walls and the little wandering breezes from out the wastelands can come and go as they please. It is a cool place to eat, too. Victoria is especially fond of it because there are generally fascinating little lizards to be seen wandering about on the top of the low, bordering adobe wall in search of flies. Some of these turquoise studded little rascals grow very tame. One, this noon, sat and glinted trustful jewelled eyes at me as I gently stroked it under the chin with my finger. They grow saucily insolent, too. There is one in particular that makes a point of scampering over Tanya as she lies on the rug in the shade, putting Victoria to sleep. Tanya does not particularly mind being scampered over. But the other day when the same inquisitive little sprite, breathlessly driving for a fly, tumbled into her paint pot as she sat decorating a desert gourd, she almost said something – very loud. She got up so suddenly that she upset Rudyard, who fell against Rider, who was sewing a basket with mescal fibre. And in the wreckage his prize wooden needle got broken.

So, as there had to be another needle, we raided the nearest juniper tree for a likely twig, and whittled out a new one. Reflecting, as we sat there in the drowsy shade, about the long, long road humanity has trodden from the time of the first primitive wooden needles to today's roaring machines. A long road. Humanity has lost something during that long trek. Something of incalculable value; something the loss of which is now driving it into insanity and red ruin. It has lost the knowledge of how to live. It has lost its faith. It has lost its sense of kinship with the Great Spirit. Dazzled by a greed for material things it has sold its birthright for a "mess of pottage." Pottage that is now, alas, red with torrents of blood.

Not a cheerful line of reflection. As we sat there in the peace of the silent desert, whittling upon our primitive needle, there came back to us a fragment of Kipling. Just a fragment. But a grim one. And aptly descriptive of humanity's gleanings on its march of "Progress."

" ... The worst we took, with sweat and toil. The best we left behind."

How close, how close are Life and Death,
And Truth and Falsehood, Light and Dark.
So close that in each life's full breadth
Each light and shade may make its mark.

– Tanya South

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – August 1941

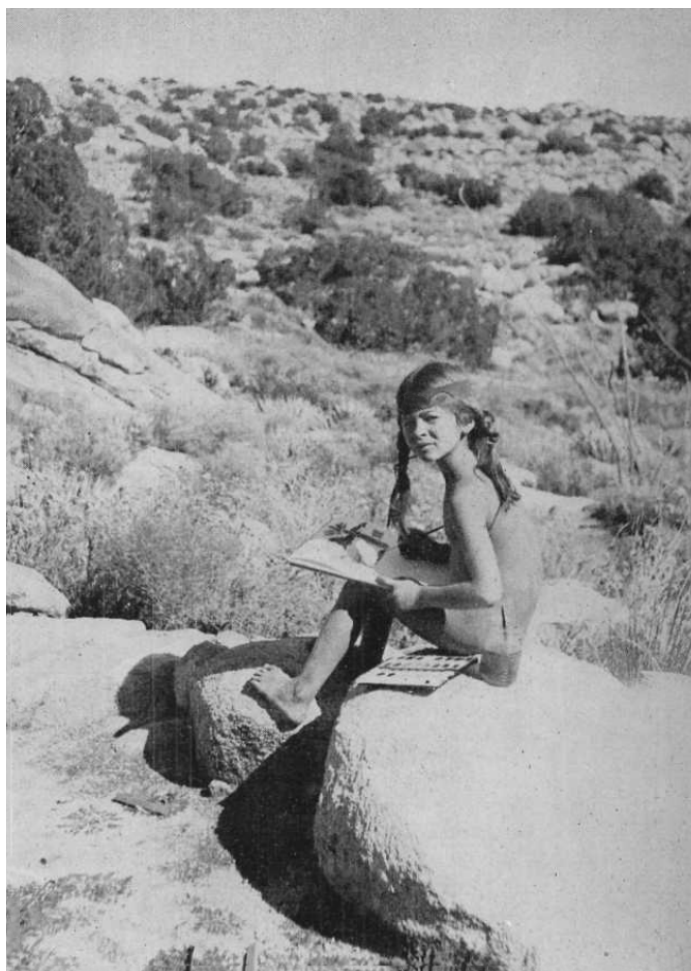
At their desert homestead on Southern California's Ghost mountain, Marshal and Tanya South and their three children have no water supply except the rain that falls on the roof of their adobe home and is drained to the cisterns. Before the cisterns were built they had to haul water many miles, and then pack it on their backs up the steep trail to the top of the mountain. Rains are not plentiful in this desert region – and every drop of water is precious. Yet despite this fact the Souths have a little garden. It isn't large, and it has to be well protected against rabbits and other rodents, but – well, let Marshal tell you about it in his own words. Here is another interesting chapter in the story of a family that has found health and happiness in primitive living.

THE days are hot now. Through the chinks of the ramada, thatch the noonday sun searches the patch of black shade with thin, burning fingers. It is breathless in the house, even with every window flung wide. Our little thermometer, tacked against a temporary inside wall, hovers around 110 degrees, and often goes higher.

The big open unfinished cistern that we have grown used to calling the "lake" is dry. Where, awhile back, toy boats sailed and water beetles played, hot, thirsty cement now glares to the scampering lizards and the hopeful bees.

It is hard on the bees. Both our own and the wild ones have gotten used to the lake as a water supply. Now, again, they must make long flights across the desert for their drinks. And, in consequence, they are mad. Habit is as strong in insects and all other living creatures as it is in humans. Like the needle of the phonograph, action impulses follow little grooves among the thought cells. Until there is a worn track which it is hard to turn from. "Thus did my father, and my grandfather!" "Behold, this is *right* and this is *wrong*!" Thus and so is "the custom."

It is a good thing that the Great Spirit, in His infinite wisdom, sees fit, every once in a while, to drastically upset the order of things. Else there would be no development of mind or soul or initiative. Just a ghastly lock-step – everything growing more and more crystallized and stereotyped and patterned until the whole universe mummified. After all it is disaster and upheaval that are the stuff from which real progress is built.



Rider South selects a warm sunny rock for his outdoor studio. Sketching and painting are among his favorite pastimes.

Our tame chukka partridges have learned to fit themselves to conditions. They come for their drinks at fairly regular times, morning and evening. And at such times we go out and serve them their portion in a tiny pan beneath the shade of the juniper tree. If they come in and find the pan dry they walk up and down prominently on the white gravel in front of the house, eyes cocked expectantly, until noticed. They are not the only ones who have learned, however. The squirrels, chipmunks and birds have learned too. Speedily, as the meal call sounds, guests begin to assemble for the banquet. The chukkas do not like the big grey squirrel, who is a hoarder. They scold angrily as he wolfs the grain. They don't like, either, the large red racer snake who comes periodically, trailing his long handsome length for a drink of water. But the racer is a good sport and fills his appointed place in the scheme of things. He is an adjuster in Nature's balance. Our mouse population, a problem a short time ago, is now back to normal.

Our tiny garden continues to do well, though it is rationed now on water from the drinking water cisterns. Every year the water situation improves a little, as we get more and more toehold. The thing is like a rolling snowball. The bigger it gets the quicker it grows. We get a lot of comfort sometimes in thinking back to beginnings. It's encouraging, and it is also an illustration of inter-dependence. It takes water to mix cement – and it takes cement to catch more water. Sometimes we think we haven't gone very far. Then we remember that we carried the first water to mix the first tiny batches of cement up the mountain on our backs. And remembering this – as we now dip a bucket into a sizable cistern for our supply – we feel better. And sizable cisterns mean the ability to make bigger cisterns. So it grows. So *everything* grows. A fundamental law. Germs and mesquite plants and humans – and civilizations and universes. Until, like an over-inflated bubble, they grow too big to stand the strain of their own expansion. Then they blow up – and return to beginnings, to start all over again. Hopeless? By no means. On the contrary, if you will reflect upon this mysterious, unswerving law, you will find there the most definite assurance of Hope and of Immortality. Life is a busy thing. And packed full of joy if it is lived sanely and sincerely.

And the richest joy of life is work. Work and accomplishment. Not treadmill work, but individually constructive work. I don't think there are many pleasures equal to that of overcoming a seemingly hopeless problem. At any rate we get a thrill out of every cool green salad that comes up to the table these days, a thrill that is maybe childish and out of all proportion to the size of the salad, but a thrill nevertheless. Sometimes our race visitors smile slyly as we enthuse. They are thinking of the lush fields where water in abundance flows docilely in ditches, and green things wax fat in pampered ease. But we are thinking of our first garden. It was 12 by 18 *inches* in size. And, for lack of anything better, we fenced it around with cholla cactus – a rampart against the mice and rats.

We planted mustard in that garden. And doled it scanty portions of drinking water that we carried up the mountain on our backs in a hot summer. And the little plants came up. It was a new world to them – new and harsh conditions. Ten thousand generations of mustard seed behind them had never faced conditions such as these. When they were three inches high, dwarfed and spindly and tough, they realized that the end was upon them. And, with the marvelous prompting of the Great Spirit (a circumstance from which one can derive more assurance than from all the books and preachers in the world), they began to seed – to put their last remaining flickers of life into a desperate effort to perpetuate their kind. We had one salad from that garden. It was a salad that might have served as an appetizer for a squirrel. But it was a salad.

The next garden was a trifle bigger. And only a trifle better and more successful. Plants are like people. They acquire certain habits and needs over long periods of reincarnation. A long line of ancestry had accustomed our garden vegetables to certain civilized conditions. They did not like the desert. The harsh soil

upon which the mescals and the junipers and the ramarillo bushes thrive was too crude for them. So, as we had no time to wait upon evolution, we had to compromise – make soil that they *did* like.

Far and wide, on desert excursions, we collected fertilizer, carrying it home and up the mountain in sacks. When the grass and herbage flourished in the spring we collected that too. All of this enriching material we buried and dug in, into the stubborn earth. Then came the yelling winds, and the savage beat of the sun; the appreciative bugs; the mice and the squirrels and the joyful birds. Many times, before these individual or collective blitzkriegs, the garden went under. But, stubbornly, having an inability to know when it was licked, it always somehow got up on its hind legs and shook a defiant fist at the land hosts and the air hosts.

And it won out. Today it flourishes merrily, protected by frames – low enclosures completely covered with cheesecloth. Maybe you can't have a "garden estate" under such conditions. But you can have vegetables. In desert locations where water is scarce and high winds and pests are serious problems these garden frames are the answer. Five or six feet wide, and of any length convenient, they give complete protection. If you have had trouble with your desert vegetable garden and have not hit upon this device, try it out. Make the side walls from old lumber, or anything else that is handy, and build them from 12 to 18 inches high. If the materials are available it is an improvement to make the sides of fine mesh wire netting, as this lets in the air and light. There should be curtains of burlap or canvas, to let down when hot or heavy winds blow. The tops of the frames can be covered with cheap unbleached muslin, tacked down along one side and weighted with a long strip of wood on the other. It should be wide enough to lap well over. Lath covers, or covers of fine mesh wire, are perhaps better if they are tight enough to exclude pests. Or glass can be used. The garden frame is a practical thing for dry locations. It is economical as to water, too.

Hot days and desert sunshine. How little any of us know about life, despite the learned delvings and soul-crushing science of our Age of Progress. What did the Chaldeans think, and discover? And the Atlanteans, and the Egyptians – and all the shadowy company before – who groped and swaggered and toiled through their respective cycles of growth and death. Dust in the wind! Mayhap I have the dust of dead world conquerors in the moist mud of the olla that grows in size and shape under the workings of my fingers. Perhaps in the dumpy little toy dog which Rider fashions from the moistened earth lurks the ashes of a forgotten saint.

"Imperial Caesar, dead and turned to clay
May stop a hole to keep the wind away."

... And the world rolls on among the stars – a throbbing, living atom amidst a glorious universe of unnumbered myriads of other throbbing, living atoms. A universe of eternal, universal life, in which the fleeting shadow that we call Death is no more than a brief, recurring night between the glow of endless days.

The wind this afternoon whirls and roars. Perhaps that is the charm of our desert mountain. There is no sameness; all is constant change. The hot sunshine streams into the house through the open back window and the three ears of golden corn, with their stripped-back husks – corn of our own raising – sway and swing from the twisted fiber cord that suspends them from a ceiling beam. The back shutter of the kitchen window is open and sways and bangs at its confining hook. From the shade of the ramada, outside, come the mingled voices of Rider, Rudyard, Tanya and Victoria, who are out there in the warm wind, trying to keep cool. Sketchily Tanya is wrestling with the job of reading an instructive story aloud. Comes a sudden stop to the narrative – and abrupt termination upon which the small, determined voice of Rudyard throws explanation:

"I am thoroughly se-gusted (disgusted) with that book," he says firmly, as he calmly removes it from Tanya's hand. "But I am not 'gusted with this other one, " – picking up another from the table and holding it out to her. "Read this. There's *fairy stories* in this book."

Best of the wind. And heat in it. A hummingbird hurtling past and out over the little juniper studded flat with a sharp whirr – a flick of sound passing in the dry, driving air like the swish of a speeding arrow. Or was it really an arrow? A ghostly arrow from the ghostly bow of one of the long dead dusky warriors who roamed Ghost mountain in the dim, fled years? Who shall say? The "old people" were free. Their hearts were fierce and wild and brave and beat with every shade of human love and a quenchless worship of Freedom. They died. But they were not enslaved. And their spirits live on. Their arrows still speed across the ridges; their ghostly chants still eddy in the whimpering wind.

Dawn to noon – and to Dark. But the trail of the bare, resolute brown feet and the thin twang of the desert bowstring lead out across the wastelands. A thin, resolute wilderness trail that has passed aforetime – and shall pass again – through the red rust of crumbled machines and the weathered mounds of forgotten cities.

Dawn to Dark! ... And on to Dawn. The winds swirl out of emptiness. But the old, old trail goes on and on. On towards the Sunrise.

What then is Life? an instant's breath,
Of Joy and Strife 'tween Birth and Death.
An instant's glance, of Search, of Hope,
Of instant's chance to stretch our scope.
Always the brink, ever the Way –
'Till Death will link another Day.

– Tanya South

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – September 1941

Marshal South and seven-year-old Rider recently spent a day looking for a spring which according to Indian legend is to be found in one of the Ghost mountain canyons. A spring of water would add much to the security of life at Yaquitepec where the Souths are carrying on their experiment in primitive living. But the search was unsuccessful – and so the Souths must go through the summer with only the water that drained from their house roof into the cisterns during the last rainy season.

THUNDERHEADS bank often upon the horizon these August days and the hard arch of the turquoise sky is a thirsty metallic backdrop for cruising cloud-mountains of dazzling white. There is something magnificent about these mighty, desert thunderclouds. It would be a warped soul indeed who could stand amidst the hush of the wasteland leagues and gaze at them unmoved. "Just clouds" would you say? "Simple aggregations of vapor. Drifting mist banks. Nothing more."

Well – perhaps. But as one stands in the hot, stretching silence of the endless desert and gazes upward these towering white sky mountains don't look like that. They don't look simple and commonplace or tagged with matter-of-fact scientific explanation. They look like something very different. They carry with them an ominous, disquieting sense of POWER. Of a living Power that is as far beyond science as the light of the sun is beyond the glimmer of a rushlight. A Power that moves in mighty silence; that is clothed in the swirling drive of stuff as unsubstantial as vapor. But a Power, nevertheless, before which the human soul shrinks in awe. Small wonder that the ancient dwellers of the desert sensed the might of the Great Spirit in these glittering pinnacles of cloud and conceived their dim, rumbling black caverns as being the haunt of the mysterious Thunderbird. Maybe we at Yaquitepec have gone back; mayhap the spirits of the old people have laid hold upon us. But science can keep its explanations – and its ideas.

One of our cisterns is dry, and several days ago I washed it out to be ready for the first heavy shower. I left the hatch off so the dry air and sunshine would freshen the interior. And I forgot about it for a couple of days. When I remembered and went to close the opening there were a couple of little desert mice in the bottom of the cistern. Victims of raise steps – or perhaps of venturesome curiosity – they were huddled now in a little furry ball in the coolest corner. The smooth cistern sides had proved too much for them to scale. Without movement,



Tanya South is a busy person – she not only has the care of her three children, but she also conducts a daily school for the two oldest. For relaxation she brings the typewriter out under the ramada and writes. Her poems have appeared in many publications.

in a beady-eyed hopelessness, they sat and watched me while I maneuvered a long pole down into the depths of the dry tank.

Then, suddenly, as the butt came to rest a couple of inches from them, they understood. Hope electrified the huddled grey ball to action. With nimble, clinging feet they scooted one after the other up the steep inclined plane, leaped over the edge of the man-hole and scuttled to safety amidst the bushes. I had to climb down into the cistern to mop it out again before I replaced the lid. But I didn't mind. A cheap enough price to pay for the privilege of another sidelight on animal behavior.

We have about decided that the Ghost mountain "spring" is a myth. Oh, yes, there have been rumors of a hidden spring. Vague, elusive tales, something like the lost mine stories of which the wastelands are full. In winter, when chill winds sweep over Ghost mountain and when everything that can hold water is full, we don't take much stock in the spring legend. But every summer, when the heat waves shimmer far out across the glinting badlands and our cisterns begin to drop their water level, we get out the spring story and dust it off – with all its vague, fascinating detail.

" ... There was an old Indian. And he told a prospector ... It was on the *south* side of the canyon ... The mountain sheep had quite a trail there ... No, it's hidden by now, maybe ... The Indians filled up a lot of those springs, so the white men wouldn't find them ... Anyway that place used to be called hidden well ... "

And so forth, and so on. Regular desert stuff. Just enough mystery – and maybe truth – in it to make it alluring. In summertime!

It was Rider who resurrected the legend this year. Sitting by the side of the hatch of the big cistern where he acted as door-keeper against the thirsty wild bees – shutting down and opening the cloth cover as I drew the buckets of water – he said suddenly: "Daddy, let's go look for the spring tomorrow. You know that old man said ... "

So the next morning when the dawn was drawing a faint pencil of red behind the phantom blue outlines of buttes and mountain ranges away off in Arizona, we set out. Hot, blinding sunlight was glaring on the barren ridges by the time we reached the brink of Mystery canyon. Over the cliff edge a gnarled dead juniper, age-blackened in the sun, reached fantastic arms. The swimming gulf below was silent with the breathless, ear-ringing hush of the desert. Already heat was pulsing from it. The white sand of the little wash, far down on the canyon floor, was a writhing blurr.

It was on the south side of the canyon, about half way up. Rider said hopefully, quoting from the legends. He took off his sandals to secure safer foothold among the tumbled, wind-scoured boulders, and we began to go down.

And we went down – and down. And sideways, west and east. All through that forenoon and far into the afternoon we worked back and forth along that almost perpendicular wall of sun-seared rock. Beetling cliffs where the wild apricot trees, roots deep driven into fissures, waved siren green branches that hinted falsely of water. Hushed caves where the shallow shadows were carpeted thickly with drifted, dry desert leaves. Scorching gullies where, in the choking heat of an oven, we threaded our way perilously between teetering, giant boulders – many of them big as an office building – picking our footing along the brink of menacing chasms that yawned blackly amidst the jumbled rocks. Buzzards wheeled high in the hot silence. Ghostly little brown birds, voiceless as shadows, slipped away into the gloom of stirless junipers. Once a big hawk, silent

and grey like some malignant spirit, launched himself startingly from a black cleft and swept away down the canyon.

"It was on the south side," Rider kept saying gamely, "— about half way up the canyon wall. Maybe if we keep on ... "

But his voice was slowly getting dryer and hoarser and his eager scramblings less and less nimble. The canteen was about empty. The heat of the sun in the open gullies was killing. "It ... was ... on the south side ... Daddy. And ... and maybe ... "

But we quit, finally, after a stubborn argument, for Rider hates to abandon his purpose. "We'll come again then, maybe in the fall or winter," he said at last, grudgingly. "And then we'll look on the *north* side, too. If this spring is just a fairy story we've got to know for certain."

Hot and weary we clambered down into the bed of the canyon and headed on our roundabout course homeward, skirting the base of the mountain. The sand was hot and the catsclaw bushes, gloating at our aching muscles, slashed at us vindictively. Rider's feet were dragging. But he made no complaint. And, even as we tramped, he stooped every once in a while to pick up pottery sherds. The desert about Ghost mountain is littered with scraps of the shattered earthenware of the old people. How long? From whence — and to where?

Silence and heat and scattered chips of old jars upon the sand. It isn't so much what you can see on the desert; it's what you can *feel*.

It was a weary tramp. But there was no help for it. We were a long way from the trail that threads up Ghost mountain. But we knew well, from ample experience, that the longest way around was the easiest way home. We had made frontal attacks on the mountain before — to our undoing. A coyote got up presently out of a thin band of shade beneath a scorched butte and loped thirstily down the wash. He stopped, after a bit, and stared at us. Soon, as we paid no attention to him, we saw him trotting back.

It was a day for whip-tail lizards. They were out in extraordinary numbers, scampering their handsome forms across the hot sand. There is something of the stage villain's slink about the gait of a whip-tail. It is so exaggerated that it seems deliberately assumed. It is a play-acting pose that goes perfectly with the devil-may-care expression on their faces. Rider forgot his pottery collecting presently in the excitement of seeing one of them pick up and run on its hind legs. The whip-tails, in common with some other desert lizards, will do that once in a while. Folding in their forelegs against their breasts and balancing by their long tails they will scoot like the wind in queerly human two-legged fashion. It is then that one can glimpse the family connection between the lizards and the prosaic domestic chicken.

It was a day for bell spiders too. Their webs were everywhere. Weary, as we were, we blundered often into their low-strung nets and lines before we could turn aside. Bell spider is probably not the official name for these ingenious little desert dwellers. Without doubt they, unknowingly, shoulder some fearsome Latin appellation. But Rider calls them bell spiders because of the tiny fairy-like bell shaped house they build for themselves. This sun-and-rain tent, open only at the bottom, hangs like a bell in the midst of an artful arrangement of supporting cables. Usually about an inch and an eighth long and three eighths of an inch in diameter at the bottom, it is ingeniously woven of white silk and camouflaged on the outside by scraps of dry buckwheat flowers, bits of dead grass or tiny dry leaves. Beside it, or around it, the little tent dweller weaves a marvelously elaborate catching net, almost invisible and of a texture resembling fine white crepe.

The spider itself is a ghostly whitish color, sometimes faintly marked, and with slender, brownish legs. It resembles, somewhat, the black widow; another point of similarity being its extremely tough web. Until one peers closely and discovers the neat and beautifully woven net which this spider makes amidst its sprawling and untidy arrangement of cross cables, its web has a striking resemblance to that of the widow. Whether its bite is harmless however, or charged with poison similar to its sinister relative, we do not know.

It was late when we plodded up the last stretch. of the home trail. Even Rider had had more than enough. Tanya, Rudyard and Victoria were at the door to welcome us. "Did you find the spring?" Tanya asked hopefully.

Headed for the water olla, Rider shook his head:

"We've got a better idea," he said huskily. "We're gonna get a lot more cement and just *build* a spring for ourselves."

Which is the way it is likely going to be. And, after all, there is a deal of comfort in the thought. Necessity is the goad which spurs to accomplishment. And a thing won by work has a value far in excess of anything that comes easily. Perhaps it is a good thing that there was no spring upon the summit of Ghost mountain when we settled here. If there had been there might perhaps have been, today, no Yaquitepec – and a lot of other things.

With a spring, and abundant water, we might have found life in the desert "just too hard" – and moved away.

Some ask to do some noble deed,
To rouse man's inmost, deepest core;
Or fill some very special need,
And thus enrich the worldly store.

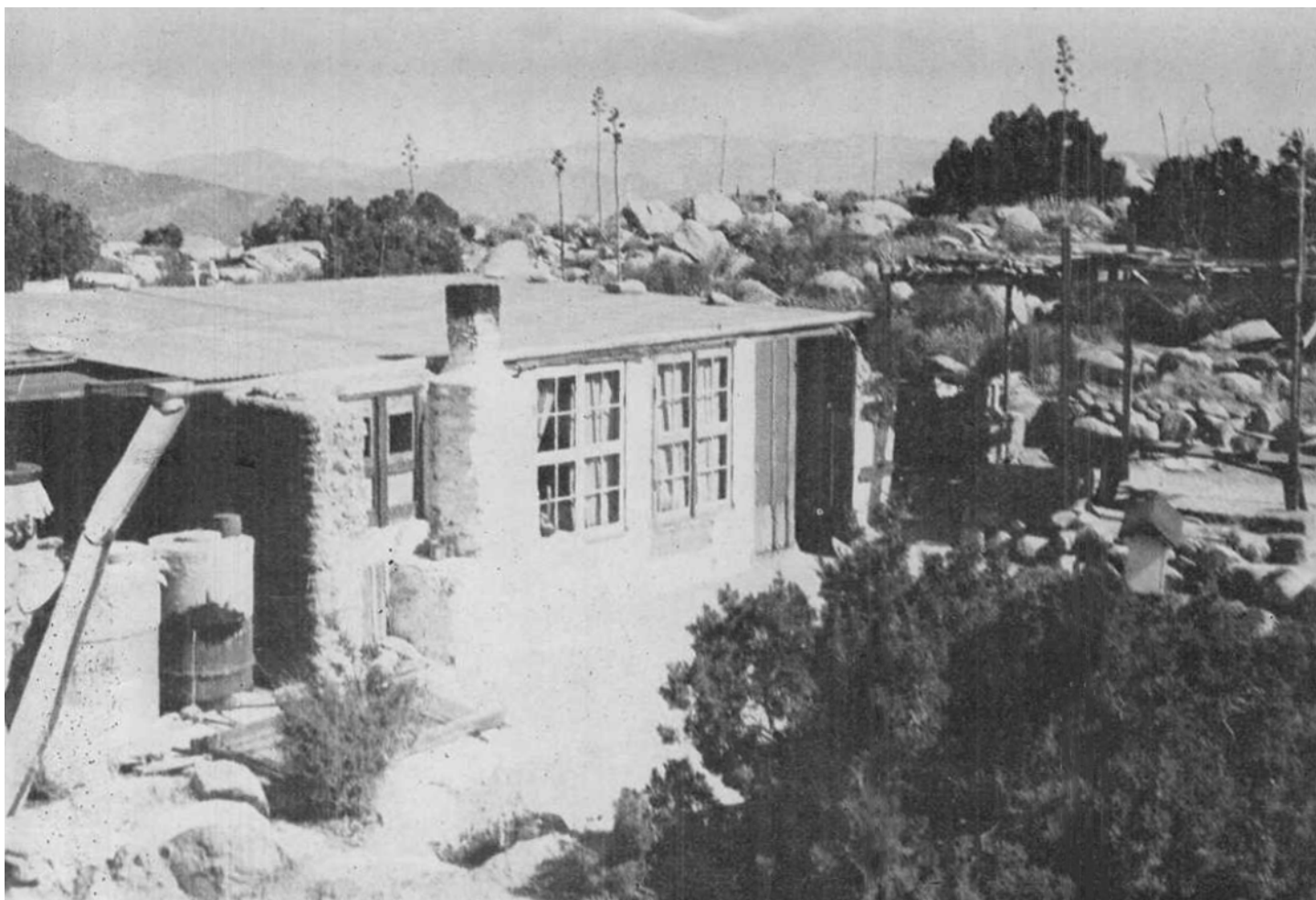
But I have learned that helping one
Is helping all, though unaware.
And so, content from sun to sun,
Strive to do my humble share.

– Tanya South

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – October 1941



This is Yaquitepec – the Souths' adobe home on the top of Ghost mountain. Marshal and Tanya and their children depend for their water supply on the rain that falls on this roof, and is carried by the spout on the left to two cement-lined cisterns. Thanks to a generous storm in August, the cisterns are now full.

Marshal and Tanya and the little Souths waited all through June and July for rain. Their cisterns were nearly empty – and the rain gods seemed to have forgotten that life on Ghost mountain cannot go on without water. Then early in August the storm came – a deluge that not only insured drinking water for many months, but provided moisture for more adobe walls. You'll have a better understanding of what rain really means to desert people when you have read this episode in the lives of the South family.

THERE is rejoicing upon Ghost mountain, for once more all our water cisterns are brimming over. Even the "lake," as we term the big cement lined excavation that will some day be an additional reservoir, is half full. For three days ago, after a long "torture of hope" during which heavy thundershowers marched in complete circle around us – drenching the lowlands and mountains within a mile and leaving us bone dry – the rain gods relented.

There was drama in their storm-sending too. And rebuke. For we had gone to bed dispirited and, let us confess it with shame, rather a little angry and full of complaint. All the day long we had sweltered in the hot, heavy atmospheric breathlessness which precedes a desert deluge. And all day the sullen thunderheads had banked around us, glooming the sky everywhere except for one clear spot, seemingly not greater than the area of our mountain, that hung directly over our heads. And it had rained. In sheets and curtains of slashing grey the forked flails of the lightning had ripped waters from the heavens – to north, to east, to west, to south. But not here. "All we get," said Rider bitterly, sniffing the damp fragrance of the breeze that came up in the evening from the distant lowlands, "-all we get is the *smell*."

So we had gone to bed disgruntled, trying hard to be philosophic in the knowledge that sooner or later our turn would come. But, after the manner of frail humans, not succeeding very well.

But the grey, still whiteness of the next dawn crept across the desert to the hollow rumble of heavy thunder. Far off, but approaching. Hardened by so many previous disappointments I noted it with a drowsy mental shrug. And went to sleep again.

"Daddy! Daddy! Wake up!-it's *raining*!"

I woke with a jerk – in more senses than one – for Rider's band was upon my arm and he was shaking me vigorously. "Real rain," he said breathlessly. And, as I sat up, fighting the sleep from my eyes, I heard Rudyard's shrill refrain piping from the next bed: "Yes, weal *wain*! You gotta get up an' fix the 'pouts! Hurree daddy! *Hurree*!"

So I got up hastily – Rudyard is very definite in his commands and has all the authority of extreme youth – and rushed out to "fix the spouts." The spouts and water gutters always have to be "fixed" – that is, swept out and cleaned – immediately before a rain. It is a last minute chore that no previous planning can avoid. The reason is that the Ghost mountain pack rats, secure in the truce of brotherhood which reigns at Yaquitepec, long ago decided to use our gently sloping house roof each night as a dance floor. Which would be all right, for they are lovable little animals, if they did not also use the water gutter as a check booth in which to park bits of cholla, the dry rinds of cactus fruits, mescal pods, dead juniper sticks and all the thousand and one other classes of trashy "valuables" which pack rats – exactly on the order of humans – lug along with them and regard as "very important." And which they conveniently forget – in the water spout. It isn't any good to clean the spouts the night before, except as to a reduction in labor. For the next morning will find a new collection.

"Hurree, daddy! Hurree!" shrilled my imperious taskmaster, racing, a bare-skinned sprite, after me into the dawn, "Hurree! *Hurree*!"

And there was need of hurry. For ominous big drops were already plunking in wide-spaced intervals upon the iron roof. Far aloft we could hear that weird, sinister rushing sound - like the churning of a great wind – which is the advance message of released rain masses already plunging downward towards a thirsty earth. Rider was dashing here and there, closing shutters, dragging dry firewood into the kitchen and setting the innumerable pots, pans, pails and jars that are his own personal water-catching outfit, beneath the run-off and drip point of every inclined flat surface not connected with the main gutter system. We all worked fast. But I had barely tossed out the last bit of cactus joint and given the clean metal gutter a final wipe with the damp doth when the deluge struck in a blinding white fury. Junipers, rocks, ocotillos and tall podded mesca's blotted suddenly in a sheet of falling water. Rider and I reached shelter in a spume of stinging drops that seemed to tingle with the electricity of the forked fire that of a sudden split the sky overhead with a deafening crash.

Rudyard bolted in at our heels like a little drenched duck, water pouring from his tangled brown curls. Then it *rained!*

The storm lasted half a day, with the first fury – when the water fell in solid curtains, succeeded by scattered and dwindling showers. The day previous Rider and I had collected a bundle of yucca leaves, with which to pat a new seat in one of our chairs. A lucky circumstance, for now there was an indoor job all ready to band. So, while Tanya sat in the window seat explaining the rain in complicated baby-talk to wide-eyed little Victoria, I and my two eager assistants hunted up awls and began to shred the long green bayonet-like leaves into quarter inch strips. The big leaves shred readily, following the lines of the fibers that run from butt to tip. When the leaves are fresh cut these strips are very pliant and braid or twist easily; but if they are dry they quickly can be gotten to the right condition by soaking in water. When we had accumulated what looked like a sufficiency of strips – in spite of Rudyard's "assistance," for he has rather elastic ideas at present on what constitutes a quarter-inch width – Rider brought the forlorn chair that needed fixing. It was in a bad way, never having recovered from the time when Rudyard invented a dramatic game called "Beeg fire on Bwoadway. Peoples jumping into net." He had used the cane-bottomed chair as the "net," jumping lustily into it from the height of a box set upon the table. The drama had been suppressed quite suddenly by unimaginative grown-up "police." But not in time to help the chair much.

Well, what is one chair seat, anyway, in the scheme of things. Kingdoms, we have been told, have crumbled for the want of a horseshoe nail. And heaven alone knows how many automobile classics have been lost to unprogressive speed drivers who neglected to use "whoowawizz" spark plugs. So why worry about a chair seat? I cut out the old torn bottom and began to braid in the new one. We have found that braiding, after the manner of the South Sea islanders with their coconut fiber, is the best treatment for yucca.

It is a fairly long job to braid the seat into a regular sized chair, braiding as one goes and lacing the completed cord back and forth, basket fashion. So by the time the rain was over and the children were racing up and down through the puddles in the hot sunlight that had broken through the scattering clouds the chair was about finished. Not a brilliant example of weaving, perhaps, but something that would serve well enough. I clipped the last strand end, set the chair by the table and went out to sniff the fragrance of the damp, rejoicing, sun-sparkled desert. Tanya and Victoria were already out, sitting on the damp rock step beside the "lake" watching Rider and Rudyard sailing their long-stored boats. Over the crests of the clean-washed juniper trees winged, like migrating fairies, a wide scattered drift of gauzy-winged flying ants. "Plush bugs," as Rider calls the bright many-legged, fluffily scarlet little round insects which appear mysteriously after warm weather rains, were already ambling about underfoot.

It is true enough, as Kipling said, that "Smells are stronger than sounds or sights to make your heartstrings crack ... " But of all the scents that can stir up haunting memories and sheer delight for the human nostrils I know of none half so potent as the fragrance of the desert after rain. It is something too deep and subtle for description. If you know it you know what I mean. And if you have never lifted your head and drunk in the winery, aromatic fragrance that wells from the grateful earth and stretching leagues of wasteland after a heavy shower, you have missed something – missed one of the greatest and most mysterious thrills that the wilderness holds. To stand in the midst of a sunlit, rain-washed silence and drink deep of this prayer of thanks, welling up like incense from plant and shrub and rock and spiney thorn to the Great Giver of all Mercy, is a moment – a sacred moment. One stands awed, listening to one's own humble heartbeats. Thus stood our dusky brothers, the "savages" of the dim, fled yesterdays. With them the Great Spirit was something real – not an empty thing, blurred in a tinsel mockery of Sunday clothes and stereotyped ritual and hollow words.

But rain at Yaquitepec means not only water in the storage cisterns. It means mud. Mud is a valuable thing. So long we have been without it. Or, having it, have had it in little dabs – as much, maybe, as one can obtain from a pint of wash water, or from the frugally saved unused portions of a brew of tea. Such dabs take a tedious time in making a showing upon an adobe wall – though we can point to considerable areas of the mud walls of Yaquitepec that were built in just such piecemeal fashion.

But now is one of our widely spaced periods of abundance when we revel in mud. There is mud upon my hands as I write, and mud upon my feet. Dried mud that has been imperfectly scraped off. Rider, still working at outdoor jobs, is pleasingly decorated all over with wet, clayey signs of toil. Rudyard has mud in his hair. Purposely put there, we discovered later, as a result of his having remembered a story told some time ago by a visitor to the effect that the Apaches plastered their heads with mud as a hair tonic. Even Victoria has had her innings. For seizing an opportunity, she crawled off her rug and into a gooey batch of adobe which I had just trampled to the right consistency. In the ensuing cleansing operations, to the accompaniment of lusty yells, Tanya got well mudded too. So that makes it unanimous.

But a lot of new wall has gone up, built with a shovel and a trowel and the plain bare hands, and in breathless haste – racing against the swift soaking away of the surface water in the open pools, from which we take it. In some of the pools that have been previously well trampled by our bare feet – after the manner of the old buffalo wallows on the plains – there is still water standing. So for a day or so yet there will be mud – and wall building. Then again operations will stop. Thus, in such fits and starts, goes our building. Woefully primitive, of course. But we are shamelessly unashamed of the method. And it is likewise quite true that the house isn't finished as yet. Nor are we anxious to have it so. "Finished" is an ominous word, reminiscent, somehow, of the practice of sending elegant young ladies and young gentlemen to an elegant "Finishing school." Too many things, now, in this era's progressive set-up, are regarded as "finished." And a lot of them frequently are.

UPWARD

Break the trail a little higher,
Push along and try.
There's no limit to desire.
Save the sky.

And when eventide is dimming
Others' hope,
You will have new vistas rimming,
And new scope.

– Tanya South

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – November 1941

This is the time of year when Marshal South is scouring the landscape far and near for dead juniper – for the winter's fuel supply. "Some day," Marshal writes, "we may go modern and get a burro to replace the pack board for labor of this kind." But the dwellers at Yaquitepec are not sure they want the burro. In their glorious experiment in primitive living on this remote desert mountain they have deliberately chosen a hard way of life for themselves – and a burro is merely a first step toward easier living. Too much ease brings decay and ruin to the human race. And so for the present the Souths will continue to pack in their wood supply on their own backs.

THE wall of the new room on which we worked with such frantic haste after the last big rain – racing with mudmaking against the evaporation of our open waterholes – stands bravely. What there is of it. It must now wait for more rain and more mud. Which is perhaps just as well. For it will get a chance to thoroughly sunbake before the next course is laid.

It is a good wall and we are proud of it. Not a thing of classic beauty, but rugged and strong – as a wall should be. Eighteen to thirty inches thick – the variation in width depending on the necessities of the foundation – it stands now like the rampart of some ancient fort. A circumstance from which we draw no little satisfaction. For it is a comfort, when the imagination balks at peering forward into a future of machine-made hells of destruction, to turn backward in thought to the days when every home was a castle and warfare could claim at least the honesty that marks the struggles of the beasts.

Not that the past held any magic over the present – save in degree. But it held more hope. It was swayed by the same laws, marching in the same changeless cycles. But men's hearts then held more simple faith and truth. They were groping towards an ideal – towards a light. Now they stand in the light and the light blinds them; they have become mad. "Onward, Progress! Onward!" --To where?

But the days march past on Ghost mountain without benefit of "Progress." The little lizards scamper along the sunny summit of our new, three-foot high wall and the butterflies drift and float over the summits of the age-gnarled junipers.

Yesterday, upon the summit of a barren ridge, where the ocean had forsaken it, who knows how many centuries ago, Rider found the desert-bleached fragments of a big, ancient sea shell.



Rider South is trying to master the use of the weapon by which the desert tribesmen once obtained their meat supply.

And this morning, as I set out a newly decorated pottery bowl and olla to dry upon a rock the bright-eyed chipmunks and lizards came out of the bushes and thorn thickets to investigate – and to speculate. Drift of cloud and stir of wind. Clock ticks on the endless ribbon of eternity. Time. Time. Somewhere there are tooting whistles and shrieking sirens. Time. Time. "Hurry! Hurry! Hurry, or you'll be too late!" -For what?

The hand of Winter begins to reach towards the world. Here at Yaquitepec the movement is only a gentle stirring, as yet. But there is warning in it. Warning that the winter wood must be gotten in; that the carefree methods of summer fuel-gathering will no longer suffice. There must be a generous woodpile against storms. It is a problem that we face each year, and one that must be attacked well in advance. For it seems that no matter how high a stack of dead juniper wood and ancient mescal butts we collect in the fall, winter demands always manage to get away with every scrap of it.

So Rider and I devote every opportunity these days to wood packing. Sometimes Rudyard comes along. But, though he is intensely eager, his little legs are short yet for hazardous rock scrambling and for long trips. We have a brand new specially designed pack-board this year which makes the home-bringing of the loads much easier. Some day Yaquitepec will go "modern" and add a faithful burro, or a pair of them, to the establishment.

And, so doing, we will, of course, begin within our own immediate sphere, another age-old cycle. All things move in cycles – and all according to immutable Jaws. Smooth infallible automatic laws of action and reaction, by which everything and every happening of the universe, either good or evil, carries with it, in its borning, the seed of its own destruction.

And where does this concern the burro, you ask? Well, in its own personal "cycle" it concerns the burro a great deal. But what we have reference to, particularly, is *our* concern. For the acquisition of a beast of burden is one of the first steps along the path of man's desire for greater ease. A simple step – and a long, long path. Very pleasant, some stretches of it. But the inevitable end of it is grim ruin; physical, individual and national. The beast of burden makes life a little easier. The machine makes it easier still. It is easier to ride in a cart than to walk. Easier still in an automobile; easier yet in an airplane. Pleasant the road – and deadly. But it is the law. And it is the law also that, beyond the inevitable ruin, starts again the hard, lonely little path of toil and sweat. "It can't happen here – or again," you may say. "Times have changed; we are more enlightened now. We have harnessed and conquered the forces of nature. We are just emerging upon man's most glorious epoch and destiny."

So? Well, who would dispute. And does it really matter? Meanwhile the winds come on whispering feet across the old desert, stirring the dead grass over shattered bits of forgotten pottery and playing with the dust of sea creatures that only "yesterday," in the depths of an ocean that "would last forever" called these very spots home.

Deserts and oceans are the record keepers of cycles. But only to a limited degree. It is in a desert that you can dig in the ruins of great Babylon, where now little lizards sun themselves in the dust of the one-time palaces of "mighty" kings. But when you have dug down and down through all the strata of man's building of cities, age after age, one upon another – with the dust-built drift of human forgetfulness and oblivion separating each from each like blank leaves in a printed book – you come finally to a layer where, deep down, the earth holds silence as to record and in blank sand and stone guards her secrets tight lipped. But if you turn away in your "science" and smug certainty, satisfied that you have come to both final endings and first beginnings, there will

be grey ghosts among the dusty tombs and the heaps of shattered pots to laugh at you. For, before the "very first" tombs and broken pots, there were still other tombs and broken pots. Before the sand and the gravel and the deep granite there was the fire-mist. And before the fire-mist there was other sand and gravel and other granite. And before that. . . .

But why grope the universe with the feeble flame of a sputtering match? How old is the desert wind? Or the desert stars. And what has all this to do with carrying firewood for winter, and plans for a burro? Well, *quien sabe* – but maybe more than some might think.

And so, on these things, and on many another, Rider and I muse and speculate as we tramp over the rocks gathering sticks. We classify these expeditions as "work." And work they are from the point of industry and the expenditure of lots of physical energy. But it is natural "work" of the sort that the Great Spirit, in His wisdom, designed for all His creatures. Work such as the birds do; and the foxes and the squirrels and the pack rats and the hard working beavers. Work of this sort is a natural thing. It is something you can sing over as you do it – as do the birds. It is a very different thing from that black slavery which man has invented.

Man's work too often isn't work. It is "toil." A different thing; a grimmer thing. No bird or animal or other industrious wild thing "toils" – except such misguided creatures as the ants and the bees and others of their ilk who are fanatical followers of some crazed "ism" that submerges the individual to the "good of the mass." They are very busy, seemingly, on some "plan." Getting somewhere – or nowhere at all. For brilliant examples of utter dumbness and intellectual depravity I commend you to these "intelligent" mass slaves.

Lots of brown moths were whirling over the rocks as we came home yesterday with our last load of wood of the afternoon. The wind across the shoulder of the mountain was brisk and in the swirl of it the big brown flutterers, each of them brilliantly splashed with scarlet, went scattering and blowing across the ridges like an eddying drift of autumn leaves. Across the rim of the mountain they were trailing away out of sight into the dimness of the far grey desert. Shadows lay there, for the sun was setting, and the jagged peaks to westward stretched a ragged coverlet of indigo haze across all the lowlands. Lances of dying sunlight fell through the gaps on the rim of the world and bathed the summit of Ghost mountain in a shimmer of golden pink, through which we moved with the unreality of ghosts, throwing long, unearthly shadows. On the trail, as he carried carefully the fragments of ancient sea shells that he had picked up away back on the ridge, Rider found another whitened shell – that of a long dead desert snail – and beside it a brown, lichen-crusting chip of pottery, with the faint imprint of the potter's fingertip still upon it.... Whose fingertip? And how long ago?

Tanya, Victoria and Rudyard were in the doorway to welcome us, and behind them, in the house, the candles were already lit. The faint, aromatic odor of juniper smoke and the warmly sweet fragrance of newly baked corn bread.

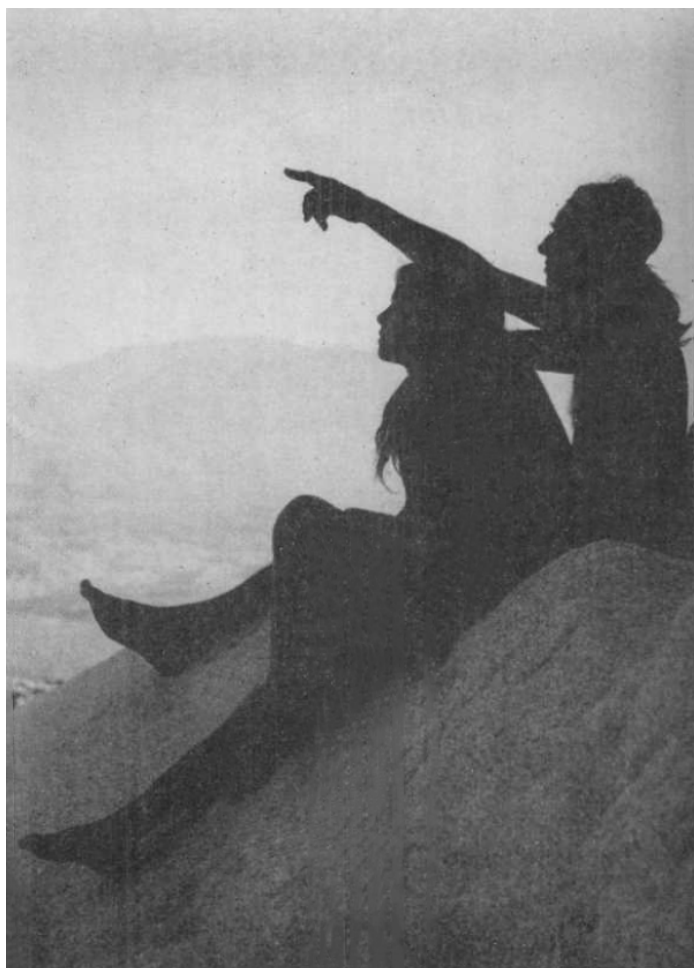
Sunset and dark. Another day.

Desert Refuge

By Marshal South

Desert Magazine – December 1941

On one of their tramps over the desert near Ghost mountain Marshal and Rider South came upon an old mine – a shaft that had been abandoned so long it was overgrown with shrubbery. A gold mine perhaps – but the discovery that interested them was a rusty pick which would fill a long-felt need at Yaquitepec. Here is another interesting chapter in the story of a family that for nine years has been engaged in a glorious experiment in the art of primitive living on a remote desert mountaintop.



Marshal and Rider South frequently make exploring excursions into the desert area surrounding Ghost mountain. Here, as they pause in the shade at the brink of a dry waterfall, Marshal points to a crevice in the opposite canyon wall where he and Tanya once found a well preserved Indian olla.

REAL winter draws closer to Ghost mountain. But these present fall days are full of a charm that is all their own. On the ridges the yellow flowers of the *ramarillos* are still in evidence and invite the attentions of methodical bees. The sun has lost its fierce fire. But the rocks glow warm at noonday and the wandering breezes that come to whisper around the walls of Yaquitepec still have tales to tell of drowsy solitudes and the clean fragrance of yucca-studded, sun-glinted washes where the hours, marked only by the slow-moving shadows of greasewood and of ocotillo, drift by in silence that is marred by no tick of dock or pulse of progress.

Except when it storms. But that is another story. Storms are another mood; the charm of the desert lies in its ever changing moods. Fierce. Tempestuous. Vibrant with life and passion. Like a primitive woman, blending fierce love and savage fury. There lies the fascination of the desert. Do you seek for something calm and ordered; methodic, dependable – and listlessly "dead"? Then turn your search elsewhere; you will not find it here. Civilized man seeks stability for security – and its accompanying stagnation and ultimate decay and ruin. But nature is wiser. Not along flower scented paths does real development, either of soul or body lie.

Turn back the pages of recorded history. There you will find that it was always the barbarian – he who knew heat and cold and bitter privation – who came forth, time and again, from his bleak wildernesses and overthrew the pampered dwellers in the cities of ease ... himself, in turn, to succumb to luxury and in time be

overthrown by his hard-muscled barbarian successor. Wave upon wave from the north and from the wastelands. Hard ice melting in the tropic sun. But that is nature's way. Flow and ebb. Storm and sun. Thus does she preserve the balance. Do not look for advancement in "mass." It is not done. It is done by the *atom* – by the *individual*.

These are the evenings of fires, and the primitive thrill and family bond that the leaping flames of the hearth can waken as can nothing else.

We are building a new fireplace at Yaquitepec. Sometimes we think that if we are not careful we shall find ourselves dwelling in a fireplace instead of a house – that the fireplaces, by sheer weight of numbers, will swallow the rest of the building. There are four of them now – existent – incomplete – and just commenced. Of one the foundation only has been started. That will be the big one. Another has its side walls half up – that is to be a double one that will warm two rooms. The third is the old standby, whose fire-blackened maw, yawning beneath our big adobe stove, has flung cheer already over a range of desert winters.

The fourth is an addition that rises now, with mud and granite rocks, beside the "old faithful." Perhaps we should call it the Wild Geese Fireplace. For the wild geese started its building by their high, lone honking one night against the desert stars. Going south. And *early*. We took counsel together. This was another "sign" in a string of signs that spoke of the possibility of a hard, cold winter. "We cannot finish the new room and its big fireplace in time," we said. "And we may need, this year, more warmth than the old stove can give. The quickest way is to build a brand new fireplace."

So, in the course of time – things move slowly at Yaquitepec, not because of indolence but because there are many other things to do – the workmen assembled as for the building of the pyramids. And the seven-year-old lugged rocks. And the three-year-old fetched mud – in an old can. And the one-year-old sat in her high chair and yelped encouragement. And Pharaoh – himself – got him his trowel and hefted him his hammer and began the fireplace. A good fireplace. And now it is all but finished. Adjoining the old stove, and with an arrangement of smoke flues that would be an architect's nightmare, its yawning mouth will swallow with ease the very largest mescal butt that grows upon Ghost mountain. Or log of juniper. "Blow, blow, ye bitter winter winds!" The flames will roar and the sparks crackle. A successful fireplace Victoria approves it. "Bee Hay!" she remarks solemnly every time she looks at it. Victoria has academic leanings. She confers B. A. degrees upon everything that strikes her fancy. She has 12 teeth now and is walking and starting to talk.

A week ago Rider and I voted ourselves a day's vacation and went on a long tramp. Rider looks forward eagerly to these excursions which constitute a rare holiday in the regular routine of school lessons. Already he is a veteran "prospector." But his prospecting is for strange plants and bits of pottery and bugs, for which he totes along a little sack and a small paper box or two. This time we abandoned our mountain and struck out across the lower desert, among the barren rocky buttes and the creosote-studded slopes and washes. The day was perfect; one of those glowing days of desert fall when the sun-warmth is just right for comfort and one can tramp for miles and miles without fatigue. Far off the distant mountains stabbed a sky that was a dazzling blue. The nearer ridges glowed above us in a mosaic of tumbled boulders and shadow-etched clefts. Through the crystalline air the gnarled junipers that clung along their escarpments seemed close enough to touch. A sleepy breeze drifted from the hills, carrying with it the winey, aromatic tang of greasewood and ramarillo and yucca and the odor of clean space. Underfoot the gravelly earth, weatherings of ages from the gaunt, surrounding mountains, crunched beneath our hide sandals. The grit of it and the soft, occasional rustle of a creosote branch, springing back from the crowding of our bodies, were the only sounds that broke the hush of a vast bowl of desert silence.

And so, through a wilderness of blessed silence – for which years of familiarity have only whetted our appetite – we moved on. We had no plan save to tramp and explore. Chaparral cocks slipped away through the creosotes; an occasional jackrabbit flicked vanishing cars through the cactus.

Under an aged silver cholla near the rocky toe of a ridge we came upon a big mortar hole worn in a flat granite slab. The blunted stone fragment once used for a pestle still lay beside it. The ancients had been here before us. But earth now filled this forgotten grinding bowl. And the brown hands that had held the old pestle have long since returned to earth too. An inquisitive little antelope squirrel perched upon a nearby boulder and watched us with bright, beady eyes; then with a saucy flirt of his tail disappeared merrily – a symbolic atom of bubbling life.

And so, in the glow of midday, amidst a wild clutter of rocks on a lonely ridge, we came to a mine. We came upon it suddenly. And stopped, startled. A mine – or rather an abandoned shaft, such as this was – was about the last thing we would have imagined. We stood staring into it. The shallow shaft was partly filled. In the debris that formed its bottom lusty bushes grew. On the weathered mound by the opening lay a miner's drill, rust-eaten. On a rock beside it an old knife from which, the years had stripped the wooden handle. The gently swaying branches of a big creosote bush wove a moving tapestry of light and shadow over the ancient prospect. In the hushed stillness one listened instinctively for footsteps. And heard none.

"I guess," said Rider presently, "'this is 'The Lost Pick' mine."

He pointed into the deeper shadows at the base of the creosote bush. And there lay the pick. Old and rusty as the drill, and with its handle weathered into crumbling grey rottenness. I stepped softly across and picked it up.

The Lost Pick mine! Was this abandoned shaft really the one to which a desert wanderer had referred more than two years ago? Perhaps. We had almost forgotten. There had been several nebulous lost mines in the rambling reminiscences of the old man. The "Lost Pick." The "lost Blanket Roll." The "Lost Canteen." Rambling, disconnected stories – yarns which the narrator himself hardly troubled to believe. Fabric of dreams and desert shadows; the dancing mirage of gold – which it is more blessed to pursue than to find. A fairy tale. Yet here was the old pick – and the old shaft. We stared curiously into the shallow digging and poked speculatively at the sides with the old pickhead. Rider even clambered into the hole – and promptly forgot gold in the excitement of finding a perfectly magnificent specimen of a dead and dried beetle.

No, there wasn't any gold there. At least not the foolish kind of yellow stuff that humanity sells its soul for. There was gold of the sun and the silence and the whisper of the wind. And – for us – treasure in the shape of the old pickhead which despite its years of weathering was in excellent order. For a long time we dwellers on Ghost mountain, had needed a pick. And had been forced to do without one.

So we took our prize and went away as softly as we had come. We had found the "Lost Pick Mine" – and we lost it again, leaving it to its memories and its silence. There is no trail and we shall not tell. Someone – sometime – dug there in hopes. Let the peace of the desert hold safe its memories.

But the old pickhead, on a new handle, is now part of the Yaquitepec tool equipment. Despite the fact that we share the Indian belief that it is not lucky to meddle with old relics, the pick was something else again. It was "meant." And we took it in gratitude. There is a feel to such things which you will not find in the textbooks. Maybe we are superstitious. Well, the desert Indians were superstitious too.

TIME

Day follows day in quick succession,
In swift and swifter moving flow,
As with fanatical obsession,
The years in rapid cadence go.

And yesterdays – todays – tomorrows –
All merge as one mirage sublime,
And all our joys and all our sorrows,
Become receding specks in Time.
– Tanya South