

MARCH 16, 1972

West of the motel I'm staying in are the mountains that background El Paso. By pulling the curtains on the front window of the room, I can watch the sun's rays patterning and repatterning in the blue haze on the peaks. In particular, it's an impressive sight to fly in from the east and gradually frame the mountains in the windshield as the plane lowers to the runway.

Cow people are numerous around the motel coffee shop. South of here are the vast cattle ranges of Mexico. Steers can be moved from there in numbers that would smother the Shortgrass Country. The cattle that I've seen are good ones, too.

To blend with the tourist atmosphere, I've been wearing a corduroy cap and a camera swung around my neck. Several years back, I overheard some hombres in Kansas express a critical opinion of Texas wearing big brimmed hats. Ever since then I've tried to look as much like the crowd as possible. I guess I'm doing a pretty good job of it, because a cab driver offered to show me the sights today for \$40. If I'd had on my ranch hat, he wouldn't have bothered to ask for a match.

Even in costume, you can be singled from the herd. Last night my host chose a fancy watering spot for dinner. It was one of those dark places that make the pictures on the wall and the patrons all look alike. Similar to courthouse architecture every one of these joints are the same. When you've seen one of them you've seen a lifetime supply.

While we were waiting for our food, an old boy came by and jerked a cigarette out of my mouth. I didn't think too much about it the first time he did it. The government has got to be such a mother hen, I figured they had special agents going around enforcing their anti-tobacco campaign.

However, when he made the second swipe I had to beg his pardon. By begging his pardon, I mean I told this fellow that I didn't want to be rude, but I did want him to understand that my one of my missions was defending the dignity of mankind, and that his conduct was setting my mission back considerably more than somewhat.

As you'd expect, my host wanted to do something more than beg this stranger's pardon. You could have told right away, in fact, that he was preparing to give this cigarette snatcher a face full of doubled up fist that'd make the man give up cigarette snatching for about 16 light years of long Mondays.

Well, I didn't want to see any violence unless it was on the television screen or from the rear view mirror of a right fast pickup. So I shushed up my friend and sort of loose herded my enemy on to another table. Having a fist fight would have ruined our dinner. I didn't want to have to eat my steak with a lot of nose bleeding going on. Steaks should be served medium rare; noses should stay as dry as possible, or that's the way I look at it.

Also, you can guess who'd have ended up paying the check if there'd been a big fight. One time down in San Antone, I got stuck for \$20 worth just because the fellow who'd done the inviting got preoccupied playing a game of musical chairs that ended up with the other player having his chair jerked out from under him. Twenty dollars worth of tuition is enough to pay for one lesson. I wasn't going to let that happen again.

Anyhow, the deal worked out all right. In 10 minutes, I'd met enough nice people to forget that red roan stray ever existed.

I am going to keep wearing my cap until I get back home. I don't want to be a traitor to cowdom, yet from the way those Kansas men were talking so many years ago, it doesn't hurt to use all the cheap insurance you can get.