

One of the ladies at the Port Aransas condominium treated a coastal tick burrowed deep in my right shoulder on last month's trip. She thought the tick fell from a tree to be so high up on my body.

One reason she thought so was that kids her age suspect elders lack the incentives to cause folks to roll in the grass. (All right, so that is borderline stuff. I'll try to do better.) The second reason she thought the tick fell from a tree was from the depth the tick plunged into the site.

The boardwalks at the bird watching pond pass under leafy trees branched in droopy limbs that brush over your hat crown. Water rises almost up to the planks this wet season.

Not difficult to imagine a tick climbing a tree trunk as the water slowly rises from the pond floor after a dry spell. The hard part is to calculate how a tick's short stride relates to how many steps he takes to make the climb high enough to dive off on humans.

Ants scurry about on pebbled beds; mosquitoes are virtual aerial dive bombers. June bugs rank pretty swift for an insect, but ticks - ticks seem to crawl instead of

walk. Sort of a dry land float comes to mind to describe their walk.

Salt water air and thick brush make the hides of the few Gulf Coast cowboys left around immune to any type of bite short of one with fangs. Had the hands in the cow jungle north of there in the 1960s or 70s ever been bitten, their blood was so laced with fierce jalapeños and chili pequeños that the tick would have thought he strayed south over the Rio Bravo.

But back to the desk; an oil-based cosmetic applied over in the apartment made the tick restless and dribbled a little blood from the wound. The older lady watching on the side said she just pulled ticks off. On that Monday morning, she looked like she could sure do the job.

An old man watching also took on an ominous look and said, "Better not pull off his head, or you'll have tick fever for sure. These aren't like ticks in West Texas. They'll fever you worse than Rocky Mountain ones."

Pretty interesting that he knew so much medical knowledge, being from Oklahoma. The cowboys up around Pawhuska "in the gone-bys" knew more about roping steers in the daytime and doing the "Cotton-Eyed Joe" at night than they did ticks or tick fever.

About that time, the girl screeched, "He's fallen out, Mr. Noelke. I am going to swab the place and put on a band-aid."

The old man and the other lady bent down, searching the floor for the tick. I dabbed the blood with a bandana. An ol' boy in the back added that if we found the tick, he will call a lab he knows to identify it.

At the beginning of this deal, I was thankful that hearing aids keep ticks from your ears. After being warned about tick fever and all but diagnosed with the same, going for professional help seemed better than having a couple of pessimists to comment on the side.

The "Okie" wanted the tick to be a fever tick so bad, he kept asking the girl if she was certain the head came out with the body. Free at last with my shirt sleeve rolled down, I told that little cowboy that at that very moment at the ranch, four men saddled to go gather "ticky" cattle. (Divide that in half to read "Two men saddled and two sat out in a pickup drinking coffee.")

"Ticks," I told him, "are so bad out on the 09 Divide, a two year-old black bull last spring became so anemic that his skin turned yellow like he was jaundiced. He was one of those northern bulls that never experience those blood-suckers until we buy them. Had we been able to find a donor

strong enough to spare any blood, he needed a transfusion worse than anything else."

Pour-on Ivomec and a medicine my grandfather formulated from bacon grease and sulfur saved his life, but he needed to rest one season. Realizing the audience was captured, I continued telling them that the tick carcasses that fell off him are still lying around the cow chute from six months ago. The medicines had to be so powerful they mummify the ticks. Just walking around the chute sounds like stepping on soft shell pecans.

Before they, or he, could ask how big the ranch was, I excused my self to retire to more private quarters. I check every morning, but the wound from the tick stays red. If I run a degree of fever, I'm going to the doctor.