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SHORT GRASS COUNTRY

By Monte Noelke

Autumn in Boston means the onslaught of 400,000 or so students and sidewalks lined with tourists for the fall foliage extravaganza. New plays open in the theater district; symphonies and the Museum of Fine Arts bring in programs and special exhibits.

Rooms become high priced and hard to find. A tip on where to find a bed-and-breakfast saved about \$100 a day on room rent. The place was a four-story brownstone mansion owned by a father-and-son partnership who gave more service than some of the husband-and-wife and mom-and-pop establishments in other parts of the country. Breakfast, for example, featured fresh blueberries, cold melons and hot pastries. Fruit juice was at least related to fruit and the traditional innkeeper's hard-shell rolls and limp, crusted croissants were left off the menu.

Every morning a new set of customers ate at the long table. Two English ladies stayed for four days. I warned them to keep a low profile around town, especially to avoid the Colonial Revolution monuments out at Lexington and Bunker Hill and down on the docks where the big tea party happened.

Citizens of the United Kingdom behave in public, but they require a lot of coaching away from their homeland. Just a few blocks away, I told them, the British cavalry changed a hallowed meeting hall into an exercise ring for their horses. Even if the event took place in the 1780's, 212 years was still not enough time to recover from the insult of turning the town meeting hall into a riding academy for a bunch of hot-shot horse soldiers. I report the incident every time I visit Boston. Bringing the subject back to mind seems to take the arrogance out of the English custom of hollering "tally ho" on fox hunts.

I'd intended to bring along a car fender to use as a decoy to tease the infamous Boston drivers. I was going to tie the fender on a drawstring and toss it out in the streets to see how many would follow it as I pulled it up the sidewalk. After a refresher on their reckless behavior, forgetting the fender was a good idea.

Each morning on a corner close to the bed-and-breakfast a policeman stood around a gang of city street workers. He joked and laughed with the guys digging in a big manhole. Years had passed since police officers laughed or smiled on the job.

Later, a guy at the newsstand explained that the officer was happy because the city had to hire off-duty policeman at \$25 an hour to keep the Volkswagens and taxi cabs from knocking down the warning signs and caving in the manholes.

Art critics wrote a scathing story on the guest vocalist in the symphony being paid \$30,000 for one performance. She apparently had real life confused with a movie. The best suite at the Four Season's Hotel didn't suit her, so she commandeered the hotel's limousine and chauffeur and moved over to the Ritz Carlton. Checked in at the Ritz, she refused to relinquish the Four Season's Cadillac.

On the stage she was a lovely, perfectly groomed lady, gifted in voice and style. The conductor glided into the scores as smoothly as light sea breezes; however, even under a musical trance, he seemed to be holding back to be sure his baton didn't offend this high-tempered diva.

For cultural balance, the old ballroom of a hotel in the theater district hire a country western band to play for 30 minutes and then brings on a hard-rock group for the next half hour. Just as in Texas, costumes run heavily to black roll-brim hats and red-toed boots. Over in a corner, three or four teachers were giving two-step instructions. Out on the floor, the graduates of the classes looked like they'd watched too many hockey games and done too much rocking and rolling to be good western dancers.

Almost all the food served in Boston is special. Sea food comes from the icy waters of the Sea of Maine and the cooks must have good backgrounds. Out on the edge of an ethnic neighborhood a family of Ethiopians run a bar and restaurant that serves their country's food. A little like Greek food and fired by a dreadful hot pepper, the lamb and the vegetables are eaten by using a soft barely cooked bread to scoop the food to your mouth.

The Boss and one of his partners once owned a bay Thoroughbred mare that would've been a match for the high-strung singer.