

attention!!

It hits when I least expect it, when I don't want it and, worst of all, when I can't afford it.

My hands get cold and clammy, my vision blurs and I have an unnatural desire to hum the Taco Bueno jingle. Soon a fever spreads through my body and a lust for Mexican food overpowers me.

I'm the victim of a rare blood condition. In addition to the normal red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets I have a mysterious presence of taco "plate"-lets in my bloodstream.

When my taco count falls below the acceptable level, my symptoms are akin to drug withdrawal — I need Mexican food, I need a big dose and I need it NOW.

I'm not exactly sure how this medical freak occurred.

It could be my dad's fault. In my younger days, instead of strained beets and peas, Dad fed me refried beans and Mexican rice.

He fed me tortilla chips when I began teething and used picante sauce on my gums to numb teething pains.

My most vivid childhood memories of eating out are the contests my dad and I used to have. We'd face off over the bowl of hot sauce. Dipping and eating chip after chip, my eyes watered, my mouth burned and eventually I'd reach for the water glass first. Many a time I've sent my taste buds into shock from waiting too long for the water.

We used to eat Mexican food only on special occasions, but now any excuse will do. You washed the car? Let's eat out. You don't feel well? Mexican food will perk you up. It's raining? Let's go eat chalupas. The sun rose this morning? It's taco time.

I thought I was a product of the environment my dad created, but even when I moved away to college the addiction continued — and grew worse because now it's MY cash that pays the bill.

I'm old enough to know such eating habits are

unhealthy. I should be able to quit. I can't.

At first my addiction was run-of-the-mill burrito love, but now I've branched out into the designer dishes — chimichangas, pollo guisada, quesadillas.

Fajitas are just a fad and are not for us hard-core abusers. But I still eat them every now and then just to keep up with the latest trends.

My addiction follows me wherever I go. I can't make it out of the grocery store without a bag of Tostitos and a bottle of Pace, the hottest picante sauce around.

I daydream of nachos during my finance lecture and chili con queso during my chemistry lab.

I watch television for the El Chico commercials. To hell with the programming.

Seductive curls of steam rise from the cheese-covered enchiladas, float from the TV screen and tickle my nostrils. I'm sunk.

Get me to the nearest taco stand — quick!

Sometimes I'm lucky enough to have a 2-for-1 coupon, but usually when the urge to eat hits me I can't find the darn thing. I end up paying full price. It's worth it.

I pay for it all right — bad breath, an aching stomach and an extra pound of flab on my body.

But I can rationalize with the best of them. After all, hot sauce opens up closed sinus passages. And a taco contains all four food groups.

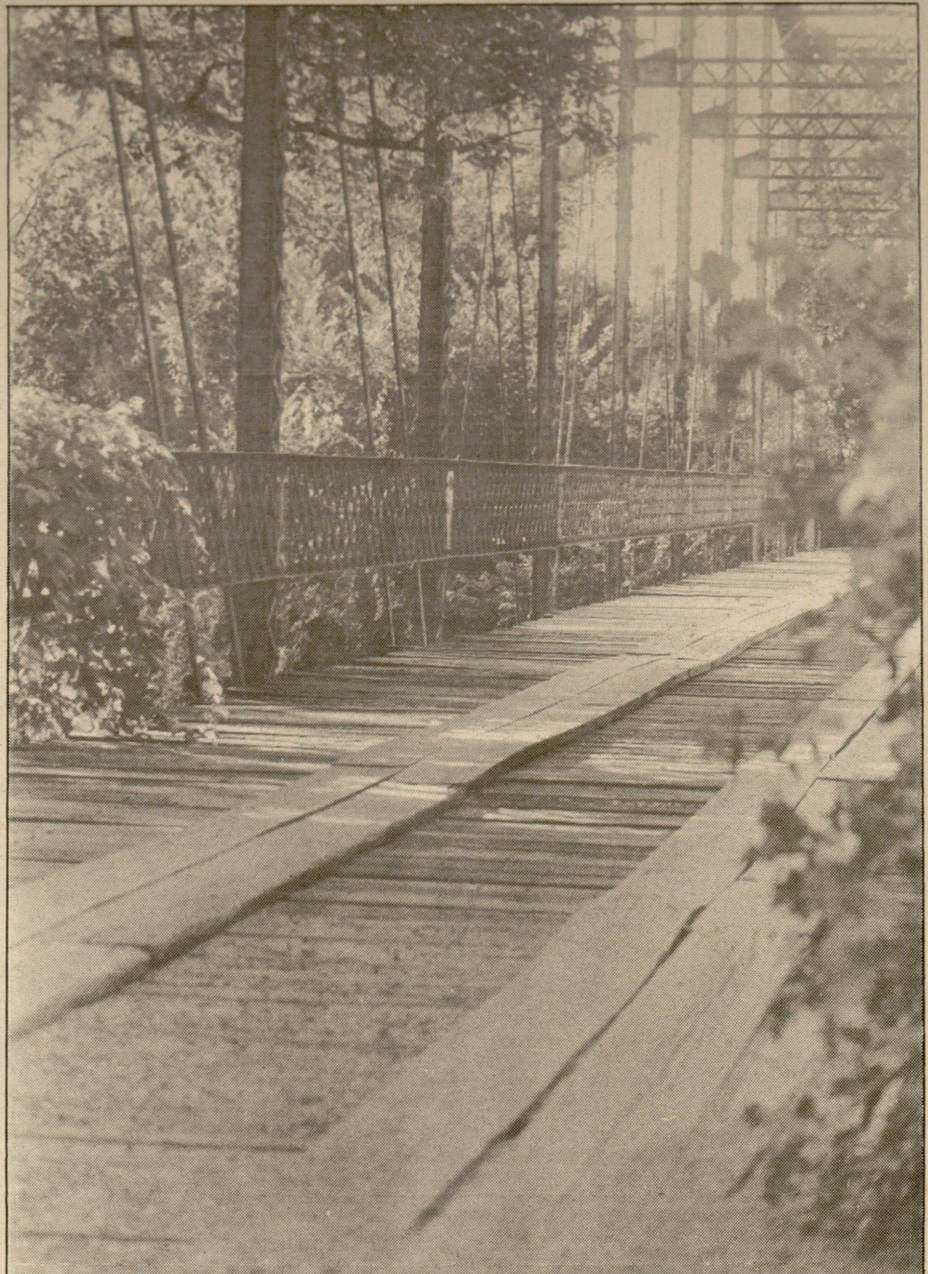
Sometimes I explain to myself it's okay because I skipped breakfast this morning.

When the guilt becomes too heavy a burden, I order a diet Coke with my meal. Now that's silly, I know. After 27 billion calories, what's a few more going to matter?

I'm a college senior. I should be able to kick this addiction, but the simple fact is I don't want to. I love Mexican food. Mexican food loves me.

Why fight it?

Amy Bensinger is a senior journalism major.



Tracy Staton, a senior journalism major and photo editor of the Battalion took this week's photo.

Editor's Note: This attention!! page will be used each week as a forum for you, our readers. We encourage you to submit any original work that would be suitable for publication in At Ease.

Pictures should be black-and-white shots that are unique either in content, angle or technique. Columns, essays or poems should be no longer than 500 words, and should relate to an unusual experience, a new perspective on a common experience, or just about anything else you want to share with our readers. Please don't send us your gripes, complaints, or sermons on heavy-duty issues — send those to the Battalion's Opinion Page.

Don't forget to put your name and phone number on anything you send us. Then just drop it off at the Battalion, Room 216 of the Reed McDonald Building. Be sure to specify that it is for At Ease.