

Tuesday morning – Santa Fe New Mexico, The Farmer's market, south of the Santa Fe Railroad water tower. Turn off Guadalupe Street; you can't miss it.

Follow close; the goal is disarmament and discount. The approach opens aimed at the flower booth and two farm ladies seated Spartan steel stools, selling summer bouquets and red plums under a white tent.

Here's the pitch: "My dears, the only woman I ever loved, or who loved me, lies in a cold, unmarked grave in this capitol city. Every year, I travel from the miserable Texas desert to climb the eastern Sierra Madre and pluck petals from a bouquet to float in the mountain air in honor of our love. Your beautiful sunflowers are perfect. Could you cut a nib off the price to soften my sorrow?"

Pause here and go back up and edit "farm ladies"; enlarge to "two savvy biddies with hearts hard as the stools." The tale brought tears. But the tear ducts irrigate the eyes and moisten the cheeks. Tears do not reach cigar box money caches, or alter the time on old sisters' odometers' experiences with husbands and boyfriends.

It was my best shot. Once way, way, back, a florist wept from the same story. The experience did her good. After she saw the bouquet on a 29 year-old secretary's desk, she became adult and able to deal in this cold old world. As tough as it is for florists to face grocery store competition and overcome plastic falsies, she should have been grateful for the experience.

Win or lose, you learn not to stay around after a heart-rendered speech. Costumed in bow tie and starched oxford, the minute they dismissed the offer, I flipped over 12 "clams," grabbed a bouquet, and said "Cheerio."

Nobody uses "Cheerio" or knows what it means in the language. Charles Dickens may have known how or when to say "Cheerio." Mr. Dickens had to write a book a month. Writers that busy, however, can't be bothered signing off from flower booths in a "Cheerio" or plain "Adios," for that matter.

Afterwards, unabashed by the defeat, I moved to a second plan. Back at the Inn, the bouquet spread in a vase on a piano, a couple from Switzerland ate a late breakfast nearby. Friendly, innocent tourists, a bit hypnotized by my Southern drawl and courtly display of a morning bouquet.

Different than above, much different, I gave the man a new two-dollar bill, only saying "I got this at the bank

yesterday for you to have as a souvenir." No "Good morning," or any malarkey about collector's value.

Now why, you might wonder, throw away two bucks on a couple of strangers from a country with less flat ground than the Big Bend Park in Texas? Okay, the answer is that those two measly bucks open the floor to exchange addresses. Those two dollars lay groundwork for the future.

You do remember the Swiss are only out to save their currency and preserve their boundaries. The Swiss are not on a foolish mission to save the world for democracy. They keep the deposit slots at potent Swiss jugs open for deposits from all the world's mankind, from the scoundrels to the saints, from the shahs to the ex-prime ministers. Like all jug keepers, if they are caught in an indiscretion, they apologize and pay the ticket.

In short, instead of broadening acquaintances in El Paso or Amarillo or Oklahoma City, I am going to make pals with citizens of Zurich who might have a neutral place the next war.

Next hit was over at the Casa Sena, east of the plaza. After word reached me that that high-classed joint no longer served rainbow trout baked in clay, I wanted an on-site report on the news plus a chance to see a clay roller.

The red-haired waitress advised "Better not ask" to a request to see the machine. "The boss is in a tizzy," she said, "because the part has to come from Europe. What do you expect for a blue plate lunch, 'Tex' - a side show?" (Gosh, I hate being called "Tex".)

The chef wasn't defeated. He dusted a rainbow in blue cornmeal to the exact coat. He might be out of clay, but he sure was baking good muffins and flipping the trout at the right time.

Adjoining the Plaza the day after, at the La Fonda Hotel (1923 edition), the chef made a salad without visible machinery. Unlike any of the grated cabbage, mayonnaise-sloshed infamies called slaw, he grated delicate strands of jicama spiced by cilantro leaves. It's a culinary delight.

Stay around to see how well the two-dollar investment works in Switzerland. Sure bound to beat what I blew on the old ladies' flowers.