

MARCH 27, 1986

Far into the nights, March winds have been testing the walls of my old ranch house. Cracks and crevices and general ruptures in the framework are allowing about 87 percent of the winds to go through the house. Attic grills and loose antenna wires rattle and slap in tempo to gusts. Dead branches fall on the sidewalks and each morning there's a new score of the shingles that have flown from the roof.

At bedtime during the peak of the season, I make tight folds of the blankets and sheets and bedspread underneath the mattress. Once my bedding is secured, I roll the head of the bed due West. Sudden shifts in the direction of the winds in the night, I've learned, won't throw a west pointed board into a blind. An unexpected change in a floor draft, or a window pane blowing out won't undercut a westward course.

On particularly bad nights I've tried deflecting the air currents by hanging a blanket over the headboard. The extra warmth isn't worth the blanket flapping at full sail. Invariably, it'll tear loose by midnight. It always seems colder to me once the blanket falls than it would have been had I just left the headboard bare.

After I get into bed, I scrooch downward from my shoulders to no further than my waist. I mastered that exercise to keep from pushing my hind legs out from underneath the bottom of the covers. The strain on the chest and back muscles is awful; nevertheless, the effort is worthwhile because not one sleeper out of 20 will arise in the night to remake their beds, regardless of how close they are to losing their toes from frostbite.

I refuse to install a safety rail on my bed. I've lived on the plains too long to mind an occasional fall to the floor. I do use a soft pillow folded over both ears to reduce the noise pollution. I caught on to that when the kids were in their colic stage of life. Pillow feathers dim the sounds of the howling of the winds as well as they absorb the bellowing of babies from colic. I do want to warn you that after using a pillow like that for so long, my ears look like a prize fighter who has over stayed his time in the ring. Yet counting the amount of extra sleep gained, I feel it's been worth the cosmetic damage.

Every morning the weather forecast warns of high winds in the area. Routinely at nights, I tack my bed to the west and hope for spring to reach a calm. Perhaps it's the price of spring in the Shortgrass Country. I may have to go to ear muffs before it's over.