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National newspapers hit our post office in pairs, or in some cases, triplets. My desk top either has empty space or a big stack of newsprint accumulated all in one burst.

If the right keys and right password is entered, this laptop brings up daily editions. Scribes and maybe a few other citizens feel bad about not supporting a tradition and process as important as a printed newspaper. Titles like "front page" or "editorial section" mean so much, as many a scoundrel of a public servant met his end from a fearless press.

Weeks ago in a deluge from *The Wall Street Journal*, the business section featured an article and two photographs on the drouth. Included was a photograph of a baby Angus calf on a frozen pond in Iowa up on the Minnesota border. A herder is out on the ice after the calf. Momma cows, black and Angus, watch in the background.

It seems this Iowa chap bought the cows last August, about the time of final liquidation at the ranch on the Divide. He told the reporter he bought the cattle in hopes of making three or four hundred dollars a pair once the cattle calved. But, (and this "but" is in everybody's cow story,) word spread that the Texas cows calved at the wrong time for Iowa.

In a quote, not available here, he said further that the buyers learned to tell the out of country cattle, or words to that effect. He, the Iowa farmer in the photograph, was forced to winter and calve in the snow and ice. No quotes were necessary as to how determined he was to save that baby calf on an iced-over pond.

The pond could have been in Texas a few winters ago. The herder could have been any of us. The saddest part was that those cows in the background could have been the five year-olds we hung onto until the final surrender.

The only part of the article that was obviously a mistake was where the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers were quoted saying the average age of ranchers in Texas was 58 years old. The cow herders association is mistaken. Herders still alive from the drouth in the 1950s aged that many years in the seven-year dry spell. Were they to tooth the graybeards left from that dry holocaust, they'd have to hire an archeologist experienced in aging mummies from the pyramids.

Alone with the newspaper, I cursed under breath: "By gawd, ol' sport of a Wall Street sheet, haven't you enough heart not to run the picture of a set of black cows that could have been raised on a drouth-stricken ranch in Texas? Ones that could have been birthed in front of his ranch

house from first-calf heifers. Could have been pulled by the chains hung in his saddle house? Oh well, to hell with you; no northern press can come across harder than a Texas drouth."

Those probably were not my cows in the photograph, unless hollow horns behave better up on the Minnesota border. If they'd been our bloodline, the ol' momma would have drowned going after her calf. Not because of the cause of motherhood, but because the law of cattle economics says every time an old sister expires, the per-head amount of mortgage increases.

In closer circles, it's known by the strange saying: "In the cow game, the wheel spins in one direction and the ball goes the other way, and never will the two meet. That must have been lifted from a roulette table, except playing roulette offers better odds than a cow-calf game. (Charge minus five points for the try).

On one of the days last week after the showers and a snow, I drove up the county road through the old ranch and across the railroad at Pumpkin Center on to Crockett County Road 209. On and off all the way, thin cows stopped eating cactus in case the pickup might be a feed wagon - a handout. Six or seven hairball calves grazed close to the

right of way fence. Deer stood their ground partially out of sight in the brushy railroad right of way.

On purpose, I drove past the ranch house to the Middle Well in the Devil's River Pasture. There alone the thought came clearly: The only ticket out of this drouth is sheep. Not a hollow horn born who can pull you or any other herder out of this wreck.

Recall you raised wool and lambs in the 1950s and 60s to pay off the losses on the cattle up in Kansas. Come clean; admit you can't run sheep. Coyotes and bobcats are too thick. Look up at that shut-off windmill that you worked on as a kid. You and that mill are a thing of the past.