

4-H Show Circuit Teaches Kids More Than Mere Livestock Lore

By Monte Noelke

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MERTZON — I Just realized this week that only one of our kids was in college. The oldest of our seven boys had been gone nearly all winter, making the stock show circuit. He'd been absent so much that I'd lost track whether he was still in high school, or circulating in the protest league. We don't have a formal muster call around the house, so you never can be sure if the count is long or short. About the only way to tell how many are on hand is to make a rough estimate of the amount of incoming and outgoing telephone calls.

Nowadays the stock shows teach the club boys more than they used to. A country boy can get a lot of lessons, darting back and forth across the state. The shows are scheduled close together. County agents bed down the exhibitors in one place one night and perhaps 500 miles from here the next day. Gasoline and tire expenses figures heavily in the modern program. Only the circus offers a more mobile existence.

My son got his biggest break down at the Houston show. Way late one night, an armed burglar took charge of the room he was sharing with the county group. By daylight, at the formative age of 18 years old, he knew what it was like to wake up broke in a strange city.

The stick-up man wasn't performing a public service for youth organizations. Nevertheless, he taught those boys there were other ways to lose watches beside leaving them on the banks of swimming holes, and different methods of losing money than standing on the wrong side of a carnival booth.

After the news of the robbery reached here, the whole community was upset to hear that Houston was a shabby enough city to harbor crooks so dirty that they'd rob 4-H Club boys. Everybody acted surprised that the home of the Astrodome could also be the nesting place of a bunch of small time louts.

The episode shouldn't have shocked anyone, except may be some lonesome shepherd in Northern New Mexico.

I was down in Houston last fall. Without ever being confronted by a gunman, I was stuck \$2 at breakfast for a couple of underdeveloped pullet eggs. Rooms the size of a small bed tarp were costing \$20 a night. The local newspaper was openly heralding that the city was going to be a close runner-up in the nation's unarmed robber contest.

Every time a customer rolled up to stop at the motel, an attack on his pocketbook was started that would have made an old time highwayman ashamed of the human species. And during the entire process. I didn't see any distinction made regarding the age of the victims. Old folks or toddlers were handed the same price list as the rest of us.

Moneywise, it doesn't make a bit of difference whether a robber is poking a gun at you or a waitress is sticking a menu in front of your face. The ending is the same. Guns are, of course, more dangerous, but medical journals aren't complimentary of restaurant ptomaine poison, either.

One last thing that does need to be said in behalf of the kids. They must have been mighty smart money managers to have anything left for a bandit to steal.