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Prize for the biggest weekend in Santa Fe, New Mexico goes to the Indian Market celebration. One hundred thousand visitors hit town to set up booths, or buy the goods offered in the outdoor stalls.

Shoppers and spectators swarm the narrow sidewalks and dart into shops and bistros to blow their dough. Old cranks such as me retreat to hotel rooms, or dodge into ticketed performances in final stages of denial that the event ever occurred.

The primary annoyance from the market hits here at the Guadalupe Inn at breakfast. The market opens at 7 a.m. at the main plaza 10 blocks away. Breakfast begins at 6:30.

Unlike normal days, guests rush by the buffet and take off to downtown in a flurry of tread spinning over the gravel driveway. No one has time to listen to or tell stories.

Stories build up sitting on the room's second-story balcony, staring at the sun's morning shadows on the brown adobe walls across the alley. Audible from indoors, a Navajo poet chants and sings her verse on a compact disk.

"Hi-yay, hi-ya" Luci Tapahonso sings. Then — then comes part of one of her poems; "They sang into place the

mountains, the rivers, plants and animals. They sang us into life."

Alone on a balcony 100 yards' margin from frantic celebration to sell Native American art and trinkets, solitude seems the best choice. You sure don't want to bring up stories of Greatest of Grandfather's disagreement with the Native Americans' policy on borrowing his horses.

Be prudent, also, to keep your opinion to yourself about where some of the goods come from. Like snide remarks about visiting Chinatown on the way to the concert. It might work in private with another storyteller, but this age is plenty sensitive. A casual reference to overbite within earshot of the oboe section of a concert orchestra may provoke a trip to the courthouse.

That's no excuse, however, for always being against the tide. You can't gloat forever about how in the Arctic you saved all that dough 25 years ago not buying a polished walrus tusk or a framed polar bear's toenail for a souvenir.

One thing for sure, your siblings won't fight over the keepsakes in the bookshelves at the ranch. Treasures such as the first Atlantic coast oyster shell you ever split without cracking the rim, or the pair of chopsticks packed

across the whole of Indonesia without ever touching a grain of rice, miss becoming collectors' pieces.

A good part about an Inn like this one is that the owners make breakfast so personal and friendly. On weekend mornings they have all the guests introduce themselves and tell where they are from.

Storytellers label such opportunities to analyze an audience as a "lay-up." The audience is profiled with no effort. All we have to do is edit out the grandchildren review and we know Ed and his wife from New Hampshire, raised in Alabama, are gonna' be sensitive to both sides of that ol' Mason-Dixon line with a tad thrown over on the south side.

The biggest break failed the morning a young Englishman brought his French girlfriend to breakfast. They checked out before I could tell them that two weeks ago, grandson Aubrey Compton Noelke was rushed down to the emergency room in Austin, Texas by the French girl he brought over on a self-styled one-way exchange program.

In reality, she needed to be entering the Miss Universe contest instead of traveling with a sunburned burr-head of kid mariner. (She and Aubrey spend nine months of the year working on boats and yachts in various seas and

oceans. All I know is they don't work on ranches. I know nothing about free-booting on the high seas.)

The ER doctor took the long odds on a 106° F Austin day to diagnosis the case as heat stroke, until he took a closer look at the lady standing at the bedside. And then — and then he remembered all the UT students he saw in the spring with lovesickness that would've made acute jaundice fever look like a minor case of spring daisy blight.

With seven sons around, we had several severe cases over the teen stages. For one memorable one, we used a shoehorn to keep him from swallowing his tongue instead of a smaller plated spoon the time he was so crazy about a girl who lived over at Sherwood. But my authority expired after they left home.

I was cocked to tell His Majesty's subject the story, but rudely and abruptly, he says he has to travel early because of the dry New Mexico heat. From the amount of attention the girlfriend attracts in the door, the excuse sounds familiar. More and more, however, I meet people in a big hurry, especially ones I've talked to on previous occasions.