

Predictions are so wild on baby boomers, or can be, it sounds like a trillion poor souls retire on Social Security on the same day on twenty-six cents daily if the banks hold until then. Lucky ones, it seems, will have a second-hand Chevy with the windshield cracked to drive and boiled lima beans without any salt pork to eat and feed the wife.

Out at Mertzon, retired folks are older than the Baby Boom or any other boom. We go back before generations had a name. Not unusual to mark us off as plain "old men and old women."

One long-time resident across the street in town plants and sows and seeds boxes of vegetables, herbs and bulbs in spite of her age. In other days, she gave Mother beefsteak tomatoes rich and juicy and enough yellow squash for five households with a school kitchen thrown in to boot. Today, however, with Mother gone, she nods if we meet head-on at the post office.

Tough as the water shortage and dry spell runs, my plan has been to broaden neighborhood relations to include produce. The old boy next house up the street has a 10-gallon a minute water well on a vacant lot. His mom and dad were old-time Mertzon people. If he is good-hearted like

they were, he won't let his neighbors buy drinking water at the grocery store with a tank full at his house.

The one up on the other corner gardens, but has so many kids, the biggest farm on Spring Creek wouldn't raise enough food to feed them. Better to avoid those yards with bicycles and tricycles all over the front, plus the back filled with dogs and swing sets. There's not going to be anything to spare from that preemption were seeds planted on the stamped out grounds.

The important thing is to save being friendly until I meet a rich guy who plants rose bushes in his yard with a new car parked in the driveway. Chances are he might have a tad left over at the end of the month, or might entertain on a weekend with a backyard party.

Don't think we didn't learn down at the rock house how people treated large families with the front yard strewn in odd tennis shoes and bent bicycle wheels and littered with skate boards and garden hoes. Six or seven years passed at a time without a magazine salesman stopping to call. Insurance men never did, unless burial insurance counts. The ranch house wasn't as lonely as the town place. Folks stopped waving after awhile.

Now, traffic was different way, way back. The first ranch house Mother lived in at Chosey water hole on the

east side of the Santa Fe railroad tracks attracted hoboes during those desperate Depression days in the 1930s. Red beans cost three or four cents a pound in the bulk; flour and lard for biscuits sold in big buckets and printed sacks. The water tank held enough to water a garden. We had a milk cow and chickens.

Ol' boys off the rail cars spaded and weeded and chopped firewood for food. Mother fed well. They rode into Mertzon six miles away on school days. They taught free lessons in curse words and how to play mumble-peg with a Barlow knife. Hoboes slept in the barn sometimes, but left early the next morning to head for a road gang up the tracks.

Before the last out of town trip a week ago, the neighbor lady across the street stopped her car in the street to talk on the way back from work. (She's a nurse in Angelo, I think) Instead of talking about her tomato plants like I wanted to bring up, she said she heard a dog attacked me on one of my walks.

Evident, she hadn't checked whether the bite was mad dog rabid or a raging gangrenous infection. She probably knew already the dog had been released from a 10-day confinement in the city pound for biting a lady down at the football field.

Looks like a health-oriented nurse would want to know if her next door neighbor was going to come down with rabies for no other reason than to have her pistol loaded for the infected dog or his human victim.

No doubt, too, she knew the sheriff had me under oath not to shoot within the city limits. Were a pack of dogs to move in the front yard, they'd have full run of the place until the sheriff and dog catcher arrived to control them.

Looks like Mertzon may miss the baby boom with rabies threats and disarmed citizens. Folks, however, may not live long enough under those rules to ever know.