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Shortgrass Country

by Monte Noelke

A few Sundays ago, the travel section of a widely circulated daily newspaper mentioned Fort Concho at San Angelo in a story about the restored frontier forts close to the Big Bend area of Texas. In a later issue of another paper the writer was quoted as warning that West Texas was steak and potato country, and motels and Dairy Queens were the only places to eat.

Being in and out of a lot myself, I appreciated the big city scribe's advice. It hadn't been a month since I'd slipped up and ate in a Mexican food restaurant that had devised a recipe for making flour tortillas so hard they'd make a set of hubcaps for a Malibu Chevrolet coupe seem like spring grade leaf lettuce.

On a weekend I'd entertained out of town guests at a San Angelo spot that had so many kids working as trainees, you'd have thought it was amateur night at an acrobat school. By the desert course we'd already heard the aftermath of a boy tripping and falling with a tray of dishes. Had that travel writer been there that evening he might have recommended roasting steak and potatoes on a public grill at a roadside park.

For years this particular restaurant has been recruiting waiters from the Angelo State University. The main thing these lads are taught is how to march out of the kitchen carrying a cupcake made to look like a birthday cake and singing at high pitch. Instead of becoming such exuberant actors, I'd prefer that they be trained to keep from plunging their forefingers into the greens on salad plates and desist from looping their thumbs far over the lips of the soup bowls.

The article went on to say that one of the rewards of making it that far was an "end of the earth" sensation. He's sure right on that count. At this writing, we've been lambing on dry grass for three weeks. I don't know how a city guy could be so skilled in catching my feelings.