

04/10/1975

## SHORTGRASSs

Cold weather on Easter sent Shortgrassers scurrying for their wraps. Fruit trees and gardens were ruined; much muttering was done by the citizens.

Vegetable farming and orchard instincts are deep seated out here. Busy-thumbs plant and tear the soil as if the Shortgrass Country was a tropical land. Gourd squash and large core okra flourish in the area. Important commodities, such as beans and hot peppers, give low yields.

Child Who Sits in the Sun insists on sowing a garden every year. On the first warm day of February she spades a plot in the backyard.

Her tools date back to her ancestors. Sharp sticks and scraps of flint serve as hoes and plows. A buckskin pouch is the seed bag. Her tribal scalping knife is her trowel.

The gardening is not objectionable. It's the dust she stirs up that is annoying. South winds blow the aftermath right into my favorite sunning spot. The slightest complaint sets off a barrage of dirt clods.

Her motions working the soil are deft and skillful. She moves up the rows at a steady pace. Bird calls interrupt her work. She often pause to eat a wild onion bulb, or rpress a weed for medicine.

Were it not for the ever presence of danger, I'd enjoy watching her work. It's like reopening a scene from the primitive cultures. Small corn holes punched by a sharp stick; water being carried on her shoulder as if the calendar had never turned a page.

Late in the evenings, she chants an Indian son of fertility to the earth. Over and over, she sings, "Hayai, ai-yai, Oh spirit of nature is my delight. Long ago wrongs are never right. Great Spirit of all relieve my plight. Turn white-eyed husband into skunk weed upon thy sight."

Neighbors honor the singing. Lawnmowers are shut down. Children playing on vacant lots head for home. Dogs and cats move back into protective spots. Child Who Sits in the Sun demands a lots of respect from both man and beast.

My muscles growing tense are the first reaction to the song. Next, the urge to run. Then the compelling fascination to danger that draws sightseers to fights or the foolish to fires. I loll in the chair, flexing my hands, loosening my shoulders, and preparing for attack.

Self defense is routine. Like their paleface counterparts, squaws aim for their enemies' eyes. Be it a bucket of hot ashes of a pot of boiling water, they always use the eyes as a target.

Squawmen fall early who do not learn this lesson. Shield the face at any cost or you are a blinded man; helpless in the hands of a merciless savage.

It was the squawmen who contributed the tear-away jersey that football players use today. From his arts came the boxer's crouched head with his eyes protected by his left glove. How hollow the Eagle Scout would feel were he to know that it was not one of his brotherhood that discovered that self destruction from fire could be prevented by rolling instead of fleeing in panic.

Have you ever wondered for example, where the basketball referee learned to be so careful to dry the wet spots on the court? Watch a squawman someday. His trail is a backtrail. Rocks are cleared from his path as he goes. Throw-rugs are shifted and the footing is tested on the floor. People just don't realize how much we have contributed to survival.

Her voice gave away her strategy. She began to crescendo on the last lines. Without moving my newspaper, I began to gradually move lower in the chair. In less than a fortnight, a newspaper had warded off the blow of the bucket full of smoldering ashes. Gain, a paper was going to be my defense.

Oh how crafty the wild ones are. Buckskin shoes don't make noise on a tile floor. So small is the bulge of a hunting knife or war axe in the folds of an Indian robe. So deadly is an arrow or a lance at close range. Yet to the wary belongs long life. Once she was so fast. Now time is taking away her style.