

7SHORTGRASS.DOC

The house no longer resembles the Norman Rockwell magazine cover scene of the holiday feast now as darkness sends guests and family scurrying home before the ranch road becomes a deer park added to the obstacle course of washboard wind erosion from oil transport traffic. Time to collect odd glasses and pie plates from chair arms and off end tables. Time to sweep the pumpkin and gravy-stained dinner napkins into orange and brown wads and pitch them in the laundry basket to rest among bed clothes and bath mats.

Son Ben washes and rinses the kitchen tools first. Potato masher, garlic press, egg beater, paring knife, measuring cup(s), measuring spoons (three sets) lie strewn across the drain board crusted in grease and flour cemented in seams and cracks to challenge his good nature.

Ben whistles his version of "Rest You Weary Gentlemen." The overhead lights glare in empty spaces still vibrant from the commotion of extra guests. Candles smolder into stubs; the table centerpiece of yellow blooms my pal brought struggles to cast off the haze from burning wax.

Mother and my stepfather hosted bridge parties and executive sessions for a serious square dance club in these rooms. And, from the file on "Oft-Told Tales To Test Readers' Patience," Mother comforted a neighbor lady here

in the living room the night the old gal rushed in blubbering in hysterical tears that she had shot her man with a deer rifle...three times.

Remember the rest? My stepfather rushed for help. Mother graciously asked "Ol Toots" if she'd like to shift the rifle from her lap to be more comfortable in Grandmother's chair as she rocked at top speed. (Note: Assailants come down from the excitement of attack by pronounced heel rocking or wide body swaying. Rocking chairs are ideal therapy and easier to tolerate from the sidelines.)

Ben's whistling thins as he sees leftovers being dumped, meaning more bowls and platters to wash. He stands facing away from the sink. The moment arrives in all kind dishwashers willing to help known as "Wash or Be Awash."

Pools of free standing water on the floor – some soapy, one clear – mark where Ben works, plunging the dishes and pans in the washing sink, splashing the rinse water on huge platters and gently passing thin, fragile wine glasses under the faucet. And overhead on the kitchen window, a winter dew forms as the hot steam hits the cold panes.

Then comes the industrial size wet mop from the pantry. Three deft sweeps of the long cotton mop cords

slosh the water with spilled bread crumbs, cooked cornbread dressing and flour from the oatmeal roll makings into an absorbent swirl only accomplished by we professionals of mop and pail.

The disposal of leftovers is postponed to morning to adopt a new plan. Instead of contaminating the refrigerator until Christmas, if the packing plant opens in Angelo tomorrow, there should be interest in filler left in the dressings and the scraps on the turkey carcasses to catch the eye of an industry ingenious enough to use beef lips in hotdogs. Be a big break to have room for a block of butter and a pint of milk on the refrigerator shelf without balancing the pitcher and package on a small covered bowl of cranberry sauce or a sack of grated cheese too precious to toss in the garbage.

What sounds at first like the attic vents humming in the high winds of the 09 Divide softens to the bellowing of a heavy heifer in the waterlot. ("Mooing" might be a more accurate description in city language.) To investigate, a dash of baby powder in each top makes pulling on the boots easier. The cotton shirt and khaki trousers slip without hanging under the coveralls.

The hour or the length of a ranch nurse's day does not factor into the birthing of black calves. Everyone wants to

be through calving – man and his beasts – but at that moment, I am relieved to find a heifer either having a dream or discomfort enough to be from triplets.

Back inside the house, Ben has gone to bed. The boot-jack comes from hiding behind Uncle George's trunk. The pajama tops are unmatched, but style and fashion are 50 miles away.

Were there a movie projector to flash a final message on the wall, the words would read: "If the Pilgrims did indeed feed the red men on a November day, who did the dishes and put away the food when the feast ended?" Answer: "Must have been the Indians, because if the Pilgrims had done the work, they'd have dropped the idea right then."