

APRIL 8, 1976

Glass doors from my motel room open to a rise overlooking Pueblo, Colo. By walking out on the balcony, I can watch the sunshine on a new snow that has fallen on the front slope of mountains extending on to Fort Collins and Greeley. Pike's Peak becomes visible in the cloud break. The view provides excellent therapy to forget the drouth that is scorching the lowlands.

Earlier, I walked downtown. High altitude walking stretches the hind legs and pumps fresh air into the lungs. Kids were out playing in the yards. Old men were raking leaves and watering the lawns. I felt at peace among the people. Morning greetings were inoffensive. I saw a couple of big watchdogs. I didn't, however, feel that this was alien ground.

Disguise was necessary. Local teamster union members were meeting at the motel. I sure didn't want to be mistaken for a strike-breaker or a scab. I put on my best buying suit and my English motoring cap.

Downtown, I walked like I'd seen folks do in New York and Chicago. You know the style. Eyes frozen above contact level and elbows cocked to hit a short rib. The mouth has to be turned down to a snarl. With practice, you can become a real sophisticated urbanite.

About the time I gained confidence, an old lady stuck her head out the door of a bookstore and said, "Son, hadn't I better call you a cab to take you back to your hotel?" Something to do with being around books must have given her a special sense. I'd checked my reflection in a store window. The tie matched the shirt; my suit looked exactly like the ones that Esquire magazine said were making a comeback.

She was a real nice lady. While I was waiting for the cab, she gave me a banana from her lunch sack. I never had thought much about old women. Those back home are always getting riled up about beer elections or related matters. None of them ever handed out any bananas to my knowledge. Child Who Sits in the Sun takes an old gal to the Post Office every day who can play a piano and a French harp at the same time. But I never had figured that she'd be much of a touch for anything more than maybe a free concert or a cookie.

In the afternoon, my hosts took me on a tour of a big cow outfit. By big, I mean across county lines in the same pasture. Fellow managing the operation said the roads led to cattle guards. In Colorado talk, that means that the roads led to cattle guards by passing through 13 wire gaps.

Lots of professional fence builders haven't stretched as much wire as I did. It was like being down in South Texas on a friend's ranch. I began to break down in the shoulders from wrestling with the gates.

We must have driven 60 miles through the pastures and irrigated farms. Yearlings leave here in the fall weighing 800 pounds. Summers, so perfect that the bees flying to the hives cool the cream pitchers.

You know how it is when herders from different countries get together. One will outdo the other for awhile, then the story will change. I was working at a disadvantage. Gate closing takes your strength. On gate 12, I told them they might have the smartest kids and the fastest horses, but I'd bet them any hat in the western wear store that we had more dead sheep than they did.

On the way back to the motel, I thought of some other things the Shortgrass Country has. Nobody knows about how smart our market forecasters are and how brilliant our football handicappers can be. I didn't mention it because they'd have thought I was bragging. I'm going to write the bookstore lady a thank you note as soon as I get home.