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The San Angelo Weather Station tried their new flood warning message the last part of August. It was the first time in five years that the station needed a flood warning. Conditions were set for flooding. A tropical storm was off Corpus Christi, and a cold spell was poised to come in from the Panhandle.

The forecast from Mathis Field weather station over the telephone hedged the warning to a call of "possible high water in low-lying areas." Much safer sounding than the one on the radio opening with an ominous growling sound like an old pickup starter cranking the final turn on a cold morning. That one said, "Flooding is imminent in the following counties."

Though I was alone at the ranch in a downpour, it's hard to frighten a shortgrasser of high water, especially a shortgrasser 2550 feet above sea level and three miles within a plateau.

The warning further lost impact after reports on the watershed began to come in of a slow half-inch rain. But up here an inch an hour was falling. No matter how drastic the weather conditions, no one calls the ranch. Alex the cook and I spent five days stranded by high water once down at the old ranch. We didn't know until the water ran down, but

both banks of Spring Creek had been evacuated without as much as a curious sightseer checking on us, much less a helicopter. This time, however, I was unsure whether anyone called as rain fell on my tin roof so hard, I couldn't sit close enough to the telephone to hear anything except the lightning making the bell jingle. (Takes a fierce storm to electrify an underground line.)

Way back, Goat Whiskers the Elder's wife, Aunt Ella, reported the rainfall at the Whiskers outfit on Dutch Woman draw to the Angelo paper from time to time. Aunt Ella always held jobs requiring integrity. Scorekeeper at the bridge games and the one to do the room counts at the PTA meetings were an example of the trust placed in her.

Aunt was of Canadian origin. She received wide respect out here in the wilderness after she broke and trained her spirited son. The guy known today as Goat Whiskers the Younger was then known as "The Terror of Upper Dutch Woman." I think had she lived a long life, which she didn't, she'd have been a consultant for the rough string at the military schools.

Her second qualification to report rainfall was that Uncle Whiskers had one of the first rain gauges in the country. Most ranches then used coffee cans and wooden rulers as a dipstick. One hombre on the east side of the

shortgrass country stuck his thumb inside the can to measure the rainfall. He had a fat thumb, so he always had more rain than any of his neighbors.

Aunt Ella wasn't responsible for giving flood warnings, or I don't think she was. It would have been a good service to have an armed flagman at every draw in this country to keep folks from driving off in high water. Must have been a latent urge to be submarine pilots, because old boys were always bailing off in cars in streams too deep to cross in a wagon.

Before the highway 67 bridge was finished over Rock Pen Draw three miles west of Mertzon in the 1930s, the bridge builders rigged a cable tow line to pull cars across the draw during rises. Water nearly reached the seat in Mother's Model A Ford the morning we crossed. On the other bank, a worker put the fan belt back on, dried the distributor, and off we went to school.

Weren't any signs on Rock Pen crossing saying "No life guard on duty," or "Children must be accompanied by an adult," or "All boaters must wear life preservers." Fording high water was a good lesson for a redheaded boy unable to even dog paddle, much less swim. It taught self-reliance to plunge off into a raging creek full of brown water in a Ford Roadster. (The first time I remember hearing the

question, "Are you all right, little boy?" was in a movie in college. Andy Hardy was gently and tenderly helping this kid off the ground after a fall from his swing. Blonde, curly-headed girl from next door watched Andy with adoring eyes for being so kind to the little boy. I remember wondering whether Andy's mom ever took him for a ride across a flooding draw.)

End of August rain is perfect to grow grass. Good thing we don't have warning signals for all bad weather. A drouth signal would be worn out before the end of the first year. I don't remember when Aunt Ella's job ended. Might have just played out during a dry spell.