

SEPTEMBER 15, 1983

Hombres handicapping the drouth in Texas are falling behind unless they are living in the midst of the big wreck. Gov. White claims he's going to get Secretary of Agriculture Block down to review the dry zone. On nearly any press run of the state's dailies, commissioners and congressmen use such strong terms denouncing the drouth that it's a wonder thunderheads don't form from the verbiage. But in spite of all the threats, grief over the dry spell quadruples every day.

One extra trouble we are having in our parts is being too brave. Some 22-25 counties to the west of us have qualified for drouth emergency relief, yet our county hasn't so much as drawn an answer to the cries for help. I don't think we are that self reliant. I think it's from being so numb from the hard times and the high priced feed that we can't get out the letters right in a S.O.S. call.

My luck has been so bad that if I'd asked the government for help, I'd have ended up getting the wrong number or losing my credit card before the call could go through. I've been on such a losing streak that I've had to cut extra windows in my bedroom to keep my nightmares from causing a vacuum. The downdraft on my snores was so labored that Venetian blinds in the next room were drawn off their tracks.

It's a good thing I'm no longer around horse players or dice shooters, or they'd have me banned from the tracks and the tables as a jinx. I tried carrying a rabbit foot charm, but one of the claws wore a hole in my pants pocket exactly right for my pocket knife to fall through.

But don't get the idea I've tried to be brave. Quite the contrary. About a month ago I caught an old movie on TV that had a piano player in it just like the image I'd like to cast in public. He was all hunched over his keyboard, chain smoking Lucky Strikes, and playing the saddest ballad ever scored to music. His cheeks were gaunt and his eyes were a darker shadow than the inside of a pyramid after nightfall.

This tragic figure was like I'd always wanted to look my whole life and never could. I've always felt too good to look sick and tubercular. One time a lady did tell me at the post office that I was looking "puny." Later on I saw her reading a newspaper in Braille which accounted for that mistake.

Lots of evenings I come in from the ranch feeling like a camel herder's shoe soles. But after a walk and a shower, I am completely recovered. Doctors claim that such hombres just pretend to feel good. If they are right, I sure prefer the pretending to the sharp knives and steel tables that serve their profession in such a regal manner.

The secret, however, isn't in pretending or going to or without doctors. I suspect it is in being able to distinguish inconvenience from tragedy. Furthermore 3800 lessons in the pastures on a ranch are a good seasoning school. Also, cutting out the self pity brightens a lot of sun rises and sunsets.

And to think we used to believe that stinging scorpion bites hurt until this drouth hit with such a brutal force. Fall is passing mighty fast. I have to get better to fully appreciate the drouth. Sorry to withhold the details of my misfortune, but there's some of life's grief that you are entitled to miss.