



Kevin Sweeney

The Day a Chicken-Fried Steak Saved My Life

It was time to grow up, 35 looming like a pink slip,
one of those coming soon as MA taxpayers
emulated Californians. So Feb school vacation

I went to Tejas, hanging with high school best friend
Bruce who had a wife, a life, a kid, a claims adjustor
conference on the border

The sweet Chicana at the Days Inn desk in Del Rio
liked me but had a husband named Jed
a phone call says is home frying chicken

I didn't have a home or claim to want one, so let her
call me a cab to the river: quail & cerveza and
guitar songs in Acuña, but it wasn't enough

Next night shit-faced in Boys Town, fornicating
by feeble candlelight with another bad Catholic
while *La Virgen* looks on and the moon knows

nothing of winter. En la mañana Bruce and I leave
ruined for Dallas ready to die from drinking
when we find a diner and eat like hungry migrants
from the land of sin, landing finally at Motel 6

to watch John Wayne and Dean Martin in *Rio Bravo*,
quaffing Lone Star *con* tomato juice, realizing
Ricky Nelson is wrong as the gunfighter Colorado
and I was stupid for buying that cowboy hat

(Looks good on you, Señor) believing it's what
I need in a year of little to remember but gravy,
potatoes and a righteous piece of meat time and
slow cooking turned tender as salvation.

Kevin Sweeney has published in *Nerve Cowboy*, *5 AM*, *Big Hammer*, *Free Lunch*,
Presa and *Main Street Rag*. He has two books from Moon Pie Press, *Rags of
Prayer* and *Ordinary Time*. He lives in Maine.

Image: Days Inn Austin University/Downtown, from TripAdvisor (website).