

What Can Serious Writer Accomplish During Holidays

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The year-end holidays are the worst time of the year in which to study the Shortgrass Country. Nothing works right. Kids, the real reapers of Christmas joy, are too enthralled with their loot to talk to reporters. Citizens wise enough to stay home are too smug for an interview. And the all-out celebrant is so party-torn that whatever information he could give wouldn't pass the credibility standards of the Congressional Record.

Another handicap is the difficulty in getting a complete story. Trying to make notes during any size Christmas party is as tedious as transcribing the Bill of Rights on one of the new dimes. A veteran Associate Press correspondent couldn't write six sentences amid the din of potato chips crackling over the dips and ice clattering in the glasses.

One night at a festive gathering I did find what looked like a sure thing in the process of development. An eastern stock broker and a local businessman were discussing the recent devaluation of the English pound. From my vantage point, I was able to hear about a third of what was being said.

But then, just as the conversation was heating up, a goatherder interrupted, saying:

"Devaluation my hind foot! Nobody on this earth knows the real meaning of that word except us goat ranchers. If Charles DeGaulle and those other big shots had owned some goats since 1964, they'd know what devaluation is. And this British pound thing is a mild flurry compared to what's happened to the value of mohair. If them financial leaders had to use \$3-a-head nannies for collateral, they'd have more sense than to go blabbing all over the world about an economic crisis!"

Well, of course that outburst ruined the whole show. The goat man had to be led off by his wife. The remaining pair didn't seem to have the heart to continue the discussion.

A day or two later, I drove up on another perfect setting for post-Yule yarn. A station wagon was backing out of a driveway loaded to the upper deck with kids and cargo. Two adults obviously the host and hostess, were putting on a goodbye act the likes of which haven't been seen since the closing days of vaudeville.

In plain sight was being enacted the grandest moment in the life of an American family. Right before my eyes, one of the most meaningful experiences of any marriage was taking place. Here was my opportunity to record the high point of these people's year — the departure of overnight holiday guests.

But instead of grabbing my note pad to record a few on-the-scene impressions, I became so enveloped in the boundless joy of the husband and wife that not a soul was left in sight by time I recovered.

The remaining holidays brought the same kind of luck. Mia Farrow could have changed her hair style and gone back to Frank Sinatra, and the news wouldn't have reached me. Next Christmas, I'm not going to jeopardize my health covering the Noel celebrations. The pasturelands will have to provide what copy I gather. Being a hermit during the festivities may be mighty lonesome, but it's bound to beat what the past 10 days have been like.