

Over across Spring Creek, due east of Mertzson, a clan ranches and farms the same lands once operated by parents and grandparents named Tankersley. In various other parts of the state and country, the rest of the mob flourishes in an abandon that mocks the population explosion – or any other kind of control of humanity.

At odd times in history, (at their choice), branches admitted distant relation to the Noelkes. The ties fluctuated on little bumps from an oil and gas lease that switched the tide down at the Mertzson jug from the forever Noelke weakness to gamble on hollow horns and woolies.

A good way to put it is that lots of the time throughout the ages, we liked each other. We swapped work in shearing and shipping pens; we camped and fished together on the river.

Focus now, however, on the Tankersleys living over on the east side of Spring Creek. Four or five or more freeholds are across from Mertzson on up to the Eldorado road. In present times, these people apparently have forgotten that the river cuts them off from home, or strands them on the other side. Seems also it has not occurred to them their mothers and fathers no longer maintain the houses Grandfather Tankersley gave all his 10

children in Mertzon to send the swarms of his bloodlines to school.

The test has not happened. Floods have been minor, if at all. The present ones have been lucky to have food and shelter. The shotgun house where Aunt Vernabee and Uncle Reginald once took in folks stranded from Rock Pen draw, for example, looks vacant, ending that refuge or necessity of refuge.

Without taking you on a personal tour of the countryside, or printing a map, flood orientation is difficult, if not impossible. You have to imagine Spring Creek's head up above Barnhart being fed all the way down past Sherwood and Mertzon by dozens of draws that will block lots of roads.

Further, you will probably notice, a writer can get in a lot of trouble trying to cover such a big family and a big country and a lot of history in limited space. Easiest way to do this would be to condense into one sentence: "You better not be so high-hat over being a pioneer family if you are going to live on the wrong side of Spring Creek, cut off from Angelo by the Concho rivers."

The Concho River part is thrown in for bluff or for drama, not for cartographic purposes. Bridges cross various parts of the Concho River watershed. You don't have to read

a newspaper article to find that out. Road maps show bridges that big.

Besides, repeat, this is not a geography lesson or high water warning. It's a notice to a clan across a creek they are going to be mighty sorry they never got around to having the ones of us on high ground to a fish fry or a barbecue down under the shady oaks and pecan trees, when the creek was low.

Had they been over at the old ranch headquarters in 1959 with six kids and the mother up on the hill in the vehicles with the houses five feet deep in water, post office visits might take more than cool nods and short salutations today. If that old creek ever catches them and the missus over on this side, it might call back to mind that the cousin they think is so peculiar – the writer – has a dry upstairs bedroom in Mertzon.

Uncle Goat Whiskers let us use his old town house for sun shade and wind protection the time we were flooded out. Whiskers kept the taxes up on the property, but little else. North side had enough rocks windrowed to underpin the whole house. The rocks held one of the largest snake dens in Mertzon. We already knew how to save water from living at the ranch. Stinging scorpions or yellowjacket wasps didn't bother that gang at all.

One of the neighbors up on the Divide claimed Spring Creek ran a hundred feet wide once in April this spring at Barnhart. Down on the Pumpkin Center Country, Dutch Woman Draw ran out of the Whiskers outfit. No reports came on the water gaps, as not many places have any stock left to go under or through a fence.

Suppose this message does reach half of the family; the warning might make them a bit more hospitable for the Fourth of July. The first one I reached said we'd better hope we didn't get stranded over on his side of the Creek. Things kind of ended when I told him that if we were caught over there, it wouldn't be from having been to a barbeque or a fish fry, for sure.