

## 24SHORT

San Angelo dermatologist who offices in the same building he's had for 45 years. He treated my oldest son at child in the 1950s. Throughout the years, he doctored a half-dozen of us as the ranch who had pulled off such stunts as vaccinating ourselves with the live virus soremouth vaccine, or wading off in a creek horseback too close to poison ivy vines.

Two or three months ago, I began to notice a few red spots on my hinds legs. The first thing that comes to mind when a symptom appears is that it's a rare disease from my last trip, or maybe a lingering plague from an earlier expedition to a third world country, or a more dangerous situation like an outbreak of mortal classroom viruses from visiting one of my grandkid's school programs.

The second thing is that I always call my daughter, the doctor in Austin. She has to interrupt me and assure me I don't have the wretched shingles or the shimmering meningitis, or black blood disease.

She knows right away how to cross off the ten most dreaded diseases on a long distance connection. However, this time I had her outmatched. The medical book at the ranch pictured exactly how leprosy spots are red in the early stages. Also, she was too young to know how to diagnose a disease going back into time.

Before she was born, a man and his sick wife living over on the river at Mertzson left in the night without explanation. It took four days of intensive party line investigation before an old lady, who had lived in Palo Pinto County, remembered that her grandmother knew a woman everybody suspected had leprosy, and who had fled in the night just like the river bank case.

But as experienced as the dermatologist was, he didn't think I was going to turn into a leper. He prescribed 30 bucks' worth of salve and 10 dollars' worth of Vitamin C to relieve the trouble.

He also insisted I grow a full set of whiskers for sun protection. He claimed in all his years of burning on herder's faces, he'd never had a case above the hairline, unless there was a bald spot.

Up to then, we were in full agreement. I told him right straight I wasn't going to pull my body down growing a beard without a full physical and a complete dental examination. At my age, coming out of a hard winter and sapping up that much protein growing extra hair was asking for a bad case of anemia, not to mention having loose teeth rattling in my head like a hockey goalie's plates.

I didn't mind taking a chance and letting my sideburns grow below my ears but I wasn't about to subject my system to the shock of growing a full beard this close to spring.

Old Doc has had lots of luck turning back chigger bites and heading off the itch before it became the seven-year variety. But I think he wanted to test the potency of Vitamin C tablets as a hair stimulant, and figured a broke down rancher was good guinea pig ...