

JANUARY 15, 1981

Snow plows are scraping the snow off the parking lot around the motel. I'm located far from the Shortgrass Country, some 30 odd miles below New York City at Morristown, New Jersey. Ten degrees is the predicted high for today: the chill factor runs under zero.

Today one of our sons is going to marry a girl from here. Child Who Sits in the Sun, along with his brothers and sister and myself, have gathered as a supporting cast. My role, as you may know, is to pay for such odds and ends as rehearsal dinners and smaller items. Mainly, I have to be careful not to block the lanes of traffic for the hosts and the guests.

Do not for a moment worry about me. Before we left Texas, I went through an intense briefing on out-of-state customs. Not along the Amy Vanderbilt or Emily Post lines, but a crash course on acceptable and non-acceptable topics of conversation. Each morning there was an indoctrination session that left a word vacuum so serious that, were I to tell an Uncle Remus story today, the dialect would sound like it was being done by an announcer on the British Broadcasting network.

As I told my wife and sons, Northerners enjoy laughing at the way Texans talk. We have a long history of being the brunt of jokes. The very Indians that our forefathers fought the land for used to gather around the campfires at night to laugh at the way their prisoners of war spoke English and how their dogs howled when the Anglo camp guards sang homesick songs in the night. It must have been 1930 before anyone in our state was able to communicate outside of our boundary lines. The major part of the corruption of border Spanish, I think, can be blamed on the Tejanos. I didn't see any use then, and I don't see any use now of cleaning up an act that no one is going to understand anyway.

Two hundred years ago, in the winter of 1779 and '80, General George Washington camped his troops in these parts. A general named Green said it was a pathetic sight to see the men freezing in the bitter cold. Old George might have been first in peace, but he was mighty indifferent to discomforts of war. Looking out the window here, I can imagine how a soldier felt sleeping on the ground. I feel imposed upon just to have to walk outside for the paper.

We haven't had a bit of trouble getting along with the bride's family, they are gracious, undemanding folks that seem to be looking for ways to make us comfortable. Their home is a colonial style house sitting in a big woods like you've seen in the movies. I guess they think I'm a mute, because every time I start to tell a story some of my crew interrupts. I sure was wanting to tell them last night about a bucking horse I saw one time on the Cathey Ranch; however, with a shoe grinding on my arch, the words wouldn't flow. All they'll ever know of Mertzon is what they read in the news.

As I said, don't worry how I turn out at the big wedding. I am never left alone long enough to make a mistake. Zero weather doesn't hurt so bad when all you have outside is a rent car. This kind of snow back home would sure bring up the sheep feed.