

Western Romance #2

Western Romance #2 is done for FAPA and Fandom by Joyce Katz, 330 S. Decatur Blvd., PMB 152, Las Vegas, NV 89107, in August 2000. Thanks to **Arnie** for the layout and copying help. All art this issued is by Alan White. Email: Joyworley@aol.com. Member fwa and afal.

WE LIVE IN A CHANGING WORLD. Today it seems that most of the West is on fire, including the mountains that surround Las Vegas. There's a haze across the sky from smoke; I seem to be coughing more than normal, even though I'm staying in doors. But the worst hit this year is Montana, and I'm sad to think of the Big Sky Country in flame and smoke.

One of the news reports mentioned that the Flathead Reservation was threatened, and the tribe might have to be evacuated. Later reports seemed to indicate that firefighters had been successful in saving the reservation, and that the evacuation had been postponed. But it made me think of my trip there 45 or 50 years ago.

My mother's cousin Letha lived in Ronan, Montana, and we visited them there two or three summers. Daddy was a railroad man back in the days when a railroader could get free passes for self and family to anywhere he wanted to go. Riding the Missouri Pacific was automatic, since that's the line he worked for. That got us as far as Denver, but from that point on we traveled by other lines. For some of our trips, we went through Colorado, but to get to Montana, we took the Union Pacific out of Kansas City north to Billings, Montana. Then we rode the Great Northern across the lower half of Idaho to Spokane, Washington, and doubled back across the narrow neck of Idaho to Helena. We then took an older line, with antique cars that still had gas light fixtures, to Missoula, where Aunt Letha met us, drove 30 or 40 miles to Ronan, and then 15 or 20 miles outside that small town to my aunt's ranch.

The trip was a Great Adventure, and I loved every minute it took to get us to The Wild West, including the time we spent waiting in depots for the next connection. From Poplar Bluff we rode to St. Louis, then spent several hours in that grand station. The St. Louis Grand Central Station was a temple of marble, parquet floors, gorgeous inlaid ceilings, grand concourses with echoes bouncing back in musical tones. Across the street was, and still is, the magnificent Meeting of the Waters fountain, with the Missouri and Mississippi depicted as Grecian styled man and woman, surrounded with spewing fish and water sprites. Down the street a bit was a great diner that made huge burgers, and by the time we'd visited each of our favorite spots and sat beside the fountain to be drenched by the water spray, it was time to catch the connection to Kansas City and all points west.

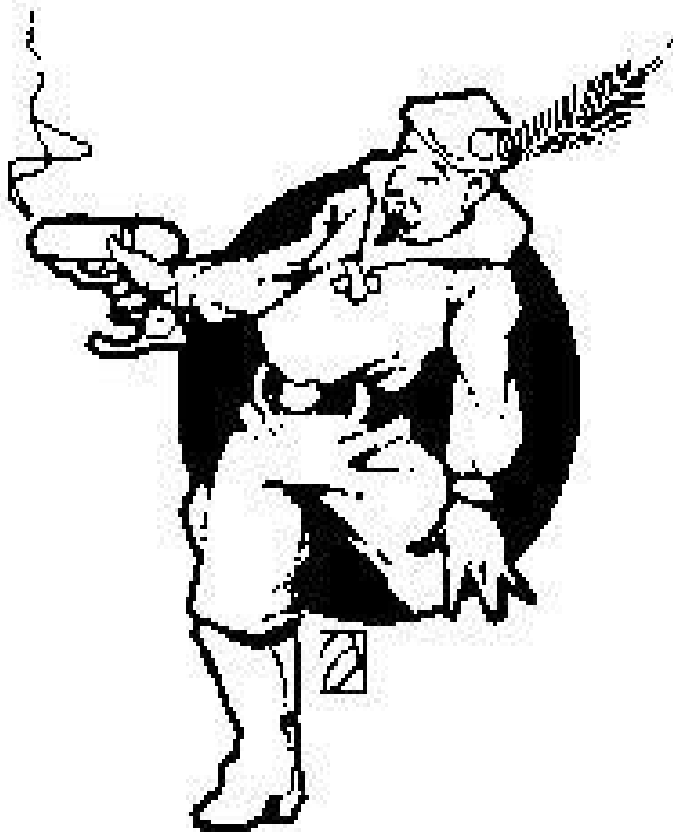


During the Kansas City run the familiar gradually slid away and excitement set in. There were one or two short tunnels...I loved that, and was excited by thinking how they were built. The tracks followed close beside the Missouri River, and I spent much of the time aboard humming *Across The Wide Missouri* to myself (no doubt to the horror of fellow passengers.) We'd pull into Kansas City in the evening of the first day...and some accident of scheduling usually provided a 23 hour layover in that great station.

I loved the Kansas City station second only to St. Louis'. It was a 24-hour city; I used to call it the Eternal City, filled with shops and restaurants and bookstores and shoeshine stands. I was given free run of the place...that was an earlier more innocent time, and my family believed in the Brotherhood of Railroad Workers — no one would harm me; everyone would look out for me. It must have been true, for no one did, and I had a marvelous time.

When daylight finally came, after the long long night in the station, we'd visit the dignified World War I museum across the street. It was a solemn group of halls, fountains, sculptures and gardens, filled with weapons and uniforms, mementoes and medals. The pain in the hearts of the people who founded the museum was allowed to enter the buildings; young as I was, I felt the grief of war more strongly there than any place I've ever been.

My father, who was wounded in the Argonne Forest, was always healed by seeing this edifice of mourning and respect. And when, on one of our many many visits to this great hall of sad-



ness, he found a photograph of himself and his unit, it was as if a star had been placed on his forehead. Knowing his pain was not forgotten helped him more than anything up to that time, and was only equaled when he received his Certificate signed by John F. Kennedy.

From Kansas City, sometimes we went to Denver. One time, we had a full day's layover there, so we took a tour into the hills, to the Red Rock amphitheater, huge and beautiful, and to the Buffalo Bill Museum high atop some mountain. The layovers were a definite part of the thrill of travel, since we used them to explore each city.

The best leg was the long ride across the West. We saw deer and antelope from our windows, and storms, floods and fires. Criss-

crossing the mountains, we saw school children riding horseback to class in Idaho; we saw herds of buffalo, and wild horses galloping over the foothills. We all turned into Western enthusiasts, picking up more history and geography than we'd ever learned in class.

Aunt Letha's home was the last spread on the side of the mountain; after her ranch, it was just virgin timber, wildlife and stone. The small town of Ronan seemed like a page from an old book, exotic and remote from my home in Missouri. Years later, I corresponded with a sheep rancher's wife in Ronan; she sold me a soup tureen, and told me how little Ronan had changed. The tureen was shaped like a seated lamb; I was surprised she'd part with it, but perhaps she'd had her fill of cute spring lambs.

While we were there, Aunt Letha took us all to a powwow on the Flathead Reservation. I remember the beautiful boys dancing to drums made by stretching skins over holes in the ground. I recall making friends with a pretty Indian girl who let Mother hold her baby for awhile. I remember eating a great supper of hotdogs and soda (Exotic Indian Fare), while we watched the dancing and listened to the music.

Although Aunt Letha was almost half Cherokee, she felt little kinship with the Flatheads. She told us with great amusement that one of the local reservation boys had a crush on my cousin, her eldest daughter. Neither she nor the daughter were having any part of it; they laughed at how he followed her around, heart in his eyes. She didn't notice my mother's steely look, disliking the disrespect they'd shone, as she pointed out the boy to us, one of the dancers in the great circle. I remember thinking that I wouldn't mind if this handsome youth followed me around.

My cousin eventually married a rancher from the eastern part of Montana, where she raised wheat, I believe. I never saw her again after that summer. I hope and trust her life was happy, but I'll bet it wasn't nearly as romantic and exciting as it could have been.

I hate to think of that beauty ruined; I hope the fire was extinguished before there was too much damage to the reservation's land.

FAPA is also facing some changes. Although I ran for office on a platform of No Action, there are other more industrious officials who actually Get Things Done. While I lollygag around, content to let the mailings plop into my mailbox, or better still, be delivered to my hands, there are people out there who Actually Work for FAPA. You'll never find me volunteering to be the Secretary-Treasure, or the Official Editor; my hat is off to them for the labors they perform to make my hobby more fun.

It appears that some modernizing and cleaning up of the rules is called for. It appears that these small changes will make it easier for the laborers to complete their tasks. So even though I abhor change, and I don't like Taking Rash Actions, I think we should go along with their requests.

Please give consideration to the requested changes. The fact is, it doesn't mean much to the rest of we lazy fans, but if it will help them, I'm all for it.

Worley-Gigs

There's been some changes in my world, too. ChannelSpace Entertainment, the company that owns Collecting Channel, has run short of operating capital. This caused a great upheaval in the warp and woof of the company, resulting in most employees being terminated. Unfortunately, this included the entire Content Department, except for one writer (Bill Kunkel) and one HTML person to post the site.

In our journalistic lives, there have been numerous instances when Arnie and I were both laid off at the same time. The first time was the worst, when *Electronic Games* cut the staff. We didn't expect it, had little notion how to cope, and our savings were minimal. Since then, on the times it has happened, we have usually managed for one or the other of us to find a job fairly quickly.

We're probably better prepared for it this time than ever before. Our savings isn't too hefty, but at least we do have some. We'd recently consolidated debts, so our payments are as low as possible. And this time, for the first time ever, we both have Unemployment coming to us.

Psychologically, it's always a bummer. Even though we know it had nothing to do with our skills and abilities, it's a blow to the ego. There is always the nagging fear that no one else will want us; that we may have passed our employment peak. Thankfully, this is mitigated by the fact that Collecting Channel keeps pulling stories by the laid-off editors for reprint — obviously they like our writing.

I hope to stay in the Collecting field, and so does Arnie. While I'll go back into gaming if that's my only choice, I'll admit I'm tired of it...not so much of the games themselves, but of the routines of news gathering and reviewing. For me, collecting is still a fresh area of journalism, comparatively, and I really enjoy working in the history field.

Meanwhile, I'm rather enjoying these leisurely days. Although I report to my desk and log on to the Internet each morning at 8 a.m. or before, it doesn't take much time to take care of any correspondence. So I'm spending my time doing those things I never quite get to when I'm working. I've seen my eye doctor....better, thank you, and I'm taking steroid drops...and my regular physician....blood pressure down, pulse steady. I've actually done a little...gasp!...housekeeping and cooking; made my first cake in years (Devils Food). Wrote notes to my relatives; organized my pantry. Pruned the roses.

Actually, I could probably get used to this way of life. But yet, like an old fire horse, I do miss the bells and gongs of intense activity, the thrill of researching remote history to see how it ties to today's pickle jars, the chance to tickle the readers' consciences as I write about ancient artifacts.

For now, it's fine; it's the first vacation in years and years. But by the time of the next FAPA deadline, there'd better be more to do, or I'll be forced to beat my drums for you. (end)