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Still weather over Christmas interrupted the ranch's Y2K plans. The winds calmed and the tank levels dropped down half way. We planned on playing it safe by shutting off all the windmills on New Year's Eve, but when we ran so low on water, I decided we were going to just have to take the chance they were in compliance.

The old ones going back in the 1930s were the critical ones. The motors were uniform, but sails, springs, and kingpins had been added over the decades, making aging impossible. Sure, they were old style Aermotors; nevertheless, as any cosmetic surgeon will tell you, if he keeps smoothing wrinkles, taking the dropsy from ear lobes, and elevating chins, he's going to lose contact with his patient's passage of time.

Halfway to town one day, I remembered we'd overhauled the Page fence stretchers Uncle Goat Whiskers salvaged in 1933 from the ranch the Estate lost out on the Pecos River. I tried to think how long ago it was we bought new cogs (dogs) for the stretchers. Must have been the winter of '83. I remember Twin Mountain Post Yard ordered the parts. Two brothers from Musquiz named "Tito" and "Nufo" were rebuilding the fence on the east side. But the more I thought, the less I worried. Those Page stretchers are mighty powerful pieces of equipment. I decided it'd take more than a century change to hurt those babies.

The closer the Millennium came, the closer I checked around the house and barn for non-compliant equipment. About the newest thing was the Japanese motor on the sprayer. To test it, twice we cranked hard enough to cause a little chugging sound followed by a backfire hearty enough to make us think gasoline leaked from the carburetor. When the thingamabob on the whatchacallit backlashed the starter rope, I told my helper we'd wait to watch Japan pass through the millennium ahead of us and see whether their sprayer engines went down.

The other stuff looked like 1970 or 1980 was the last time it was compliant to any age. After we stopped registering the feed truck in 1985, the taillights and pollution device were either bypassed or fell off in the pasture. Other than needing a new muffler and a set of tires, the old unit looked in good enough shape to pass its 21st New Year's Eve without being bothered by the Millennium.

I allotted worrying about other vehicles by thinking in terms of tradein or salvage value. For example, the crewcab, appraised at \$36,000, needed that many thousand to be replaced. One '86 pickup junked out for \$150 in an actual pre-Christmas sale to a windmill man. I figured if the two stock trailers crater on the New Year, I'd be able to pay for a new one by next year on the amount of commission and gasoline saved staying away from auction rings.

My household appliances went back as far as the introduction of REA in 1952, so they were safe unless the friction tape on the cords came loose. I keep plenty of candles as the electricity goes off pretty often on the long rural power lines. The stash of a few jugs of water and an extra can of coffee reached back to being stranded at the ranch from flooding, or being out of water from a stilled windmill wheel. (Years after we all quit smoking, a carton of Bull Durham turned up on the top shelf of a closet, hidden for emergencies. Wonder some of us didn't drown in those days in high water from running short of tobacco.)

Out on the range, signs didn't point to a cataclysmic New Year. After the vet hospitals closed for Christmas, we found a cow trying to have a calf backward in time to save the cow, but lose the calf. Also, it certainly wasn't out of the ordinary for a young black bull hastening the end of his career by hobbling into water to become a much sought-after prize in the filling of sausage casings in San Angelo packing circles. Compared to the Thanksgiving holiday excitement occasioned by a guest feeding a colic-prone mare tangerine skins, our old ponies seemed as normal as old ponies are covered in coats of winter hair and adorned by witch knots in their tails.

I missed the excitement of the city by staying at the ranch. Big runs were made on bottled water and groceries at the San Angelo stores. In Mertzon, the gasoline grinders filled some cars twice a day. If there was a bank run, it

was to pay feed bills, and that's liable to happen in the Shortgrass Country on any given day of the year.

I was plenty uncomfortable worrying about the windmills, but at this writing only one stopped pumping over the holidays. As you may guess, that was because the leathers were worn thin ...