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Water well drillers in Shortgrass Country claim to be six months behind on orders for new wells. An article in the daily paper in San Angelo blamed the backlog on wells drying up from the drouth and the precarious water reserves in the cities and outposts.

So far only one well on the ranch has pumped air interspersed with mud. It was drilled before World War One and was once the supply for a household and three pastures heavily stocked with cattle, so the failure of such an old-timer was traumatic.

In the drouth of the Fifties, all of the wells on dry Spring Creek Draw going through the old ranch had to be deepened. Rickety cable tool rigs thumped away at tinhorn casing lining holes going back to my grandfather's time, caving in about as much filling to the bottom of the well as they gained in a day.

Added to the drama were the horseback men driving livestock away from the rig to the dwindling supplies of other waterings. An old galvanized tank mounted on a wagon pulled by a team of mules kept the headquarters in kitchen water once that well failed. Needless to say, tension around the house peaked in the middle of the hot, parched days when water had to be heated on the stove to wash the dishes and rinse the ever-full pail of diapers.

The water department over at Mertzon revived those long-ago memories last month. Desperate for an additional

source, the city drilled a test hole six miles from town, right off the north property line of the old ranch and close to the big draw. After the well failed to pass under steady pumping, the head of the water works came by the house in Mertzon. Insulted that he hadn't asked my opinion before, I directed my reply toward 92 years of ranching history on the big draw, including a sidelight that my first home was 400 yards from his drill site, making the water superintendent's total test time 25 instead of 24 hours.

Now and then a crisis arises where a graybeard or a granny's experience might save making the same mistake twice. I never can remember to use it, but the trick is to wait for someone to ask for your advice. Always seems like consultants are short on consultees. I learned too late that I should have been going to audience school instead of speech class.

In the news story on the area well drillers' overloaded schedules, mention was made of an increase of demand by town ranchers and vacation homeowners wanting backup wells in case the municipal water supply worsened. Strong water sands are going to have to be struck to meet those customers' needs. Three minutes of tooth brushing can take six gallons of water if the lavatory faucet is left running; an automatic dishwasher uses 18 gallons in a cycle.

Also, city folks have to be gradually converted to well water. Used to splashing in chlorine concoctions in tubs and pools, flavored with the odor of the deck of a fishing boat,

they keep running the shower trying to make it smell right. Years ago an article in *Reader's Digest Magazine* explained that the reason all city water has fishy odor is an ammonia compound (amine) added for health protection. It's been a long time since I read the article over at my mother's house, but I think the reaction of the ammonia released chloroform, among other things, explaining the dopey behavior city folks display from taking too many baths. One big advantage of highly aromatic formulas is that the ones of us who can't hear water dripping in the house can at least smell the trouble.

Every time a rig passes through Mertzon going back to Angelo, another customer can be checked off the waiting list. Mother should have kept her old copies of *Reader's Digest*. Then I'd know the percentage of chloroform in the city folks' bath water ...