

APRIL 4, 1974

Through the windows of our automobile the whole world seems to be one huge farm. My partner and I passed from the north part of the Shortgrass Country way before daybreak. We are traveling due north on the plains of Texas. Christopher Columbus couldn't have convinced his best friend the world was round on these flat grounds. At 55 mile per hour, it may be necessary to camp in a tractor shed to complete the crossing.

The purpose of the trip is to interview prospective superintendents for the Mertzon school. The two chiefs we are hunting are way up against the New Mexico line. Hombres of that craft, so it seems, take long vueltas to gather. Before we reach our destinations, we'll both have pernicious car sores on our hindlegs.

Trouble developed in the planning stage of the journey. My pickup caught a bad case of broken U-bolts and my copilot's pickup fell over with a stuck valve sickness. In order to get wheels under us, we had to contract for his wife's car. To make that trade, we had to promise to take each of our wives out for a Mexican dinner, plus all the Spanish rice they could eat.

I never heard of such ridiculous terms in my life. Women nowadays are so affected by female trouble-making movements that they are that they are harder on a trade than foreign countries. It would have been cheaper to come by bus. Mexican food in San Angelo will run over \$2 a plate. Throwing in a rider like that Spanish rice deal is going to really rip the purse. If the school board doesn't pay our travel expenses, we'd be better off staying home pouring out feed.

The reason that I have time to write is because my partner and I aren't speaking to each other. About daybreak, we passed a long string of dead coyotes tied to a fenceline. Sort of casual like, I said I'd bet there were 30 head hanging on the fence. Sort of uncasual like, he called me for a dollar and said he knew there were more than 30 head. We had to turn around to settle the bet. Twenty-nine head were strung up and 12 head were lying around the bottom of the posts. The audit took four counts to settle. It was impossible to dispute that I'd won, but he refused to pay off on the grounds that he meant that the 12 head on the ground were the same as the ones hanging.

I wasn't going to fight him over a squelched dollar bet, nevertheless I wasn't going to be cheated by an hombre so dumb that he hadn't seen me counting the coyotes the first time we passed by.

It was all his fault that we traded so soft with our wives on the car. He shouldn't have ever been elected to a big job like the school board if he couldn't hold his own on a coyote bet and a car rental trade. Some public image we are going to have back home. Trustees are supposed to be fearless guardians of the public schools, not cheap gamblers who won't pay for their chips.

Highways last for limitless miles up here. Sand dunes have to serve for hills in many parts. Tractors and other farm paraphernalia dominate the roadsides.

It's as bad to see this country dry as it is to see it dry at home. Every ounce of cottonseed meal and every grain of milo that these boys grow are intricately tied to the fate of the cow people. I wish they'd hurry up and get out of their beds and go to farming.

This is going to be a long ride with a pouting partner as a traveling companion.