

Even Motel Maids Disregard Basic Rights Of Flying Pets

By Monte Noelke

9-4-69

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MERTZON — The leaders in the screwworm eradication program are going to find themselves in the same shape as the fabled shepherding kid who kept shouting wolf to pass the time of day. All summer long, chiefs of the sheep and goat herders and big shots in the cattle business have been warning the producers to watch for worms.

In the spring before the recent rains these hombres were 100 percent correct. But during the summer as the Shortgrass Country tuned into such a dehydrated state that house cats had to be fed liquid supplements to moisten their tongues, shouting warnings about screwworms was about as sensible as offering pay as you go marriage and morals seminars in Hollywood, Calif.

The range was so dry and hot that the incubation of lizards and snakes was halted. It would have taken a mighty fast acting screwworm fly to croon a love song, much less instigate a serious affair.

In the same period, I did learn a lot about houseflies. You see, after school was out, we took the kids for a trip down through the central part of Texas.

Youngsters in this day and age need to travel. Nobody wants his offspring to grow up like some of us did during that other depression of the 30's. Back then a lot of old boys were so nervous that when they rode a cattle truck to Fort Worth the driver would have to blindfold them to get them out of the cab in a town of over 500 citizens. Most of them were so spooky once they arrived in cowtown, they were harder to handle than the stock.

Anyhow, back to the houseflies. While we were on the way home, a fly joined our group at a filling station 100 or so miles from San Angelo. Unlike most of his breed, he was so well mannered that we let him come on home with us. After all, when you are hauling seven restless sons, and a vacation-exhausted wife, one insect (or a brown bear, for that matter) doesn't make much difference. Taking into account the amount of turmoil within the car, it's surprising that the fly didn't take a suicide dive into one of the closed windows.

By the time we got to the house, the influence of the boys jousting with coat hangers and playing a sort of inner-car soccer had been a bad influence on him. The minute the car doors were opened, he overmatched himself with a couple of local flies and was knocked down immediately.

My next encounter with houseflies occurred on a recent trip down south. It's indefinite where the fly came aboard, but he not only rode to Del Rio, but made himself at home at the motel.

In all flydom, there never existed a more perfect gentleman than this one. He was too high class to ride over to Mexico with us. (By "us" I mean my wife and I. On this deal, the boys were left home.) On top of that, he knew his place. We could nap all afternoon without him doing any practice landings on our lips or performing any over-pillow buzzing stunts that are the trademarks of his brothers.

The only trouble this fly caused was when the maids came in to change the linens and shift the dust around the room. Every last one of them had to be cautioned not to spray.

One particularly goofy old gal got so rattled by my instructions that she ran off and left her cleaning cart. She was doing fine until the fly routine arose, then she went to pieces. You could hear her clear across the court, blabbing to the head housekeeper about a loco Americano who had pet fly in his room.

A lot of females don't have the emotional predictability of a goose. On that very same morning, I'd seen a lady leading a pair of ruthless poodle dogs and there weren't any of the maids getting hysterical. If you ask me, keeping one fly won't compare to harboring a set of those pampered mutt dogs. Try someday to get your banker interested in providing the expense money for dog hairdos and you'll see who is right. I'm not saying that the average Shortgrass banker would be in favor of putting up the money to feed a trained flea even if he was already contracted to MGM. but I'll bet there isn't one jugkeeper in the whole country who'd load 15 cents for a dog haircut.

To get any peace, my flying partner had to be released to shift for himself. The odds of a man being left to mind his own business always have been low. A friendly fly, a husband and a wife can't share a motel room without somebody complaining.

People can buy licenses from the state, county and city to lead any category of tire-sniffing pooch that can be found. Pet owners have permits to sell every kind of nuisance from mask-faced tomcats to bowled fish, yet woe be it to a peace loving citizen who tries to keep one fly.

From this day on, houseflies loitering around filling stations can arrange for their own transportation. The harmless ones will have to pay for the wickedness of their ill-bred relatives. I knew the world was in a bad shape, but I never dreamed the quest of privacy had degenerated so far.