



Hill Country Dreams

by Betty Sharp

You wake up humming, even if you've never been there. Luckenbach. Waylon and Willie and the...Well, you know. Bandera. Stocky horses, green country, open spaces. Marfa and Big Bend and Canyon—they're too harsh. Beautiful, but vaguely threatening. Better to dream about Pecan Springs. Wait, that's where China Bayles lives. It's Dripping Springs. Or Gruene. The dance hall, white-hatted cowboys, the two-step, the music. Driving to see wildflowers, stay in a bed and breakfast, old café road food. Can't go in the summer though—drought and heat and all that. Still, soon. The Hill Country. It's going to happen.

Even for an old cowgirl on Medicare the dream is still fresh. Can you call yourself a cowgirl if you've been behind a desk for decades? Two 1,000-pound pasture ornaments grazing your five acres haven't been saddled in years. Sometimes older bodies don't cooperate with dreams. Still, lose enough weight and regain some flexibility. Try a Bandera dude ranch horse just for an hour—who knows.

Walmart's going up less than two miles from your place. Dallas North Tollway is speeding further north. Development pandemonium. Cowboys are building everywhere—the football people, not the real ones. You'll be in the city limits soon. New neighbors are bound to complain about the dogs, the horse manure, roosters crowing. They won't understand the coyotes. Time to move to the Hill Country? Yeah, I know, Austin and San Antonio sprawl and all that. Still...

Not a whole lot of years left for old cowgirls in North Texas. Move here, they're told. Water shortage isn't mentioned. Michael Martin Murphy comes through and puts on a show at the McKinney Performing Arts Center—it'll always be the courthouse to some of us. He jokes: "My audience consists of old

people and their parents." We laugh, because it's true. "Wildfire" is still as great, though. Maybe the high notes aren't as lush, but the feeling is still strong. That's the point, I guess. The feeling is still there.

Read Texas history, and you either become a romanticist or die of pessimism. There's little other choice. Readers and dreamers know what was before and we think we can pretty well predict what's coming. More and more people who have never heard of Prescott Webb or J. Frank Dobie. They haven't been tested on Fehrenbach's "Lone Star" and "Goodbye to a River" isn't their narrative.

There's still the Hill Country, though. Escape into the dream, even as the gravel roads are strangled under asphalt. "Cowboy Take Me Away." Pretend you're a Dixie Chick, rock to "Long Time Gone" while driving. Maybe this spring. Maybe this fall. Down through Marble Falls on 281. Is it a toll road yet? Bet you can get a good piece of pie at your kind of happy hour. On the way to the Texas Hill Country. Still for romanticists.

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