

NOVEMBER 17, 1988

Before one complaint is sounded, I want to explain why I had to leave town again so soon after the trip to the Artie. One of my old friends who keeps a home in San Jose, Costa Rica was all alone. Late autumn is rainy season down there. So I packed up and went down to keep him company until the golf links were dry enough for him company until the golf links were dry enough for him to entertain himself.

What was not planned was a little swirl of wind off the coast of Venezuela which I barely noticed on the weather news the day I flew out of San Angelo. But by the time I'd passed through customs at San Jose, the most optimistic forecasters were making it sound like all that was going to be left of Costa Rica after the hurricane hit were the volcanoes, and probably they were going to be so affected by the disturbance that they'd erupt over the countryside.

Up to that point I'd always made it a rigid policy not to stay around where bricks were liable to be falling from the walls, or where bricks were apt to be hurled by hot blooded rebels. I'd already passed my quota on gun emplacements and hand-held automatic rifles when we taxied by the defense measures at Belize City on the way down. But my partner was putting on such a grand welcome act of dramatic embrazos that he learned from the Latinos, I'm sure, that I relented and decided to stay over.

At his house the situation quickly changed to a storm alert. His wife, up in the States, had been on the telephone since the first warnings, issuing orders that her huge crystal chandelier hanging some 15 feet from the living room floor was to be covered in blankets. A job, in my opinion, that was about like having to climb the mast of a clipper ship to roll in a sail.

Her secondary instructions were that in case the hurricane did hit, the servants and whoever else was there were to form a circle around her grand piano to deflect airborne missiles such as shattered palm fronds and flying glass that might pit the instrument's finish or damage the stool.

After a quick survey, I caught onto who this "whoever that was around" hombre was. I also tried to remember whether the insurance provided by my credit card people paid on field hospitals and took care of medical airlifts. I longed for the dry ground of the Shortgrass Country and rued the day this wanderlust had struck my soul.

In the last hours, what they called Hurricane Joan veered to the north and hit Nicaragua. Never had a morning dawned in such peace. At coffee, I looked up at untouched prisms in the chandelier and was grateful that my courage was left untested.