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Over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, gasoline prices advanced to honor the occasion. Bicentennial spirit was displayed by the markup. Jefferson and Washington, I feel sure, would have been proud of their efforts to found a country based on gasoline grinders who were willing to feast on their fellow man's weakness for travel.

Mertzon operators kept their price the same. For about a ten dollar bill, the tank on an economy model could be topped off. Families composed of wanderlust teenagers ran higher scores. I took my wife's car down for fuel. Our boys had drained the tank so low that the attendant had to allow time for the gasoline to soak up the dry spots.

Self service islands hit Mertzon's filling stations long before it did the other parts of the country. The first year that we took all eight kids on vacation, when the windshield was washed our six year old would cry so loud that the glove compartment door would fall open. I guess he was afraid the gasoline pumper was going to use his rag on his ears like his grandmother did. It was a big task to calm him down. Young boys dread soap and water worse than woodpeckers hate a B.B. gun.

Lower gasoline prices have attracted transient trade to town. On top of that, in the spring the commissioner's court ordered the sheriff to start slowing down traffic on the highway.

After the commissioner's order, travelers could stop by justice court to pay their fines and then fill up at a bargain pump on the way out of town. City people could absorb the provincial atmosphere of the small courtroom; plenty of local color could be obtained around the gas pumps.

It didn't work out. Some of the hombres from San Angelo began to make awful snide remarks about Mertzon. The Wool Capital lacks about half a mile of having 20 light years of school zones. When a citizen breaks out of the city limits, he doesn't want to be bothered by a bunch of country kids obstructing traffic.

Our greatest moments had been the days when diesel trucks went through town making 70 miles an hour. Repeal of the speed limit killed the thrill of living in Mertzon. I liked to watch a west bound tractor send the old ladies going to the post office scurrying for safety. Those old sisters can show plenty of speed for a short distance.

Feeling grew hot after the tickets were issued. At a barbecue, a cow trader swore that he never was going to stop again in a speed trap. He'd got a ticket on the way out west to buy a string of yearlings on a rising market. The fine had taken the profit from one steer. Had he caught his honor, the justice of the peace, on a losing streak at the domino hall, he would have had to trade harder on the cattle.

I was too polite to accept his offer to pass us by. Forty years ago, I learned not to make propositions like that. Once a fellow learns how eager folks are to help him pack, the urge to boycott or pout in a foreign place loses meaning.

It's like that old deal of getting so mad that you won't speak to your enemy. Who benefits? Deaf mutes still are going to win out as the country's most popular people. The peace and quiet of silent treatment can be as refreshing as a failure in the wire service.

High water bridges are less appealing after the bliss of the isolation of a flood. Think how marvelous it'd be if the town of Washington D.C. were weathered in for a full term of Congress. Political scientists would be 20 years evaluating the benefits. People in the District would complain of the company, but hardship builds great government.

I kept quiet. Offending a cow buyer is wrong in these days. Fall calves could lift our sentence. It will be bad if a lamb buyer gets a ticket, too.