

In the spring of 1935, my stepdad and Mother moved the ranch house up on the Divide from the Devil's River Draw. Caught a skinner driving a caterpillar tractor cross-country. For the price of a night's board, he pulled the house to the present site.

My stepdad and a couple of cowboys engineered and constructed the foundation and underpinning – an impossible task, as the ground on the Divide shifts and sinks. But though the crew wasn't up to building a Frank Lloyd Wright earthquake-proof foundation, the cross-country ride created enough cracks and space in the rafters, flooring and ceiling of the old box house to compensate for the shifting soil.

In 1940, a tornado ripped the roof off. Tremors from the wind and the trauma on the lumber from the cyclone further flexed the doors and window sashes. For example, one season a bedroom door might not close and the windows only open on the south side of the room. In three months, the south windows might be jammed and the door swinging free as a weather vane.

After Mother and my stepdad moved to town, a young couple lived in the house. Without instructions to pilot

the place, they used rubber door stops for shims and a bar to operate the passages and closures – all of this to the grand amusement of Mother, who knew the old house better than a fiddle player ever learns to wax his bow.

I don't know how long the house was vacant before I moved here in 1980. Long enough for the mud wasps and house mice to claim dominion over the cabinets and corner spaces. Enough time for the silverfish to invade the books past the fly leaves into the first chapters, and the moths to surround the cedar chest and claim the closets. I just remember on nights of high winter winds, the old house whistled like a Swiss shepherd calling his dogs.

Took awhile to learn what doors to prop open and which ones to prop closed. The level of the bath water showed the way the bathroom floor sank or rose. The rods in the closets offered another meter. In a glance, I could see whether the clothes hung level or slid toward one end.

Several times in the past 20 years, a Mertzon carpenter has adjusted the window frames and swung the doors. He leaves his square and plumb bob in the truck. The man has a good eye for working on the old crate. Takes a special craftsman to be able to hang a square metal door and an aluminum screen door to a door sash of unmatched measurements.

My seven year-old grandson visited during lamb marking. He brought along a set of race cars to run on the tilted floor in the kitchen. Made a good track. And instead of having cars scattered over the kitchen floor, they rolled into a heap along one wall.

I was sure grateful. It's been a long time since I stepped on a toy car barefoot. Over at the rock house in Mertzon, we shuffled like we wore snowshoes to keep from stepping on a steel jack or a tin whistle. Don't think I was ever anywhere, including Africa and New Guinea, where it was as dangerous to walk in the dark as up the hall leading to the boys' rooms, trying to avoid the steel cleats, baseball bats and fishing lures. Could be the reason I once was so light on my feet on the dance floor.

The most vocal complainant about the floor level at the ranch is my sister. I told you what a fuss she made at Christmas and Thanksgiving about the table being too low for her wheelchair to fit under. How she sent out a set of table lifters to raise the legs six inches. Going to be worse next time she comes, as the dining room is settling faster than we can raise the table level.

Before I close, I want to advise that the way to witch for a rock foundation is to take a 20-pound crowbar and plant a tree where your wife chooses a site. Also, the most

desperate search for soft digging in my lifetime needs to be mentioned. It occurred in 1960. Jose and I were ordered to bury the Boss's 1200-pound pet horse at the old ranch. Reference for the saga is filed under "Old Streak's bones lie in a shallow grave."

The way the kitchen floor is slanting, it's going to make sweeping easy. The louvered door from the dining room to the kitchen became solid panels last week, so another big shift is coming. But it won't make a lot of difference which way the race cars roll as long as my grandson has fun ...