

JANUARY 26, 1984

If I got the story right, San Angelo is going to add ammonia to their drinking water. Well, I suppose they are going to wash their bodies and their clothes in the new water, too. The guy that told me claimed he'd read about the recipe change in the daily newspaper. I can't vouch for him or the paper as I live too far from town now to need a newspaper or to trust urban yarn spinners. Be my luck to learn that the informant was in the business of pedaling antidotes for ammonia poison. or maybe suffering from an overdose of ammonia gas himself.

You'd have thought there'd been a cheaper way of providing window glass cleaner and secondary sources of smelling salts than adding ammonia to a big city reservoir. The household brand that we keep under the kitchen sink here at the ranch is so potent it'll make your tear ducts backwash like the circulating pump on a fire engine. We use quite a bit of ammonia to clean the blood from the marking pens off our chaps and boots, but I never would have thought of offering anyone a slug to add to their coffee or put in a drink of water.

However, like I started to say, I'm uneasy about that coffee drinker over in Angelo. Since I've moved back to the ranch to live. I don't have to keep up with the news reports every day, and that fellow knew that I was behind on things. The ranch house is 21 miles from Mertzon. Wars and traffic jams and street crimes don't have to be so closely monitored when your nearest neighbor is eight miles away. Just a rough idea where the fat cattle market is landing up on the Plains and a short rundown on the Super Bowl is enough briefing for a country outfit.

Once I did have a television antenna. I think it blew down last spring, or maybe the spring before last. Goat Whiskers the Younger or one of my sons must have packed off the set itself somewhere in that same period. I'm sure if it was still in the house I'd see it when I look for my hat. I don't know about you, but the older I get the more hats hide under couches and behind armchairs. I do remember the antenna hanging over part of my office window; to save myself I can't recall the last I saw of the TV set.

As cold as our winter has been, it seems anti-freeze would be better to mix in water than window cleaner. Lately, however, it'd take an ice crusher to put anything in our water system, except maybe a straight dose of wood alcohol. I think they are over planning, anyhow. By next spring's thaw, the population may be thinned down enough from bad colds and frostbite that it won't need much drinking water.

The water must be getting plenty bad to make ammonia an option. I bet Whiskers took off my TV in '78 after he got that ranch up in Colorado. I'm sure glad I'm off the city mains. I don't know how long it'd take to learn to drink ammonia flavored coffee.