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July is the worst month to send postcards. Shortgrass citizens of any substance at all flee to the cooler climates. Mail ends up unread in pasteboard boxes collected by the neighbors, or on hold down in the musty chambers of the post office.

The neighbors and other homebound unfortunates suffering in heat think a card from any other part of the world is a reminder of their bad luck. In midsummer it takes a lot of effort to write lively enough copy to survive storage in a box full of catalogues, or to capture the attention of a poor soul already on the verge of losing his eyesight from staying indoors under air conditioning, watching soap operas on television.

Twenty-five years ago, I started writing cards from wherever I was stalled in airports. Somewhere in the period, gift shops began selling 30-card books the right size to carry in a briefcase. In surprising good taste, the pictures on the front side were prints by French artists, or photographs from excellent collections. The Mertzon post office facilitated posting by keeping a stock of the correct denomination in books of 20 stamps.

The last thing needed was ballpoint pens closely enough related to writing instruments not to blur on the slick surface of the cards. The Mertzon bank gives away a thin blue pen perfect for writing on non-absorbent paper, but my popularity at the bank fluctuates in valleys and peaks yet

to be reached by the Dow Jones averages. The minute I walk in the door I can tell how last week's column floated. If the employees' heads drop down, I know to back out and go through the drive-in window. However, when I do have a shot at the blue pens I grab a handful, because the ones out back are secured by a steel wire.

Writing so much and never seeing the recipients destroys the sense of time and place. The exchange begins to resemble a telephone conversation. For example, I may write a son in Connecticut: "Right now I'm waiting on a call from Austin and a cattle truck from San Angelo. I'll get back to you as soon as my nap is over."

Cards don't have to be answered the same way as letters. The guy I write in Florida sends scathing criticism of my taste in literature. We may exchange a dozen cards on a dozen different books without ever being able to tell the other one is receiving our cards.

Affairs of the heart are too long and sticky to be transcribed on an open-faced card. Breach of promise proceedings stemming from post cards are unknown. The fact a card is unsealed for all the world and all the mail carriers to read, gives the material immunity from the gravity of the law.

A neat little trick is to write prospective graduates a congratulation card before they have time to send an invitation in the spring. Postcard users enjoy wide reputation as cheapskates. Just dashing off a few words to a

senior might have the lasting effect of turning him off until he is married and his kids are graduating. (In June, I received an ivory-colored, engraved wedding invitation the dimensions of a Coca Cola sign - costing more, I'm sure, than my wedding and honeymoon.)

In the case of one correspondent in Missouri, we've written so long he developed a literary device in his cards. He quotes an imaginary "Doctor Faraday" as his minister, as his medical doctor, and whatever field of education suits his story.

When Doctor F. is on the pulpit, he preaches on chewing your food 44 times before swallowing. In his office down at the clinic, he tells his patients to drink all the coffee they want and be careful before they sit down in public restrooms. And from his classroom, depending on his current field, he praises the space program and denounces free trade. Doctor Faraday seems so real after all these years, I send him a Christmas card and ask his opinion on a wide range of subjects.

Along in July, the mail stops hitting its mark. There is an empty feeling about writing a dead-letter box. Posting a card in Mertzon before the 4 p.m. mail truck ceases to matter. No incentive to make the mail sacks if you know the freshness of your message is going to stagnate in a pasteboard box in an amateur postman's closet.

By September, the incoming mail picks up. The "Wish You were here" begins to change to, "I'm getting sick and tired

of ..." Old Doc. F. attacks flag burning and training bra's on little girls. Harry down in Florida writes he thinks the bestseller list is an insult to the nation's intelligence. Things perk right up, and I can tell by the way the stamps are slapped on the card, we are off to a good season.