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Port Aransas, Texas – Desk chair aimed toward a big picture window two stories high opened to an early fall morning off the Gulf Coast. Ships of foreign extraction in dull red paint, tugs mighty in low wake, shrimp craft draped in rear-slung brown nets, sailboats' classic white sheets topped in pennants, and drilling platforms defiant in raw iron to the sea can be scanned with seven power binoculars in slow sweeps.

Keep your balance, little cowboy. Shortgrass scribes are not assigned to write sea stories or marine lore. If you're lucky, you might parrot a tale down the coast on Padre Island about how Captain Richard King once expanded his horizons across the bay in case the world (South Texas) might be wider than he thought, or however it was ol' Cap gained more title.

Yesterday, the writer's club here in Port A met at the Girl Scout hall, ambitious chaps and eager ladies un-soured by throes of the craft and brimming with ambition. They were also disinterested in newspaper scribes, especially ones old enough to have known the alphabet before the last two letters were added.

Seated there at a long table in hinged rods of steel formed for a chair, it would have been as likely as the

patrons of this hall, the Girl Scouts, to recognize a newspaper columnist with a merit badge. One lady tested the case when she announced she wrote a column for the coastal newspaper. From all the attention she received from the writer's group, she might as well have announced that she thought her work was worthy of a Nobel in literature. Looks like they might have said, at least, "Let's take her to lunch."

Sure not hard to find a place for lunch in Port Aransas. Right there in the club room, an old guy named Dick ran a joint all of three blocks away the size of a small trailer house. Before your New Year's or last year's resolutions become effective or you are lifted to diet, go by his Pelican Pete's on the way to the ferry for Dick's french fries. Mr. or Mrs. Dick or some spatula and skillet artist learned to cut potatoes the right way to fry. Not a globule of grease, not a speck, not a smithereen clings to the fries.

Dick read one of his stories at the club meeting about a carnival in his Iowa childhood. Carnival writers sure have a lot of room to write about the hoochie-koochie girls, the creak of the wheels, the smell of the cotton candy, and the hustle of the barkers. Writers' groups give scribes a chance to test stuff.

Walks on the beach are other diversions. The walks draw plenty of dawgs. Rarely is one unleashed, because of coyotes. Son Ben ordered a bear pepper spray shipped here for protection against coyotes. Directions on the can say to wait until the bear is 40 feet away to start spraying. The directions say further that the worst scenario is once a bear comes inside your tent.

If you feel like I do, the bear spray people underestimate where customers smart enough to buy the product pitch their tents and whether we need to be reminded a bear in a tent with you is a bad scenario.

The spray, in this case, wasn't about tents; it was to spice the protected coyotes' eyes on the beach, unafraid of humans, and aggressive to dawgs. On this eighth day down here, the wind has never laid enough for a target practice, nor have there been any attacks reported in the complex.

No coyotes have bothered the dawg walkers passing along at the water's edge. On the subject of worst scenarios, it'd have been plenty embarrassing to meet someone from Mertzon on the beach with a spray can holstered on one hip.

To transport the bomb back to Mertzon through Austin is another problem. The front seat of the car's floorboard has a rack to put bottles in, but the sun shines on the

spot part of the day to make spray bombs hazardous,
especially a pepper bomb that'll turn a Kodiak bear at 40
feet.

The can sits here on the table, holster and all.
Coyotes were on the dunes out front last year. But this
trip they must be on the other part of the island.

Black pepper brings back how the Big Boss used to
cover his steak and fried potatoes in a thick pepper coat.
Makes you wonder how his free-hand style with a shaker
might match a dramatic one with a spray.

But for now it seems no longer than fights last
between coyotes and lap dogs, it would take a fast draw and
aim sharp enough to miss the guy on one end of the leash,
plus a bit of nerve to fire close to a house pet.