

JULY 1, 1982

Mertzon has its first resident game warden. Previously the game laws were enforced by an officer stationed in San Angelo. Under that reign, local citizens careless of habit and prone to poach were never aware of the game department until one of their patrol cars flashed a light over a hill or came roaring off a side road, but now that a warden lives in town things are different.

The tax assessor up at the courthouse was the first one to tell me of the appointment. She's a former deputy sheriff. Like all Mertzonites, she is extra sensitive to any type of law enforcement officer. In case I haven't told you before, I'd better explain that the town harbors a certain element of law violators that ignore the postal rates and treat San Angelo's parking meters like they were big jokes.

Understand that I am trying to be fair to my hometown; however, I have to admit that we have some mighty seedy characters over here. Hombres that'll single stamp on the first class rate and double park in the city. Like any small town. I suppose, the citizens' wholesome appearance is deceiving. Gathered around the coffee house or at the post office, they look like law abiding country people, but I think behind their front there are plenty of those innocent looking folks that are waiting for a chance to gamble on an illegal bingo game, or maybe slip something by the tax collectors.

The thing that bothered me about the ex-deputy bringing up the new game warden was the way she lowered her voice to tell me. She must have been confused because of the way some of my neighbors act. I think one of them in particular got a catfish gig and a powerful headlight among his first birthday presents. I sure didn't know then and I don't know now why she thought I needed to be warned

But to be on the safe side of the tax laws and game laws, I leaned over and whispered to her to tell the new man that I was a vegetarian. On that short notice I couldn't think of any kind of vegetables that were protected. Probably turnips and rutabagas ought to have a warning label on their bulbs saying they were inedible, and it sure would help mankind if winter tomatoes were banned from the markets. Other than those two ideas, I felt safe from new or old game wardens. I am still wondering about that whispering act. She could have had the bronchitis bug that's going around town.

In a week or so after the deputy's warning, I was introduced to the warden. We had a nice private visit in front of the post office. I appreciated the protection his badge afforded. Several hombres passed by in a terrible rush to get their mail. I promised to send his wife a copy of my recipe for vegetable stew. I was in fine form, if I say so myself. I just hope I didn't overdo the act as is often my failing when I am on a winning streak.

Mertzon's crime rate is kept a secret. We've been lucky compared to the rest of the country. For awhile I am going to be careful who I'm seen drinking coffee with at the cafe. I bet that deputy thinks I'm like some of those guys close to our ranch.