

Shortgrass Country

By Monte Noelke

4-15-71

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I am taking these notes in a watering sport in Piedras Negras Mexico. A sheep doctor compadre of mine is acting as a backstop while our wives are running a door-to-door campaign on the curio shops.

The setting is perfect for a couple of hombres who are tired of getting their Vitamin C in sheep corrals. Sunlight has to go down a 50 foot hallway and then through two thick doors to reach our chairs. My partner has been looking down the sights of drench gun too long to make any conversation. The tourists sitting in here must think that we are a couple of Calvin Coolidge's nephews who came down to the river to get over a severe case of bronchitis.

Out on the streets, the setting is entirely different. The officer at the customs office must have tipped of the merchants that our wives were passing the International Boundary. Commercial preparation hasn't reached such a flurry since the days when people used to flog in to see the bull fights. Street beggars caught in the anticipation of a boom have stopped accepting nickels; cab drivers have taken on a regal air that would fit in New York City.

Our mates announced at breakfast that they had already planned a raid. When the sheep doctor's wife said she was going to feel real good after she'd had the chance to spend some money, I knew that Mrs. Onassis would have a hard time keeping up with those two. Then when my wife said she was going to stop by a cotton gin to buy a shopping bag, it was obvious the sheep doctor and myself were going to be hosting a spree that'd make Neiman Marcus wish they hadn't located in Dallas.

Bargains do exist on this side of the river. Off the tourist paths you can find some real price scorchers. I found a shop stuck on the edge of an alley that had calf hide boots for \$39 a pair. The same kind and the same quality in the United States would be at least \$22. However, once the Americans find these hideaways, the velvet disappears and the prices go up.

Being an old married man, I did know enough to buy my wife a gift during the trip. On the way back from the boot shop, I bought a string of garlic two feet long. The fellow who'd braided the stalks together must have been taught by the champion of all Mexico, because the workmanship was prettier than a tanned snake hide. The deal cost a whole dollar, but as big as our family is we can get back part of the money by eating the garlic.

You couldn't ask for a better spot to wait on a couple of shopping-crazed wives than this one. The darkness sort of seeps in under your eyelids and the air-conditioning flows down around your collar. Mexican beer doesn't taste too bad if you can remember to always deaden your tongue with a spoonful of turpentine before you ago across. All in all, a couple of husbands couldn't ask for a better deal. Anything will beat the dust of a sheep pen during a dry spring.