

An officious young man presided over a big file box in the dining room, checking out everyone on the final day of the Sewanee's summer writer's conference. He asked twice how to spell "Noelke." After the second search through the file cards he said, "I'm sorry, sir, but there's no record of a room 105, or a heading under your name."

I told him not to be sorry. During the war in Korea, the Selective Service Board tried in vain to find my transcript at Mertzon High School. Once down at the University at Austin, one of my sons called home thrilled to have found my name in the college's parking records.

Mother unintentionally caused me to lose my identity. In 1936 or '37, brokenhearted over not having a little girl, she read in a woman's magazine that avoiding natural light and bleached-out freckles changed redheads to blondes. She bought a big roll of 10-cent tickets to the local shoot-em-up movie house, the Royal Theater, determined to change my looks. Six days a week from 11:30 in the morning until dark, I watched Buck Jones and Tom Mix shoot bank robbers and save pretty cowgirls' lives from runaway stagecoaches and slash the ropes binding the same ladies to railroad tracks on narrow bridges in the face of roaring engines.

Jarred by the bravery on screen, I dreamed of rescuing a young girl from flooded Spring creek, or saving her life off rails in front of the west-bound train. My lips became

pursed from hissing the villains, and the pupils of my eyes expanded until I had to turn my head like a hoot owl to bring them into focus. Alone, I began to pencil out combinations of "Buck Noelke," "Ace Noelke," or the one I liked best, "Tom Mix, Jr."

It was Mr. Glassed, the grade school principal, who called Mother puzzled why I insisted on turning in homework signed "Ace," "Buck" or "Tom". Mother taught kindergarten after college, so she was able to explain to Mr. Glassed how little boys are influenced by repetitive images, neglecting to add where I had spent the summer.

So once again, I left town without so much as a line on a computer diskette to record my stay, or to recover the \$10 bucks I had down for deposit on the room keys. From the University, I drove to Chattanooga and on into the Great Smoky Mountains over in North Carolina.

The mountains aren't really smoky. Evaporation off the streams and the transpiration of moisture off the forests sends a wispy blue haze in the air. Also, Smoky Mountain National Park is the most heavily visited park in the country. So many people sweating out the winter's reserve of danish rolls and cupcakes and Coca-Colas, jogging and riding innertubes down the rapids, adds a lot of steam to the atmosphere.

Gatlingburg, for instance, on the north boundary of the park, claims to have 30,000 rooms to rent. The world's record for teeshirt sales, I heard, is broken and reset

every hour around the clock in Gatlingburg. All my information on tourist meccas comes second hand from Mobil guides and room clerks. I'd of missed being a signer of the Declaration of Independence if I'd had to walk through a gift shop to reach Independence Hall.

Friends recommended Bryson City on the south side of the park as a less crowded area. I stayed at a bed and breakfast off the road, but within walking distances of the park entrances. The owner knew plenty of out of the way trails.

Like a lot of property owners living close to federal lands, she brought up government control often. Over close to Bryson City, the Cherokee Indian reservation reminds property owners how space diminishes trading with the ruling class. I consoled her by telling her the Cherokees' big mistake was operating too much good country in Virginia, on down into northern Alabama and over to eastern Tennessee. Furthermore, the Cherokees were bad sports and poor losers. The tribes, for example, fell to pieces in 1828 just because the State of Georgia annexed all their lands and declared their laws and customs null and void. The principal Cherokee chief, John Ross, (lots of the Cherokees took Anglo names from their alliance with the English in the War of Independence) pleaded and won a case revoking the act before the U.S. Supreme Court. President Jackson ignored the ruling and signed the Removal Act of 1830, expelling all the

Cherokee nation to west of the Mississippi on about the most tragic forced migration in history.

The innkeeper wanted to know whether Texas ranchers feared laws like the Endangered Species Act. I told her no, our land was so desolate and void of habitants and plants that the government protected us as little children. "The Cherokees blew it," I repeated, "from claiming such idyllic spots as the Blue Ridges and the Appalachians." I don't think she understood, but if more people would settle on shortgrass lands, they would have less trouble holding title to their homes...