

## Author's boyish memory lifts stories

### LETTERS FROM THE HORSE LATITUDES

By C. W. Smith. Texas Christian University Press. 205 pp. \$19.95.

BY CAMPBELL GEESLIN

**W**HEN IT COMES to the ways in which the mysteries of sex torment boys, C. W. Smith is cursed with superb recall. In the first of three stories about growing up, "Ticker," the narrator, remembers when he was 14. He met a blonde waitress, Noreen, and "heard steel guitars."

In "The Plantation Club," a boy who plays the sax learns justice may be blind, but whites get the breaks.

The title story is about a young Marine who flees to Canada during the Vietnam War and then years later, tries to explain that action to his father. "Plane" is also about how wide and jagged the gap can be between sons and fathers.

Three other stories in this fine collection are set in Mexico. Grotesque

things happen to poor miner Arturo Sanchez in "The Man with Unusual Luck." In "Child Guidance," a Mexican boy who hustles the tourists gets a harsh lesson. In "Domestic Help," a tough American divorcee falls for the husband of her housekeeper and learns about love.

"Hugh Molder and the Symbol of Displaced Persons Everywhere" is a slapstick tale about a huge Indian statue, a dumb father and son, and a traveling salesman.

"Western History" may be the best example of the qualities — a daring, skillful mix of the genuinely comic and the deadly violent — that make most of these stories seem so fresh. A poor farmer in oil boom Oklahoma finds the corpse of an Indian suicide in a ditch and takes his boots and pistol. The deputy sheriff decides the farmer may be guilty of murder, and the story takes a surprising, shocking turn.

Smith, who lives in Dallas, is the author of four novels, including *The Vestal Virgin Room* and *Buffalo Nickel*, and one book of nonfiction, *Uncle Dad*. His stories are comfortably rooted in New and old Mexico and in Oklahoma and Texas, where Garner State Park, Burnet, and Dallas are mentioned. These stories are a nourishing combination of lively entertainment and abrupt, effective insights into the way we are today.



**SMITH**  
Insightful

Geeslin is a writer in White Plains, N.Y.

... as possible, starting at the north ... much lies on private ranches. "But I like