

Thursday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2006  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

CONTINUING TRAVELS WITH SHORTY  
(RAMBLINGS DRIVING OUT WEST)

My dog, Shorty, a five-and-a-half pound Yorkie, travels a lot with me. I've written about her before. We included wife Gladys this time around, and headed out a month ago on an extended trip to the west. A family wedding, visits with numerous relatives along the way, spiced up with stops for skiing, hiking, golf and the glitter of Las Vegas.

In our many stops, something was always said about Louisiana. Our new and old friends all had references to "a relative down there," fond memories of a past visit (always reflecting on a good meal or favorite restaurant), the successes of LSU's athletics. Yes, some talk of Katrina. But surprisingly, not nearly as much as heard in previous trips.

When I was on a book tour along the east coast late last fall, every conversation was predicated on inquiries and comments of the Gulf Coast disaster. This time around, there was scattered interest. It became obvious as the trip progressed that major concerns over Katrina had passed Louisiana and the Gulf Coast by. The rest of the nation has, sadly, decided to move on.

Our first stop of note was Archer City, Texas, a small panhandle town south of Wichita Falls, with a population of less than one thousand. It's the home of "The Last Picture Show" and its author, Pulitzer-Prize winner Larry McMurtry. And if you are a bookophile, Archer City is well worth the visit.

Archer City has one main street, with a courthouse, a few general merchandise stores, and one café. Then there are six large buildings loaded with books. McMurtry has bought these buildings and purchased inventory of large bookstores going out of business throughout the country; books on any subject and every description. There are books in a number of foreign languages. Simply a book lover's dream.



JIM AND SHORTY ARE SHOWN STANDING IN THE FRONT OF ARCHER CITY'S ONLY MOVIE THEATER THAT WAS THE LOCATION IN LARRY MCMURTRY'S BOOK AND MOVIE, "THE LAST PICTURE SHOW."

One building has the central office with employees. You browse and shop in the other buildings on the honor system. One of the employees there told me they do a large mail order business worldwide. I asked for a copy of *Lonesome Dove*, autographed if possible. "We don't sell any of Mr. McMurtry's books here," she told me. My reaction was predictable.

"You have more books here in the middle of nowhere than any bookstore in the country—and you don't carry the owner's books?"

“He doesn’t want to be pestered by his fans and have to put up with autograph seekers,” she replied. About that time, McMurtry walked in the door.

He chastised the employee in a raised voice, looked our way and rolled his eyes (another pesky autograph hound) then stomped out the door. So much for my “visit” with the Pulitzer-Prize winning author. But needless to say, I left with a box full of acquisitions and the side trip was well worth the visit.

I never read many western novels; an occasional Zane Grey or Louis L’Amour when I was much younger. But several friends, whose opinion I respect, have told me if there is only one western novel you read, it should be *Lonesome Dove*. McMurtry wrote it, and made a small fortune off this book alone. He recently won an Oscar for his screenplay of *Brokeback Mountain*

*Lonesome Dove* is an American Odyssey set in the late nineteenth century, and tells the story of a cattle drive from Texas to Montana. The trip becomes a vehicle for McMurtry to examine the panorama of everything we even imagined about the old west. It’s an unforgettable assortment of good guys and bad, Indians and settlers, heroes and outlaws, Texas Rangers who turn horse rustlers, and strong, marvelous western women of all descriptions.

It’s the one western novel that anyone should read. But if you’re in Archer City, don’t try to find an autographed copy.

The next stop, some seven hours drive later, was the Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The Broadmoor has been one of America’s premier resorts for many years. It’s located at the base of Pike’s Peak, has a first-rate golf course where the Senior PGA will be played next year, and the recent modernization puts the hotel on par with any resort hotel in the country. Shorty liked it too because it was “pet friendly.”

There were a number of conversations along the way, but very little interest in Katrina. We had a long lunch with an old college friend, Becky Stevenson from Evergreen, Colorado, whose comments reflected what we heard throughout the trip. “We just don’t hear much about your part of the country in the news anymore. Several other major tragedies have happened, and it just seems like the whole issue has faded away.”

The lesson learned, of course is that you have to strike while the iron is hot. Mississippi seems to have gotten their act together early on and spoke with one voice through their Governor. The perception was, true or false, that there was one voice and one master plan. And the proof is in the pudding. Mississippi proportionately has received significantly more money than has Louisiana post-Katrina. As national interest wanes, it’s going to be more and more difficult to tap into the federal funds needed for a major recovery effort. There will be too little, because the local and state response was too late.

On to Beaver Creek and skiing with children, my granddaughter, nieces and other family members. The old knees held up pretty well for a guy that is 65 years old. It looks like I have a number of runs “down the mountain” left in the years to come.

More family visits in Salt Lake City, Utah and then on to Las Vegas for several days of golf. Then the long drive home, through Santa Fe, west Texas and back to Louisiana.

What did I miss back home when I was away? Apparently, not a lot. Local news stories continue to cover squabbling in the Legislature, newspaper editorials wondering who is in charge, and the continuing blame game. Maybe a good bumper sticker should read “Honk if you know who is in charge of the Katrina recovery!” You wouldn’t hear many horns.

One final note. While skiing on a mountain outside of Vail, I found myself alone on a back run late in the afternoon. It would be my last time down the mountain for the day. I skied to the top of a ridge where obviously no one had been for a while. I could see snow covered mountains for miles in the glistening late afternoon sun. The setting was peaceful and serene. As I came up to the top of the ridge, I noticed a sign someone had stuck in the side of the slope. It read: “Go home and face your responsibilities.”

So I am back in Louisiana. And until next week,

Peace and justice to you and your family.

*“Skiing: the art of catching cold and going broke while rapidly heading nowhere at great personal risk.”*

**- Dave Berry**

Jim Brown

Jim Brown’s weekly column appears each Thursday here at Politicsla.com, and in a number of newspapers throughout the State of Louisiana. You can read Jim’s Blog, and take his weekly poll, plus read his columns going back to the fall of 2002 by going to his own website at <http://www.jimbrownla.com>.

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