

Across the hotel's parking lot, a Fort Worth steak house runs an all-day, full-house operation. Tantalizing odors of meat grilling and garlic searing in fat hang in the air. Each trip upstairs takes a white-knuckle hold on the banister to keep from tearing across the lot to stand in line for a rare steak.

The first news rack carrying the *Star Telegram* on the way up here from Mertzson proclaimed Fort Worth was now larger than Boston or Washington DC. Broke my heart to think of size being important to this once cowtown.

Coming in on I-30, facing outbound traffic three abreast and five miles long, confirmed the boast. All the advantages of growth crawled along, allowing the stalled commuters an opportunity to use the limitless hours on their cell phones and stare at the motorist behind them.

First mistake in our trip was my fault. I suggested we eat downtown after the rush ended, forgetting that downtown is the center of the tourist trade. Downtown was more crowded than Boston and DC together. More people were waiting in line to eat at the "Hot Spot Diner" than live in Mertzson.

Once seated, we found that the tables in the "Hot Spot" fitted so close that chopsticks would have worked better than a knife and fork. Fellow sitting to my right must have played the bird man in a circus sideshow the way he kept flopping his arms bent at the elbow, taking wide swings at mashed potatoes and roast beef.

Visitors are safe in downtown Fort Worth. Bicycle policemen keep order unknown in other cities. Take a mighty fast panhandler or pickpocket to outsmart a bicycle patrolman. In contrast to motorcycles or patrol cars, a bicycle cop bears the stealth of Spiderman.

Main attraction in the downtown bookstore was Mr. Clinton's new book. It's hard to lean long enough against a shelf to scan a 957-page book and avoid the 30 some-odd buck tab. A blurb in the summer book tips said one thousand copies sold in three-quarters of an hour the first day. From the way a writer up in North Texas raved about the book in the *New York Times*, it sounded like school was going to start early by popular demand to give students a chance to read such a fantastic tome.

Was easy to spot the book's high point the way the spine in the sample copy broke open to the President's dalliance in office. The publisher bet \$10 million on the

book. Probably allocated nine million-nine hundred thousand of the advance to the Lewinsky story.

In the old days, downtown Fort Worth didn't need books or bicycle policemen. It needed policemen with a sense of humor to herd wild bellowing cowboys and flamboyant range bosses out of the streets and alleys. Took a mighty rowdy hombre to disturb the peace of the stockyards or the downtown hotels.

One prominent San Angelo family's cowboy uncle kept riding the caboose to Fort Worth long after he quit work. Under the spells of indisposition from beverage alcohol, he might keep going St. Louis or Kansas City. On one jag, he made the Chicago yards.

His brother always hired the same Pinkerton agent to go find Old Uncle. Wasn't hard to guess his hiding place — a stockyard. Hard part was finding which stockyard, especially the time the detective found him perched on a corral fence looking at a pen of steers in San Francisco.

Spotting the old courthouse, once one of the markers to go to the Fort Worth yards, I thought if old Uncle was around today, and there still was a car like a caboose, he'd pass on through Fort Worth, seeing the stock and the yards are gone.

Were a cowboy to run off nowadays immersed in the nether world of age, or under a fog of alcohol, the only likely spot to look in Fort Worth is the petting pen out at the zoo. Hard to imagine the genuine article relating to dogie pinto goats or a pot-bellied dairy calf, much less understand a sign urging visitors to wash their hands after petting the animals. (The sign should read the reverse. Be a better idea for the visitors to wash away the popsicle sugar and popcorn butter before petting the goats and the calf.)

Adjacent the cultural district, there's some flavor left in show barns, the rodeo grounds, a cowgirl museum, and a huge collection of western art at the Amon Carter Museum. But I don't think that was what was drawing ol' Unc to hit the rails. In fact, I know it wasn't. The draw was the eternal wildness racing through his blood of hooves and horns, making him want to relive the past even if it meant hearing the cattle bawling in pens far away from home.