

November 22 1973

Hunters have been passing in front of the ranch house all morning. Pickups laden with gear are moving to the firing lines. As they pass by, ominous reflections flash from the gun racks loaded with polished blue barrels and shined wood stocks. Each one has made the hair on my neckline be lifted by my prickling glands.

I might as well admit that age has brought on a dread of the hunting season. Young bodies can absorb shell fragments in the blood stream, but old tissue is frail and venerable to puncture wounds. I've already reached the stage that I have to reduce my Alka Seltzer dosage in half. Goodness knows what would happen if I were struck by a bullet traveling 2800 feet per second.

Last year I stayed inside during the whole season. My hide became as white as a seagull's underside. Vitamin pills refused to dissolve in my sun-starved body. The threat of shadow rickets became so intense that blood would run backwards through the veins.

As I recall, a spray can exploding in a trash barrel set off that retreat. I'd been listening to the shellfire for a couple of mornings. Just as I started to the barn, the can blew up. From then on, I couldn't rally the courage to face the outside.

The old saying is that once you start running, you can't stop running. I suppose that applies to hiding, too. Whatever it applies to, I like that kind of thinking. I don't want to stop running and get my broadside shot to a thin side. I know that I couldn't run 25 steps without having to stop for a complete medical overhaul, nevertheless, I don't want to think of myself as a duck stuck on a shooting gallery track.

Old Indian fighters didn't admit that they couldn't sidestep a fat squaw bearing a stick of wood. No, indeed. The greybeards went right on acting like they were as nimble footed as feather fairies right up to the end. Even though they couldn't have dodged a buffalo bull dogged down in a swamp, they kept going on war hunts when they should have stayed home drinking weak tea diluted by scalded milk.

To restore my courage, I've been leaving a box of shells on my desk. Doctors say you can conquer your phobias by becoming familiar with them. Doctors don't say, however, how long it takes to become familiar with a phobia that can blow a hole in you that'll make the Carlsbad Caverns look like something a wood chuck had dug.

Being familiar is the reason that I'm scared. People are making a big fuss over Unidentified Flying Objects. What about making a fuss about the Identified Flying Objects.

IFOs outnumber UFO's by the thousands. Someday when you are driving down a busy thoroughway, try to think how much more dangerous an oncoming truck powered by a multi-powered diesel engine is than a mystic blur flash that some old boy saw after he'd taken on a snout full of distilled refreshments.

I don't care what doctors say. The longer I look at those shells, the more I know that I don't want to stop one. Until insurance companies start writing policies against flying saucers, I'm not going to worry about them. Folks who worry about little green men coming from Mars should check around and see how dangerous men are that are already here.

Six weeks is a long time to hide, yet that beats being on the front lines by many a step.