

THE CULTURAL CANYON!

By *Michael M. Tickenoff*

Harry and William, first cousins by blood and companions by agreement, covered the distance between Los Angeles and Glendale Arizona in less than six fast hours; arriving at their Uncles house late Friday night. They had been invited by relatives to participate in a large family gathering which would begin the next morning.

During the following day's function, one of their many elderly relatives, Aunt Onya, a large stocky lady, rugged in appearance but gentle and sweet in spirit, finally cornered the boys off to one side. She gave her warm greetings and made her general inquiries of family, relatives and friends back in the city. After their brief conversation, sweet Aunt Onya, in her broken English invited the two young men to come and have the customary social visit with her. They knew this was important to her but they explained to her with great respect that they had to get going, in order to make it home for work on Monday morning. She was somewhat disappointed but persisted upon them, "To at least stop by on your way out of town, because I have extra good, very most valuable gift for you and our family!"

Although the two young men were much more interested in visiting with the young ladies and being with their own youthful relatives, out of respect they casually agreed to stop by on their way out of town...but only for a minute! Then they went their way after the festivities ended and joined with the other youth in having a grand time.

The morning of their return arrived far to soon but remembering their promise they drove to Aunt Onya's small farm just off their route home. When they arrived they quickly reminded her that they were only there for a few minutes to say their good-byes. Even though she pressed them to have some tea and old fashioned sweets, they insisted that they were already late. The hardy but considerate woman finally relented and motioned them towards her old dilapidated barn.

The gray haired Aunt, grandmother and great great grandmother to more children than they knew, walked them out to the barn where she had hinted where her "special valuable something" was ready to take home with them.

The already anxious boys looked at each other with some trepidation and followed her out to the barn. They past through the shadowy barn area and came to a pile of straw, where a tarp lay spread open and there was a large lump which bulged out of the middle forming a large hump.

"What the heck," Harry wondered with baited curiosity.

Just as the two young respectful boys stepped up to the tarp, old good hearted Aunt Onya bent down and suddenly threw back the old canvas, like a professional bull fighter would swish his cape. And behold, there lay a HUGE COWS HEAD!

Just like that, there it reposed, just STARING UP AT THEM! There is no real way of expressing the thoughts that instantly exploded in their minds;

nothing could have prepared them for this cultural filled moment!

With great pride, Aunt Onya swished the flies away and pointed to the bloody black and white cow head and seriously explained that this was the head from the cow that was butchered for the family feast. And she had especially requested it, just in case there came the possibility of sending it back with someone, and the boys were as if an answer to her prayer.

Harry and William both stood there petrified in stunned SHOCK for what seemed to be a cow's age! Together they desperately tried to catch their breath and possibly collect their wits but failed to even think as the dawn of her plan rose silently in their minds.

While the two city slickers stood there speechless, trying to remember if they had ever even seen a dead cows head before, they finally heard their strange benefactor's voice penetrating their fog of shock. Auntie Onya was waving at them to back their fancy car up through the barn door. At first they had a spark of hope that she wanted them to help her bury the bloody head, but after only a few moments, they realize without a doubt that this was the GIFT THAT SHE WAS SENDING HOME WITH THEM!!! Yes, this was a gift for sure!

In stunned nervousness, Harry nearly backed his new car into the side of the barn. The two boys were so dumb struck they were unable to utter a word of protest before they had opened the trunk to make room for the prized head. They arranged their belongings in the trunk and then old Aunt Onya spread out the dirty tarp right there on the new carpet. With joyful commands she then told them to "Pick up the head and put it onto the tarp."

They looked at each other with distant hopes speaking in their eyes but still the words remained lost as if forever. For they were expecting one another to hurry and come up with a brilliant solution to this dreadful dilemma but no words were able to arise to save them from their fate of falling into the "Cultural Canyon!"

Before they knew it, the huge bloody cows head was dangling in the air by its ears and once again, it was staring up at them, then it was dropped into its place in the trunk. Somehow that thud in the trunk finalized their fate and sealed that memory for the rest of their lives. But as some type of good last minute thought for the cow, aunt Onya reached into the trunk and closed the eye lids of the cow and then dusted off her hands and declared, "My prayers are answered, thank you boys-you're real God sents!"

The elderly Aunt was extremely excited about her gift to the boys and her distant family, and explained how many nourishing dishes could be made with just this one cows head. "Back in the old country, nothing was ever wasted, too bad America has ruined our "culture," she complained.

Her explanation of fried brains, tongue sandwiches and some type of old peasant soup, took her thoughts back to the days of her youth and family but brought a croaking gag to William; but in pained respect and for any more

possible delays, he held all things in place.

The old woman was very touched over the help that the boys were offering, in the delivery of this WONDERFUL DELIGHT to their parents, who she knew--- would just love such a treat!

As the old Arizona relative hugged and blessed the two boys goodbye, she thanked them again, and prompted them to make sure that this very valuable part of the cow would find its way to their table and that they would once again uphold their traditions and culture. She added, "Don't let this America steal your inheritance from you."

The boys looked at each other with sly smiles, thinking that they would dump this atrocious thing as soon as possible. But old Auntie, as if reading their thoughts, in her broken English and toothless smile reminded them both that this special delight was part of the family tradition which has always been, and the family was expecting the arrival of this treasure. Then and there, the idea of throwing that hunk of "FRIGHT" into the nearest canal...vanished, and both of them found themselves nodding and assuring her that they would do their best to deliver it directly!

Time was wasting as the two attentive youths turned out of Aunt Onya's driveway. The first few miles of this homeward trip was in total silence. This was brought on by "COW HEAD SHOCK," until the first sharp turn brought a THUMP, from the trunk. Simultaneously they knew that the head had rolled off the tarp, but neither made any suggestion to stop and look. For the next few hours they pondered the power of this old woman's spell and the possible trance they might have been put under?

The distant miles passed in trying to figure out how such a thing could have happened to them. At first there was denial, that it even happened? Then there was an attempt to blame one another, for even accepting an old woman's invitation? However and finally, a gradual acceptance came...but not without great reflection.

Their young minds questioned and searched all their known traditions, heritage, customs and family rituals but they concluded; that NOT ONE COW'S HEAD HAD EVER COME THEIR WAY! They both concluded that this America must have robbed them of their wonderful culture.

Further down the long desert highway they admitted to one another, they would most likely be the only humans in history to ever haul a HUGE BLOODY COW'S HEAD FROM ARIZONA TO Los Angeles IN THE TRUNK OF THE CAR---IN ABOUT ONE HUNDRED DEGREE WEATHER!

Their minds finally settled down and within a few hours their nice shiny car approached the State border crossing. Just about fifty feet away from the border check, the very same thought came to the both of them. WHAT IF THE BORDER GUARDS LOOKED INTO THE TRUNK?

"Impossible, what reason would they have, they never had done so before," Harry questionably declared.

Now, when they arrived at the border stop bumps the tall officer leaned into the window and asked them a few questions. Maybe it was the glowing look of dreadful fear and utter dismay on their faces or the absolute lack of color on them, which made the guard cautiously ask them to maybe open the trunk for a look see. They never did know but speculated that maybe there was a SMELL? Later they realized that the word GUILT had manifested across their faces like full sized lightening tattooed on their foreheads.

Their eyes shot looks of terror at one another but there was no choice other than to punch it and head out into the desert but that was a no go. Harry opened his door and slowly walked around to the back. By the time he came to the trunk his hands were shaking so bad, he nearly failed in putting the key into the lock. He managed to accomplish this task by humming "Born To Lose," and then the shaking key finally turned and the lid snapped open with a foreboding jolt.

Then the guard who was standing there looking like the most dreaded prison warden removed his hands from his hips and cautiously lifted the lid up.

The bright light of late afternoon shined into the shadowy chamber, everything went silent for what seemed to be miles around; the guard just stood there for several moments, not saying anything. Oh yeah, he was either letting his mind adjust to the strange object laying there in clear view or maybe he was waiting for the rest of the cow to appear further down in the trunk? Whatever it was, those COW'S EYES just stared up at the State Policeman.

Another century went by, and now Harry found himself just waiting patiently as if this was a common ordinary sight to behold. The officers look was as if in utter disbelief. His mustache twitched and turned grey and he began to dribble spit from one corner of his gaping mouth. He stood rigid gawking, as though this bloody head was something beyond his capacity to comprehend. Never in college or in any of his training had anyone ever told him that he would one day be facing a cows head in the trunk of a new car on a hundred degree day in the middle of the Arizona desert!

It was as if Aunt Onya's power was reaching him and telling him that, "this was all possible and it had to be delivered. And don't think too hard about what regulation or laws are being broken here, don't you know anything about traditions?"

At that moment there seemed to be some type of communication between Harry and the guard, a mysterious unspoken agreement to allow this aberration to pass. This site was so horrendous that words seemed far beyond form, thus silence ruled the moment, and traditions and old world culture won the day!

By now William was sweating profusely but too afraid to get out of the car and see what had happened to his---companion in smuggling cow's heads over the border.

William so wanted to get out and witness first hand what and how the policeman was going to effect their arrest but instead he managed to sit fixed in his seat and nervously expel great quantities of gas!

The officer continued to stare at the eyes of that cow, then finally turning to the overwhelmed Harry, fixed his gaze upon the mute and far away youth and slowly shook his head. The guard's lips were quivering but no words ever came.

The lawman slowly shut the trunk and for what seemed to be an eternity just stood there staring into the bright sky. Harry took this as a good sign and made his way to the driver's seat. He started up the engine and waited for a moment, thinking he would be motioned over to one side, but the patrolman only goggled into the distance, and so Harry figured, that this was the GO SIGN and that is what he did!

The drive home was without further incident. Even though they traveled upon every back road for the next five hours, making sure that the state police DID NOT GET THEIR GREEDY HANDS ON AUNTIE Onya's GIFT!

Late that night the COW'S HEAD was delivered, and left on their Uncles front porch, and what happened to it from that point, will be another story. But...we can rest assured, that Harry and William never again accepted strange gifts from sweet old relatives in far away places.

Yet, we can be assured that single trip helped bridge the "Cultural Canyon" between two distant generations...FOR SURE!

Culture and Traditions are good, and they do serve to preserve things from the past, but in this case, I can't imagine too many arguments in favor of preserving this one? And I would think that both Harry and William definitely gained a real new perspective on Traditions and on their Culture too!

By Michael M. Tickenoff ©

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