

3SHORTGRASS.doc

Port Aransas, Texas: Signs in the local school zones forbid the use of cell phones while driving within the zone. This is a statewide law. No messages state the consequences if a frustrated mother can't call for backup to help unload a recalcitrant third grade boy wanting to quit school.

News items on the Internet report that 30 states have passed laws against driving and talking on cell phones. An insurance company's survey, on the same spot, showed accidents increased in three states after driving while talking on cell phones became illegal.

The survey brings back the long-ago bar stool speech: "I drive better after I've had a six-pack," and "Soon as I get off probation, I am gonna' experiment."

Side talk in a convenience store on the way down to the Coast claimed San Antonio planned to, or had already prohibited, texting on the freeways. Three major Interstates (10, 35 and 37) pass through the city.

Helicopters seemed like the only solution to enforcing a anti-texting law over the freeways until the *Ozona Stockman*, a shortgrass weekly sheet, ran a front page story about a helicopter flying low over a police car, honking the craft's horn. The pilot and the co-pilot were arrested

for public intoxication. If that's the way helicopter crews behave nowadays, that rules out aircraft enforcing the law.

The mid-day passage through San Antonio, going to the Coast on I-10 and hitting I-35 to leave town on I-37, caused such trauma from the threat of carbon smoke asphyxiation and permanent nerve damage that a country lane would have been better than a Blackberry.

Part of the time on I-35, a long procession commandeered by a motorcycle-escorted motorcade took one full lane. After I spotted a fire truck caught in the lineup, I stopped worrying. If the firemen didn't know how to escape, it was a dead cinch a herder from Mertzon was hooked.

Toodling along barely above idle, the sight of rubber skid marks on the track and the paint scars smeared on the rails painted an ominous picture of how dangerous Interstates are at 60 miles an hour and over. It might have been the dreary procession, but it seemed like tallboy beer cans dominated the litter in the gutters, indicating the ol' city still had a kick left in her in spite of being narrow-minded about texting.

The man ahead talked on his cell and smoked at the same time. His left door was ajar enough to be visible. The lady to the rear also used a phone, or was talking to

herself. The uniformed men roaring back and forth on motorcycles held a tight line, so steering was relatively simple for such a formidable track.

A funeral procession on an Interstate makes sense in San Antonio. Yet from my memories, it's unimaginable the city would pass a law prohibiting target shooting on the freeways, much less telephone use.

In the old, old days when the Big Boss kept polo horses down there in the winter, shooting dice and drinking home brew on the street corners were frowned upon Sunday mornings before noon, but not forbidden by law. The whole state was bound to have been shocked to read that the mayor and his pals' gambling hall had been closed.

San Antonio then was the Mission City, coated in a Spanish/Mexican influence. Baby-faced cadets in military school passed for 21 year-olds in the bars. Mixed drinks and horse and dog racing were against the law in other parts of the state, but no sin or infraction in that ol' burg.

Street calls off the Interstates brought back the addresses of the Boss and his compadres' winter quarters. You have more time to read and reminisce, piddling along in a funeral procession.

You would suppose a town so strict on cell phones wouldn't allow making notes - written notes - on the Interstate. So I kept my notebook down while scribbling Military Road and Houston Street to relocate my personal memories. ("Personal," in this case, means keep this quiet. Don't go blabbing it around that the author might have been young once.)

Military Road, I think, went clear around the city in those times. Maybe it still does. On Houston Street, military school cadets could buy tickets to dance with beautiful painted girls in gorgeous red silk costumes for two bits a dance. The music didn't last long, or the money either, but the odor from the perfumes lingered on all the way back to school on a Saturday night. Pass.

The fire truck way up ahead dropped out. The lead cars, perhaps the hearse, changed lanes. Thirty minutes passed before I was able to reach my exit to I-37. At the last glance, the old boy in the pickup and the lady in front were still violating the new law.