

OCTOBER 8, 1981

Mertzson was too lonely a place after Child Who Sits in the Sun took off for London. I was in a miserable state, sitting there listening to the house creak and the water dripping in the backrooms.

Everywhere I looked I saw a moccasin or a broken string of beads. So it wasn't real hard for one of my partners to talk me into going along with him on this trip to New Mexico. I sure had planned on staying home and' taking care of her birds and plants, but one morning of that empty house syndrome was all I needed to start a trip to beat off the loneliness.

We both must have needed a change to the mountains. It took us two days to make the eight hour drive from San Angelo to Ruidoso. I used a lot .of time taking pictures of the countryside. The pastures were as green as in a wet spring. We saw moss hanging off the branches of the greasewood bushes. In the sand dune areas, I stepped on grassburrs that were so wet that they squished en the pavement.

I figure my pictures are going to turn into valuable historical documents. We passed through portions of Texas and New Mexico that hadn't had that much grass since the covered wagon days. Lots of those real estate men along the way must have been in a heat to make a sale before frost, because, though some of that land is mighty good cow country, it has an excellent way of keeping it a secret from the general public.

On the second morning, my partner began to lose interest in cheering me up. He eats a big breakfast every morning, then for the rest of the day he is able to fast.

The trouble was that I refuel in a reverse order. The only way I can tackle a fried egg in a cafe is to scrape enough burned grease off the doors to rub around my nose to deaden the smell. In the days when I was on the road more often, I used to carry a piece of old tablecloth from a chili joint to get the same relief. I learned that trick doctoring Thoroughbred horses that were too finicky to eat medicated feed. You might want to try it some day on a long trip in bad eating country.

Anyway, we had a fuss about stopping. Finally, he agreed to try a combination hamburger stand and curio shop that was on the right side of the road.

Before the motor had died, the owner was out welcoming us inside. He was one of those New Mexico Spanish guys that must have been trained at the world's society of hamburger merchandising colleges.

I never had seen a fellow with so much prepared sales talk for a cheeseburger. For every item on the menu he had a spiel that'd make a vacuum cleaner salesman think his pitch had been voted illegal in the last election.

We began to order up dishes like we were going to give an intermountain party for everybody in Ruidoso and Cloudcroft. To show you how good he was, we even ordered a glass of pineapple juice which he claimed came from close to his own apple orchard. I nearly broke down when he said his wife had gone up to Albuquerque to the state fair. But after I tasted his cooking, my emotions sobered and I had enough trouble going on in my stomach to forget about his wandering wife and mine too.

In the morning (I'm writing from a Ruidoso motel) we are going to visit the Apache Indian ranch right here at the reservation. That is, if we don't expire from high altitude fever complicated by acute heartburn.

I sure don't want you to think I'm the kind of man that'd go off and leave his wife's canaries and pot plants without water and seed. They were all doing fine when I left and you can bet that I'm going to be home to revive them before she gets home from London.