

JULY 13, 1978

Every Fourth of July, Goat Whiskers the Younger and the neighbors on the east throw a barbeque down on the river at Mertzon. Folks turn out real good for the occasion. Roasted cabrito and cold beer draw citizens from San Angelo and other stations in spite of the grandiose rerun extravaganzas that CBS offers over the holidays.

Many years ago I became a heavy supporter of these affairs. When we had all eight children at home, any sort of open end buffet style feed was a mighty useful way to blend our crowd into a gathering without being noticed. For the price of, say a green bean and onion salad covered in cellophane, we could unleash a force of eight kids that'd turn the soda pop tub into a hot spot and put the barbeque pits under heavy guard.

I learned that the hosts would fall for the same story every year. Along about the end of shearing in May, I'd casually mention that we had plenty of kid goats at the ranch. Maybe drop a line that we'd need a little help to pen them as they were running in a five section pasture.

Avoiding the beer pool wasn't any problem. Goat Whiskers the Younger always got so excited about showing off his wholesale privileges at the distributor that by the time he got around to collecting, the collateral was gone and most of the customers felt so bad that the biggest finance company west of the Mississippi River couldn't have squeezed a downtown bus token off the whole crew.

This year, Child Who Sits in the Sun was out of town on the fourth. I was worn out from feeding her canary birds and watering her pot plants. She has enough wandering vines to be taxed by the water district. I've often wondered why she didn't design an irrigation system with an indoor water wheel if she liked having a home jungle for a hobby. I found a Victrola of my grandmother's over in one corner that I'd forgotten we owned. It had about 17 square feet of ferns covering the lid and the speaker. Leaf fungus and root rot had already ruined the turn table and four of the records.\

However, it's a good thing I did go to the party. One old boy was telling a story about being so busy thumping watermelons in his garden once that he nearly thumped a rattlesnake on the head. The other hombres listening to the tale had been so enthralled by their own snake stories that they weren't paying attention. Everyone of them knew how silly a rattlesnake is about his head, but I was the only one in the group with enough gumption to warn the fellow. I don't guess there's anything on this earth as touchy about their ears, their eyes or their fenners as a rattlesnake. I gave him a good lecture. I don't know whether it helped, but it sure won't be my fault if he thumps another snake on the head.

Being by myself, I had a chance to observe the celebration in a different light. I didn't see any ugly Americans or decadent Americans celebrating a gaudy Forth. I saw a bunch of fine fibered, High quality human beings celebrating our country's birthday in a dignified manner.

I was so carried away that I gave old Whiskers \$4 to pay on the beer. It doesn't hurt to let down a little on a special occasion. I just hope he doesn't expect it next year.