

columnists

high desert sketches



George at Twin Sisters Mountain
(VALERIE HOWARD illustration)

Interesting facts for mystified tourists

By GEORGE A. COVINGTON

One of my first photographs of the western rim of the Alpine Valley showed a mountain with dual peaks on the western fringe of the town. I was told by one and all (almost all) that the mountain was called Twin Peaks. Despite the fact that we have Twin Peaks Liquors and Twin Peaks Storage and a population that refers to those dual peaks as Twin Peaks, its actual name is Twin Sisters. Twin Peaks is several miles further west. This is just one example of the strange and sometimes interesting facts a tourist should know about the Big Bend.

It might help many tourists to understand because of its history the Big Bend has also been known as the Bloody Bend and the Big Bent. The first name was due to the fact that the early settlers had to fight and kill Apaches, Comanches, bandits, cow rustlers, horse thieves, and maybe a few too nosy brand inspectors. The second name has many origins, including the fact that many residents today feel that it is their duty to shoot anything that flies, runs on four legs, slithers, or otherwise ticks them off or violates their personal space. They are particularly upset if you do not properly grasp the concept of the true value of water. In the Big Bend, we drink the whiskey and fight over the water. If you see a mosquito don't swat it, but follow it back, claim its water and start drilling. Pray you don't hit oil because that stuff is so messy and not nearly as valuable as water.

While Big Benders love the tourist dollar, some of us don't like the tourists. Several years ago, we had a bad experience with a Houston tourist who murdered the Mayor of Lajitas, one of Alpine's suburbs. In a drunken state, he removed the mayor's manhood and left him to die. The culprit was acquitted because of a legal technicality. His lawyer pointed out that the mayor was duly elected at \$1 per vote. He happened to be a goat. His name was Clay Henry. The accused was a Houston bigot!

Two positive points the average tourist should know is that Alpine has a great collection of food trucks. These include menus ranging from Japanese (Fish Cat), Tri-La-Bite (All-American cuisine), Cuban (The Smokin' Cuban), La Calavera (Tex-Mex), Thai (Thai-Way), The Window (burgers), and the world-famous Cow Dog! The Cow Dog is renowned from coast to coast for its wide selection and creative manipulation of the American hot dog. Most of these eateries are found on either Holland Avenue or Murphy Street.

The second fact is that Sul Ross State University, with an enrollment of less than 2,000, has one of the finest theatre programs in the state. Led by the dynamic, beautiful, and vivacious Dona Roman, the program will present two award-winning works this summer. Theatre of the Big Bend spreads baseball fever and contagious old time rock 'n' roll rhythm in the 2018 summer offerings. Performances will be held weekends, June 22-July 29 in the Kokernot Outdoor Theatre under our beautiful starry sky.

"Bleacher Bums," a nine-inning comedy by actor Joe Mantegna, will be performed Friday-Sunday, June 22-July 1. "Smokey Joe's Café," a musical revue featuring the songs of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, opens Friday, July 6.

"Bleacher Bums," directed by Bret Scott, Sul Ross State University assistant professor of Communication, chronicles long-time Chicago Cubs fans, attending an afternoon game in the Wrigley Field bleachers. "Bleacher Bums" is a play about hope," said Scott. "Every baseball fan, and especially every Cubs fan, has to be an optimist."

Dona Roman, Sul Ross professor of Theatre, directs "Smokey Joe's Café," which features 39 songs by the prolific song-writing team, including "Hound Dog," "Kansas City," "Ruby Baby," "Poison Ivy" and "Yakety Yak." "Smokey Joe's Café" opened on Broadway in 1995, running for 2,036 performances, the longest-running musical revue in Broadway history.

This past spring production of "Man of La Mancha" had all the qualities of a Broadway production. The outdoor theatre even provides a great view of Twin Sisters to the west.

I will be taking my usual summer sabbatical in July and August, but will return September 6, 2018.

George A. Covington has worked in the fields of law, education, journalism and disability rights. He considers himself retired from every one of them with the possible exception of journalism. He is a graduate of the University of Texas schools of journalism and law. He moved to West Texas - Alpine - in 1997 after a 20-year career in Washington, D.C. where he once served on the staff of the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives (Democrat) and shortly thereafter served as Special Assistant to the Vice President of the United States (Republican) 1989-93.

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the rambling boy

Lonesome Dove: the lore, the book, the film, the photographs

By LONN TAYLOR

I have been musing recently about a long-lasting Texas phenomenon: the continuing popularity of Larry McMurtry's 1985 novel Lonesome Dove. My musings were occasioned by a fine photographic exhibit that has been on display at the Jeff Davis County Library for the past month, 55 photographs taken by screenwriter and executive producer Bill Wittliff during the 1988 filming of the television miniseries derived from the novel. It is a fine exhibit and the photographs have a haunting, timeless quality about them. They could have been taken in the 1880s by Charles Kirkland or Andrew A. Forbes or any of the other photographers who recorded the great cattle drives north from Texas in those years. In fact, they were taken 30 years ago and are from a book by Wittliff entitled A Book of Photographs from the Making of Lonesome Dove, published by the University of Texas Press in 2007. That is a very long shelf life for something as ephemeral as a television program.

Since 1985, 2.5 million copies of the novel have been printed, and 30 years after it was made you can still order the DVD of the miniseries from Amazon. Lonesome Dove made a huge impression on the Texas psyche. People name dogs and cats and horses and even children after its heroes, Gus McCrae and Woodrow Call. John Spong, who wrote about the phenomenon in Texas Monthly in July 2010, claimed that he knew of someone who named a daughter Gus after McCrae. There was a fellow in Fort Davis a few years ago who drove around in a pickup with the words Hat Creek Cattle Company, the name of McCrae's and Call's fictional ranch, painted on the doors, and another fellow who had a short-lived restaurant here called the Dry Bean Café. There is a hamburger chain in Central Texas called the Hat Creek Cattle Company. People in the Hill Country hang signs reading "We Don't Rent Pigs" on their ranch gates. Spong says this is because Texans "turn to Lonesome Dove for definition, for heroes who look and talk like them, who address life in a way they wish they could. . . . It's our Gone With the Wind. It's the way we want to see ourselves."

The novel has a strange history. In 1971, after director Peter Bogdanovich and McMurtry had finished shooting The Last Picture Show, Bogdanovich suggested to McMurtry that they collaborate on a western with John Wayne, Jimmy Stewart, and Henry Fonda playing the lead parts. McMurtry wrote a screenplay about aging cowboys and the end of the Old West which he called "Streets of Laredo" (he later used that title for a novel) and Bogdanovich took it to Columbia Pictures, where it was favorably received, but John Wayne hated it, so it languished on the shelf at Columbia for 12 years. McMurtry eventually bought the rights back from Columbia for \$35,000 and spent a year or so turning it into a novel, which he called Lonesome Dove. He got the title from a bus with the words Lonesome Dove Baptist Church painted on the sides that he saw while he was having dinner at a steak house in the little town of Ponder in Denton County. He sent the manuscript to his publishers in the fall of 1984 and the book was published the next year.

The truly odd thing is that in October 1981, McMurtry published an



Cattle crossing the Rio Grande.
(photo by Bill Wittliff. Courtesy of Humanities Texas)

Country and Western literature." He was particularly hard on the folks he grouped together as "the journalists," Edwin "Bud" Shrake, Dan Jenkins, and Gary Cartwright, of whom he said that the techniques of sports writing had ruined their novelistic styles. He praised a few of his contemporaries, especially Terry Southern, Max Crawford, James Crumley, John Irsfeld, and poet Vassar Miller, and he closed by saying, "Until Texas writers are willing to work harder, inform themselves more broadly, and stop looking backwards, we won't have a literature of any interest." Then he went on to write Lonesome Dove, and followed that with two sequels and a "prequel" to Lonesome Dove, all set in the 19th-century West and none as good as Lonesome Dove.

McMurtry had little to do with the filming of the miniseries, which featured Robert Duvall and Tommy Lee Jones as McCrae and Call - in fact McMurtry is on record as saying he has never watched it all the way through. The miniseries was the brainchild of a television producer named Suzanne de Passe, who met McMurtry at a Tucson restaurant in 1985, read the galley proofs of the novel, and paid McMurtry \$50,000 to purchase the film rights for her production company, Motown. She hired Bill Wittliff, an Austin publisher, photographer, and screen writer to turn the novel into a film script and secured \$16 million in financial backing from CBS.

Wittliff became co-executive producer with de Passe and they both held various CBS executives' hands while the film was shot.

Wittliff likes to tell about a meeting in which the CBS people told them that the cattle were going to cost too much money and that they would have to rewrite the script to eliminate the cattle drive. But one of the CBS men had an idea: "What if they start the drive and right away there's this storm and the cattle get scattered, and you have Call say, 'Let's just keep going,' and you have all those guys going to Montana, doing all that stuff, but you don't have to pay for the cattle." Wittliff countered, "Why don't we just forget the cattle and get a herd of Angora goats? They can be the first guys to drive a herd of Angora goats to Montana." One of the CBS men snapped his fingers and said, "Yeah! Goats!" and Wittliff said, "No, that's a joke." Fortunately, the cattle stayed in, the miniseries got made, and it became the best-selling Western DVD of all time.

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guest commentary

The case of southern border asylum and abuse of constitutional due process

By the Rev. Barry Abraham Zavah

Amen . . . "For common sense, reason and; for once in this horror show at our southern border, the application of the milk of human kindness by our federal officials."

Once we expected justice from our bedrock American principles of the "Rule of Law" and "Due Process ("fundamental fairness"). My law school Constitutional Law professor said it best: "Fundamental fairness is that . . . which the heart knows is right?"

Here's the rub. There is a nasty, rotted little nut in the basket. The Administration has been selling iron pyrite ("Fool's Gold"); an utterly worthless nugget of half-truths, gift wrapped but distorted by political chicanery - a bestial sleight of hand harming thousands of innocent people seeking asylum at southern border crossings.

The Trojans learned the hard way about those bearing gifts. This time, the horse phooey is provided by a President unmindful and unconcerned about our Bill of Rights. He challenges common sense with a daily barrage of countless lies and contradictions of documented facts. Then, his Attorney General associates the rule of law with Bible verses used to justify American slavery and South African apartheid.

This point is essential to understand. For the sake of the discussion, let's say that each person seeking asylum is "an illegal". Nonetheless, they still have certain rights under our Constitution's 5th Amendment "Due Process" clause!

But that's still jumping the gun. "Illegal" is an accusation and perhaps the finding after a hearing with due process rights attached. We'll delve into this a bit more, later.

Forced separation and internment of parent(s) and children; without any

contact, much less knowing where each other may be, is a punishment before a finding of being in violation of the relevant federal statutes. It is the sort of arbitrary, authoritarian despotism which was a major reason for the Revolution of 1776. Our present Constitution was all about cleaning up those sorts of "messy situations".

The King's colonial officials or military commanders, for example, made accusation(s), arrested, detained and carried out the sentence/punishment often in one fell swoop. That's not our Constitution when operating according to design specifications.

Please understand that many approaching southern border crossings do so seeking asylum from unspeakable conditions in their home countries. It is not a crime to seek asylum.

Many Americans confuse a legal and quite legitimate crossing with anyone improperly in the US. For example, perhaps someone is smuggled in or crossed the Rio Grande in a remote location or tunneled under the border or breached a fence or provided forged documentation to an Immigration Agent at an international crossing or entry point such as an airport. They have been arrested, detained and accused of a federal "B" misdemeanor, a minor offense.

Some have suggested there is no difference between taking charge of the children (and sent lord knows where without anyone knowing where or how to contact them) and Child Protection taking custody of a child or with a parent(s) arrest when police find contraband in the home. The difference is "due process and the rule of law".

The 5th Amendment states a "person may not be deprived of life, liberty

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