

After two days on Mustang Island, we adjust from being on edge of the desert to being on the edge of the sea. At first, we arise before daylight. After recovering from the old curse of herders to be moving before dawn, we languish in bed as late as seven-thirty.

But don't go blabbing such disgraceful loitering around the stockyards or the coffee houses. The few of the breed left, (and I am assuming you know my pal is a rancher, too), may still race off in the dark lots of mornings before realizing redskins no longer attack before dawn. Right or wrong, we remnants are sure poor prospects to sponsor summer vacation Bible school, much less endorse using our time to write or read in a beach house.

Within the two days, a morning routine develops much different than on the prairie. She takes a tablet and books to a corner lamp and table, keeping space open to watch the morning rising of sun on the sea.

I stack yellow tablets on the dining room table and use two chairs pushed together for a bookshelf. All set up, I write postcards to old friends and loosen up searching for ideas.

Be a good time to read an example crafted the morning a storm broke from fierce thunderclouds. Before this causes a case of the academic hives, please allow for changing the wording to the less pretentious: "notes made minutes before the weather closed in off the water."

But bear up as I read an excerpt: "Dark purple wisps became swirls rising to break the yolk of the orange sun. In minutes, rain lashed against the storm glass facing the ocean, breaking to framed pools suspended under too much wind to drip down the pane."

Copy like the above is important, prepared ahead in case a storm becomes destructive enough to become a hurricane. The opening paragraph is all ready for an interview or to write a report on the storm. Short as the piece is, it's easy to visualize standing on a partially flooded street, a white hobby horse and a chrome teakettle bobbing down the gutter, the TV guy in a black turtleneck shirt under a green parka ready to go on the air, the crew out of sight, while I dig a waterproof capsule from my drenched shirt pocket, and in a tragic voice make "deep purple clouds" rhyme with "funeral dirge shrouds."

Ten, never 20, minutes into an hour, one reads out loud from work at hand, or a passage from a book. The other

listens without commenting unless given permission to give an opinion.

She can be quiet longer than I can. Twice, maybe three times in my lifetime, I tried being quiet. Stories built up so forcefully and my ears started ringing so loud, the volume caused my mastoid glands to swell big as pingpong balls. Once the ringing starts, I go for a walk on the beach.

From March to July the Sargasso seaweed mounds thick and deep along the tide lines to form ugly brown rows, suspending dead fish and trapping crustaceans in the mass to churn into sour, odoriferous fumes of decay and disintegration. In October, however, small strands of seaweed dot the sands in insignificant amounts – mere traces compared to spring deposits.

Environmentalists fret over the city removing the spring weed accumulation with front-end loaders to dump on the sand dunes. The question seems to be, are modern-day sand dunes protected by law too fragile to withstand dumping seaweed on the slopes, or is the beach being populated by new-age people too fragile to smell seaweed, or thread through seaweed in sandals and barefoot?

After living decades in the shortgrass country, I can't settle the fuss. The flora in our country is either

toxic, has thorns, or both. All the fauna stings, bites or kicks, except one notable species – the bovine hooks with horns in the front and kicks from behind.

At times, sure the beach is empty, I poke around in the small deposits of seaweeds, hold the strands up toward the light, and guess at the weight of a gallon of dry weed. Take a long shot at the protein and Vitamin A content. Do a little figuring in the sand on freight from Port Aransas to Mertzon. In a crevice in a corner of my mind hangs a memory of feeding cottonseed meal and oyster shells back in the 1950s during a whopper of a throat-strangling drouth. It emerges while I finger the shells in the seaweed.

It's rare when an open beach allows time to think about the forever-entrenched plan in a herder's mind of how to get through a dry spring. The outcome, however, remained the same. Every morning on the way back to the condo, a strong spell of gratitude hit that I'd never tried to feed a pen of Gulf Coast cattle on seaweed silage.