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The Arapaho wise men used to advise young braves to try a new pair of moccasins before plunging their bunions into hot mineral springs, or rubbing ashes on their feet to cure blisters. In a wet spring, the buffalo hide soles shrunk so bad, the men hobbled around as tenderfooted as their unshod ponies. Tracks around the teepees looked like half the tribe was dragging a hind leg.

I don't know where those signs around tourist joints came from to never criticize a man until you walk a mile in his moccasins. It sure didn't come from the Arapahos. The tribes were plenty cranky about their footwear. Witch doctors might have used the saying to treat squaws suffering from jealousy fits and tomahawk-swinging rages; but loaning moccasins was equated to borrowing another man's horse and bringing him back with his mane and tail full of cockleburs.

In my day, the saying was supposed to keep little kids from being big gossips like their parents and teach compassion for man's failings. Every fall in the 5th grade room, Miss Greengoss used to write the proverb in big letters on the blackboard.

After being in the same room a few semesters, I began to wish the board of trustees and the superintendent had to dust hardback erasers and read old Indian sayings like I did year after year. "If old man so-and-so and old lady such-and-such had more to do than sitting up on the stage, handing big showoffs spelling prizes and reading

certificates," I'd think pounding erasers against a big rock, "they'd pass a guy on who had stalled out from unsolved long division and undeclared sentences."

Once the eraser dust settled, I'd punch my ol' classmate Dave, and ask, "Dave, how much longer we going to hold out dusting erasers instead of being cowboys like we were intended to be?" (Dave liked being outdoors so he could chew tobacco.) He'd laugh and say, "Ah, I guess when the draft board gets us, we'll be promoted."

Dave was a good friend. He's the one who started us in the shine business downtown. Eraser dusting made us natural shoeshine boys. We'd buff up a pair of old boots so good with a brush they'd hardly need to be touched with a rag. Once all the men left for World War Two, we day worked together on the ranches; except in those days, it wasn't called "day working," because most of the time you rode in after dark and left again before daylight.

Nowadays, shoes or moccasins made in China are so odd-sized, putting on another guy's wool lined houseshoes and walking from his bed to the bathroom would bind you together closer than the bonds *of* a set of Siamese twins. A man used to wearing shopmade yellow ostrich hide boots would think he was trying on a couple of kayaks if he were to slip on my latest Chinese-made walking shoes. They are so huge, I have to take an extra step to untrack. Numbers underneath the tongue read "13 M," but I think the "13" is the tongue size

and the "M" is the closest a Chinese shoemaker can come to writing "monstrosity."

I called the only familiar brand store left in Angelo looking for a pair of work boots last week. The clerk claimed his lines are still made in Minnesota. His company no longer makes leather soled boots. Rubber soles are plenty dangerous if a horse falls, especially until the tread wears off slick enough to slip from a stirrup. I suspect the first crepe and rubber bottom riding boots were invented by a funeral home to appeal to hombres needing traction to press worn accelerator pedals, or keep one foot on slick bar rails.

But the scene has changed in the dry pasture land. What few old boys make it out of town have so little regard for safety, they cut rope strings thick enough to hold the weight of a 250-pound man. Strange looking iron ox bow stirrups hang just right for the same size man's boot to slip into a drag to the death noose. The new age saddle horns must freeze in the winter, because they are wrapped in inner tubes. Riggings made from nylon webbing cinched to rubber lined girths look more like a pump jack belt than a saddle.

However, oldtimers need double doses of trying on new moccasins and keeping our mouths shut in between trials. The modern age requires more skills than dusting erasers, or lacing up a set of stirrup leathers in the dark. About all that can be said for the old days is that the archaic stuff,

like windmills and horseshoe rasps, are going to be YK2 compatible and will only crash if a storm blows them down, or a cowboy throws them over the fence ...