

# Canadian departs, but hooked on El Paso

By Sherry H. Mandin

Guest columnist

With sadness in my soul and my Lucchese boots broken in, I am bidding El Paso adieu.

As I prepare to head back to my home in Western Canada, it strikes me that the past nine months have been nothing short of extraordinary.

Yes, I have traveled hither and yon, far and wide across the globe and yet, this border city has etched its charm deep into my heart.

Hmm, you may query, who is this stranger and what could she possibly know that we do not?

My confidence lies in the knowledge that fresh eyes tend to relish the "right here, right now" unencumbered view. That and the fact that moving about incognito can be heady stuff.

Let it be known that the

warmth, kindness, inclusiveness and helpfulness of El Pasoans is reason enough to warrant a visit.

Goodness abounds here in El Paso. So much so that my cynicism has been squelched!

I have been welcomed into gardens that rival those on the Italian Riviera and learned about the latest technology at work in your newly opened desalination plant.

I stand witness to the influx of intellectuals and scholars that are inundating the new Paul L. Foster School of Medicine.

Fact be known, it is the new medical school that enticed my Canadian partner.

Change is in motion and it is slowly sweeping through your

city, creating a new and contagious vibrancy. The existing cultural richness that will influence the revitalization of your Downtown core is pulling you forward and into the league of major players.

I applaud the art scene in El Paso. I am under no illusion and thus I know this is not Toronto (I am Canadian after all) or New York, and yet I had no difficulty satisfying my passion for music, art, exercise or fine food.

My morning ritual at EFS Training Centre rivals any clubs I have experienced throughout North America. I, for one, acknowledge that sweat is sweat.

And yet these personal trainers/instructors sailed through spin, pump and boxing classes with an edge that had me showing up every single weekday, begging for more.

George, those tattoos adorning this

your biceps while demonstrating how to take down your opponent with a swift uppercut, well ... they are etched in my mind's Rolodex forever.

This expending of calories led me to become a regular over at The Table (cozy little space next to my favorite spa), where I sipped rich, foamy cappuccinos that often accompanied freshly baked muffins (I highly recommend the pumpkin or blueberry).

Eating my way through some of the most delicious Mexican cuisine on this planet (I have to extend that thrill to Juárez) has this Canadian packing home several cookbooks and a carry-on

jammed tight with spices. The warm, flaky (melt on contact) apple and strawberry empanadas that you can ingest straight from the brown paper bag is a Saturday morning treat I shall miss.

My hips will be revealing this

indulgence long after my leave! Go get some right now at the Shadow Mountain Drive Bakery ... mmmmm.

I have fallen in love with the author/artist Mr. Tom Lea, who was an unknown to me until a certain gallery owner graciously immersed me in the rich history surrounding his works. It was a walk through time and my heart was moved as I followed the chronology of El Paso's development.

The talent that resides here in your city is staggering.

The symphonic concerts at the Plaza Theatre were a double treat.

To sit in a heritage building, preserved with delicate and meticulous care, while listening to Sarah (Ioannides) conduct great classical works is ... well ... simply divine, actually.

The artists, jewelers, the cre-

ative minds that abound right here are borne with a quiet acceptance.

I could go on, but by now you surely must be grinning and feeling the pride that comes with knowing that a foreigner has seen your city with starry eyes and takes away unique, memorable experiences.

I shall return, El Paso, for I am hooked. In some minuscule way I feel as though I am now connected to the waves of change washing over this city.

So, take note, Texas! This West Texas Star is a-rising!

*¡Hasta luego, amigos queridos!*

Sherry H. Mandin is a freelance writer residing in Canmore, Alberta, Canada. She holds a degree in education, with her major studies focusing on English literature and developmental drama. Her passions have turned to creative writing travel and any outdoor activities that her beloved Rocky Mountains allow.



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