

Last two years of the Big Boss's life, he built a stable by his ranch house to train polo horses. Part of his training program was to sit in the shade after nap time and watch the two hands breaking young horses.

On the occasions when a summons came to report on the livestock operation – a secondary matter to a horseman – I joined as a spectator. Always, he concluded by saying, "Son, I won't be in my grave a week before you are doctoring bitterweed sheep in my horse stalls and spraying cattle in my breaking corral."

He was wrong. Took us 60 days to line the horse corrals to hold sheep and calves. Was the next winter before the stalls became a detox-clinic for bitterweed sheep. As I recall, the weed was plenty strong that winter. Most of our patients were discharged to be dragged behind the hill on the end of a rope tied to a saddlehorn.

Wish the boss had been around the end of May to see the finale of my sheep addiction. Late on a humid 90-degree afternoon, the last hoof of my last lamb crop and my last solidmouth ewe walked onto the truck.

Shipped the sheep on the new formula of hiring twice too many trucks to compensate for having half enough help. At each loading point, we had too many for one truck and too few for two trucks. But a race was on to move the woolies before the speargrass matured to pierce their

hides, the torrid heat melted their bloom, stomach worms took a toll, and the prickly pear apples ripened into a thorny dessert to ruin their mouths.

Twenty years ago – no, 10 years ago – we'd called Morales's shearing crew to peel the lambs, given the old ewes a shot of drench during shearing, and bet on which would be worse, a dry summer or a drenching operation every 21 days. Were enough pastures free of prickly pear to shift the worst cases to safety. By the time the drouth abated, however, we only had water lots to reform the addicts.

Harold Henson, who hauled for us for so long, affected my decision to quit running sheep. Takes special talent to load sheep. He was the best. All the time we gathered into traps, I'd ride along, swatting gnats, thinking, "Guess old Harold and his wife are riding the train across Canada, sitting up in the observatory car sipping lemon sodas, looking at glaciers roll by."

A little while later, opening a gate where we'd talked so many times: "Bet old Harold and Mrs. Henson are at the Preakness, watching the horses exercise, sitting in a cool box, dressed in sporty race horse clothes." Ride a little farther, then cleaning the sweat from my glasses: "Be just like those lucky skunks to be in the Rockies, wearing matching red cashmere sweaters, cooking thick beef steaks over the ashes of a campfire."

First weekend before shipping, the new trucker reported he was going to have to go to California. Had a

short answer for him: "All right, by gosh-a-mighty, go to California Sunday, but you better have your double-decking, chain-booming being at the Woodward corrals at 7 a.m. Monday, or you're going to think the state of California crumbled off into the Pacific Ocean and fell on your truck." (I was upset at the moment.)

"Wait just a minute, Monte," he said, "Harold is going to drive my truck."

Right back, I snapped, "Harold can't drive. He sold out and is in Kentucky or Canada, unless he's going to commute between the Woodward pens and there."

"Cool down, Monte," was his reply, "Harold's been helping me ever since he retired."

Monday morning, Harold came driving an old red truck over the same rough, brushy road to the Woodward pens, pulling a straight deck across the sharp curves. We loaded two decks of ewes and lambs in one hour and five minutes, or some 20 minutes over our record at the headquarters a few years back.

Lost part of the time explaining that I was selling my horse and saddle and would patronize riding academies for my tack and mounts if I wanted to go back to work. Now knowing how Angelo truckers retired, I was going to follow the same pattern. Emphasized that I was plenty disappointed about quitting just as he was starting all over again.

The morning after shipping, I walked across a sheep trail in the horse trap. Tracks were still fresh. The day

before, a black bull tore down the alley used to sort lambs. Horehound weeds had already blocked the crowd pens leading to the shearing pens.

Don't know where to find the money to winter my old cows now that the sheep are gone. Might try a turn opening the gates for one of the retired truckers over in town..