

28SHORTGRASS.DOC

A strange notion hit after moving into the Mertzson house to recover from the bovine heart transplant last spring. No way then or now to trace where the idea came from to donate town lots to replace the space lost in the park to the football field and to the rodeo grounds.

In withdrawal from the "chest slashing" known in medical presentations as "open heart surgery," victims consider the ability to set the timer on their cook stove without help and calculate how long to cook a six-minute egg as major mechanical and mathematical challenges equal to the genius of Thomas A. Edison. Wild ideas like giving an oak and juniper cedar thicket to a Mertzson-size town with scores of vacant lots covered in juniper and oaks after being on heart machines and under clouds of gas on an operating table become routine behavior.

One half the block was bought from the county attorney. Included were four lots Paul Marlar and his wife lived on decades ago during the other depression in a dugout chiseled from solid limestone rock.

The story might still be around of the time Paul's chickens rode down to the post office one morning in his pickup's bed, finishing the grain Mrs. Marlar fed them. Whether the tale is around or not, no one today except a

trophy shot could have stepped from a pickup like Paul, drawn a shotgun, and dropped three chickens on the wing with the First National Bank, Mertzon Drug and Chester's Barber Shop as backdrops.

Even if the story fits what storytellers call a "double dip" or "a two-timer," the dugout skeet practice had to be retold here again to tell another story. Keep two things in mind: Mr. Metro or Mr. Mayer doesn't get up at every theater and announce a film is a rerun. And two, age and volumes of material put this columnist's memory into shreds that'd make a wrecked sailing ship's rigging look storm-proof.

On the two cleared lots sat a small pink house the Marlars kids built so Paul and his wife could move above ground. Same ruins today offer excitement when viewing the grounds. It's easy to imagine a four foot diameter ball of rattlesnakes rolling out the dugout's door, even though rattlers don't make balls and sure can't lift a cellar door.

The county attorney mentioned that the house, he was told, could be moved. My main focus then, however, was to close before a land rush began in Mertzon, Texas. You know, tidy up matters before the customer overrode the heart pump

rate and was rolled over Cemetery Hill adjoining the venture.

Now pause here for an overview of the purchaser's life (me) at that time. Twice a day, a nurse takes this chap's pulse rate. Three times a day, her patient looks at the city's map and shows a jump from 76 to 106 heartbeats, he's so eager to create a nature preserve.

And now, after being refused in his offer to buy two critical lots linking the half-block to the other half, he tries to think of a nature organization that would talk to a rancher instead of a City Council willing to take a donation for the park.

One prospect on the Internet in Sydney, Australia claimed to need money to darn socks for herders too poor to buy new pairs to hunt kangaroos on cold desert nights. The appeal included the sponsor's ad – a big brewery. He knows enough about those Aussie drovers through the Mertzson wool house to know they can't thread a sacking needle, much less darn a pair of socks, with a 20-ounce beer around.

He trusts the committee raising dough for a new library, but fears the influence of a new library will keep Mertzson from ever having a decent pool hall for young men to learn that life exists outside classrooms and football fields. In a rash moment, (more influence from heart

machine and gas asphyxiation?) he advertises a free house to be moved in 30 days in Mertzon, Texas.

Reality broke the spell. A lady at the courthouse located the streets and alleys of the plot. Same lady warned him too late that nobody wants a house free.

"It's the same as trying to give away puppies or kittens," she said. "Ask fifteen thousand and come down" was her advice.

What that little lady didn't know was that decades of running woolies and hollow horns cuts off the circulation to the profit motive in the brain to the point that dead cells outnumber the live ones so bad, a team of H.& R. Block's best hands couldn't penetrate the darkness.

Today, I am glad I couldn't give the house away. It staves off the embarrassment of trying to be charitable to a city. People say my color is better. Thing to hope for is to not relapse and start trying to give something valuable away.