

Denver- For the moment I am confined to our hotel room. Yesterday, the airline that brought us up from San Angelo lost our luggage in the Ft. Worth/Dallas terminal. However, confinement is going to be of short term. The hotel housekeeper has agreed to have a toga made of bed sheets by lunch.

I did not come up to this Rocky Mountain wonderland to spend my time in a laundromat or a clothing store. No two-bit airline is going to ruin my stay even if the toga does turn out to be a bit drafty for the high altitude.

Denver is having good weather for togas. TV announcers have been beside themselves posting the high 90 readings on the screen. Cab drivers, too, have been most vocal when expressing their opinion of the heat wave in their unairconditioned hacks. I am actually kind of pleased that I'll have a robe to swish around town.

The host and guide for this trip is a friend of mine from San Angelo. He's attending a stock show and rodeo manager's seminar, or that is he's going to once our luggage comes.

While we've been holding this suitcase vigil, he's been giving me pointers how to act away from home. Things like not smoking my pipe in the elevators and not smoking my pipe in the room and not smoking my pipe anywhere except outside after the wind comes up in the mornings.

Mountaineers' lungs and nostrils must be mighty sensitive to pipe smoke. One of the cabs we rode in had a no smoking sign the size of the meter front. It's the first time I've been aware of cabbies having the license to set standards. This fellow had a flowing beard. I suppose the tobacco fumes must have been accumulating in his chin piece.

Along with the lecture on smoking habits, my partner has also pointed out a different custom here. We ate breakfast awful early. As the bus boys and waitresses started to work, they patted each other on the shoulder. I mean they reached over and patted at the shoulder blade. No squeezing, no pinching. Flat-handed patting. You get the picture.

After studying them, and listening to my compadre, it was my time to give some advice. I'm against changes in the greeting custom. One night at a dance in Mertzon, I saw an old boy that had been way up north meet a lady like the Eskimos do. The only reason he didn't lose an eye from that nose kiss was because his wife's evening gown was too tight for her to throw her best punch. Old habits might be all right for bachelors. But like I told my partner, he'd better stick to old Emily Post as long as he has a wife back home.

I suspect I caused the luggage to be lost. In between planes in Dallas, I asked one of those gruff hombres in a ticket stall whether it'd be possible for me to check the motor mounts on the plane for forklift scars. I guess that brass-buttoned lackey thought I was kidding as he said. "Smoking or non-smoking, sir?" I advised him that my wife had asked that I be careful about planes. I bet the ruckus caused that gentleman to push our bags off to never-land.

In the evenings, to the west of the hotel balcony, cool blue haze floats across the mountain peaks. The sun's rays make wedges that cut into the mountains. As long as the toga has pockets for my pipe, I'm not going to fret over the lost luggage. My partner has been silent since breakfast. He's probably thinking of a novel way to shake hands.