

APRIL 2, 1981

Mertzon was once over 2000 in population in the '30s. One Forth of July rodeo attracted 5000 people. The old rock school building was overflowing with new kids. Things were so crowded that the town dogs has a hard time finding a flower bed in which to take their naps.

Child Who Sits in the Sun scorns my story of the 2000-plus days. She keeps wanting to know where the houses were to shelter so many people. I've shown her two or three times where the big tent city was that harbored the workers on the highway that caused the boom. But whether you know it or not, Indians have to see the teepees staked, not the marks of the poles, to believe a tale. After the way her people drifted around, she should be the first to recognize an old campground. Wives, however, are great hands to discount their husband's stories. I'll have to tell you more about that some day.

Also, I remember when Mertzon was so small that a family reunion on the river was enough to cause a critical shift in the population. In the 1940s our streets were so dead the brakeman riding the caboose car used to pull the curtains on the windows when he passed through town to keep from being so lonesome.

Late in the evenings, grannies rocking on the front porches sounded like a windmill screeching from lack of oil. Graduating classes were so small the seniors held their baby sisters in their laps to fill up the picture frames.

The other night I visited a partner of mine that lives in a town the size of Mertzon. He was in a reflective mood on the subject of country towns. He said all the sub-dividing and building around San Angelo made him uncomfortable. As an example, he said that in 1900 when they built his hometown, they finished the job.

I sure agree with that idea. Chambers of Commerces go flat crazy bragging about their new telephone installations and their old crime rates. I never have heard of a shoplifter or a pickpocket making a score in a burg that the railroad had skipped or the highway had missed. Some of those places have purses worth picking, too. TV comics and stage clowns make great jokes about rural communities. Nevertheless I've noticed that to make a living from a moving van, you have to locate in a city that's big in size.

This time the oil boom has brought the extra people to Mertzon. I think they must be renting the shades around the trailer houses to shelter the new citizens, as I don't see any building activity in town. Every morning there's more traffic on main street. I'm glad I'm through running for public office, because I don't see a half a dozen faces at mail call that come from the old stock.

As long as 200 acres of grassland is called a "trap," a few of us are going to avoid the lights and fumes of the cities. Unlocked doors and unpolluted sunsets are a fine way to live. It must have been a foresighted bunch that laid off my partner's home town. Don't ever mistake your Chamber of Commerce report for the truth.