

JULY 22, 1976

Bicentennial rains started falling on the Shortgrass Country on the 4th of July weekend. First the measurements were spotted, then slow rains covered all the land.

Out in front of our ranch house, wild onions blossomed into the nearest thing to a lily that's grown here. Saddle horses ran rain races around the horse trap every day in the mud. I was afraid my old listening horse Blucher was going to end up requiring a veterinarian with chiropractic skills comparable to those of the wrestling doctors over in San Angelo.

Rain brings a wild uplift of spirit. I felt so good that I stopped by the wool house and picked up the best rain gauge the company had to give Child Who Sits in the Sun for a birthday present.

She can't read inches and fractions. Nevertheless, birthdays are to be celebrated by gifts. I did have to stop bringing her Christmas calendars. I can't remember the year it happened, but one year, (I think it was in the 60s,) an oil company featured a picture of a treaty session between the Indians and the Army.

I'd had the calendar gift wrapped right fancy and ribboned. A neighbor down the street said he'd bet that one of Man O' War's colts couldn't have jumped from the gate as fast as I had to leave the house that day. Later on, he moved his traile house from a grove of pecan trees, clear across town to a lot that had about four catclaw bushes. Gossip was that he got bad scared on Christmas Day and never would sleep in his trailer house alone. I think that was just talk. I saw him the other day taking a nap right out in front of the door.

Anyhow, I was glad he moved. One time he had the gall to tell the sheriff that I was a wife beater. Now let me set that straight. Unless you'll buy a wild tale that Mrs. Jack Dempsey handled Mr. Dempsey like a fiddler uses a piece of resin, you'll know that I haven't got a windmill rod on this ranch long enough to whip my wife.

Only time she was ever even scratched was when the county put down a gravel parking ramp in front of the house. We'd had a little love spat about a curfew violation. The clock at the pool hall was five hours slow. Next morning, I asked what happened to my supper, why it wasn't hot when I got home.

It must have been the tacks on my boot heels that threw the gravel in her face. I wasn't running that fast, I was just throwing more rocks than she was used to. Turned out that it was more gravel burn than gravel blows. She did a lot of bragging about that scrap. I'll have to admit that I was wrong, making a getaway through a gravel bed.

Hills are seeping clear water on the east side of the ranch. Cattle don't even raise their heads as the pickup passes. Old ponies have to pull mud underneath the rims. Sheep fail from the rain fever that hits the woolies during all wet spells.

Old Blucher needed his teeth floated before the rains. Now the scoundrel needs about a six years old kid to turn a saddle blanket or two on his back.