

Included in the holiday recovery tips this January was one to give up coffee latte at Starbuck's to save 11,000 calories a year. From out on the 09 Divide, 45 miles from the coffee joint, the resolution was easy to keep. The recipe for coffee latte here is to dip a spoon in a can of evaporated milk and add that to a cup of boiled coffee.

More real temptation existed in the ranch kitchen from cookie jars, fruitcake tins, honey nut bar wrappers, sugar-coated almond cans, and the crumbs and crumbling from all of those, plus refrigerated eggnog mix, leftover maple syrup floats, chocolate chip ice cream ("Roly Poly" brand), and several days' supplies for a family of four of creamed avocado spread. (Five parts mayonnaise to spread on buttered corn tortillas.)

Biggest shock was the opening of the year weigh-in on the bathroom scales. Some smart-aleck painted a skull and crossbones in black on the glass scale register. Upon mounting the scales, the reaction from such a low-life trick caused an exhaling of breath that it'd make a howling monkey think he had tonsillitis.

After weigh-in, the next step was measuring the waistline. Last year, I adopted a metric system named

"waste and waisting." (w-a-i-s-t + ing). Further, instead of saying "106 centimeters" for a 42-inch waist, the reading was coded and shortened to "06" or "09."

Sorry to report, but the results of weighing and measuring is incomplete as of this writing. The insulting painting and the tension put on the weak fibers of the measuring tape made accuracy impossible. Whoever the joker was who used the lamp black, profiles a sick sense of humor. And the tight-wad merchant who gave Mother the tape to keep in her sewing basket proves how indifferent people can be to other folks' afflictions and weaknesses.

My shower door makes a clear enough mirror to rate body conformation changes and aging progress. The full-length mirror on the bathroom door overmagnifies body folds, cosmetic pouches, flowing chin rolls, drooping ocular tissue, wrinkled earlobes, diminishing pate, and black and blue varicose digital blotches.

One son, his wife and child stayed over the New Year from the polar portion of the state of Connecticut. For them to sleep in the frigid winds of the rickety, cracked ranch house, the vent in their bedroom had to be closed.

Hard to compare our desert weather and ranch fixtures to chest-deep snowbanks and frozen doorknobs up north. Difficult, too, to adjust to late risers, such light

sleepers that dropping a tea bag in hot water or peeling a soft banana awakens them from a slumber dreaming of snowflakes swirling at tricolor stoplights and Fed-Ex men sliding baskets of red Florida grapefruit over the icy doorsteps.

On the coldest night of the holidays, they camped on the north slope of a hill in the horse trap. Wood was too wet for a campfire, so I prepared a camp meal authentic down to burning grease for the heavily floured deer steaks and dumping the fried potatoes half cooked and limp on the plates. But all and all, the meal came close to tasting like the ones my sons used to cook in Boy Scouts, which is the true camper's goal.

I realize now I was beginning to be weight-conscious before the scale debacle. Bending over to hunt for a bread pan or an egg skillet left deep belt buckle marks under my shirt. Somewhere in the malaise, however, I lost six ounces by holding my breath while frying deer steaks or buttering cornbread for the little kids.

By dabbing my fingers in cayenne pepper, I refrained from licking the dressing off my fingers while tossing salads. At high pitch, with all the beds and couches filled, I might or might not eat a whole avocado or knock off a jar of black olives.

Instead of resolving to improve on New Year's Day, Ground Hog Day is the traditional time to make resolutions in the shortgrass country. Our past experiences in this harsh land set stern guidelines. Seems waiting a few weeks gives us time to study our shadows.

But flashbacks of harsh jugkeepers and rigid schoolmasters make such Spartans of us that we could carry a fox inside a shirt made from an anteater's hide without noticing much difference from the homespun collars and coarse shirts we once wore in our youth, spun from threads sticky as stinging nettle.

The last day, or perhaps the first day of company, a son rushed into the kitchen and shouted, "Gosh-a-mighty, Louise (or was it Lucerne?) is having a gosh-a-mighty protein attack."

All I remember answering in this opening or closing moment was: "There's a protein bar on the dashboard of the pickup and an ice bag and hot water bottle in the old bathroom - take your pick."