

JUNE 13, 1974

You can put it down on permanent file. Big hearts cause big trouble. All my life I've been too generous. It'd be a multi-stroked catastrophe to transplant my heart to another person. He wouldn't be out of the hospital before he'd be picked cleaner than a crow's toenails. I'd hate to see my worst enemy in that sort of jam.

Take for instance what happened over the weekend. Two of my compadres threw a big barbeque at their ranch. Three days before the gathering, the one in charge of solid refreshments called to ask me to help gather the chuck it'd take for 30 or 40 people for Saturday and Sunday. Like the big hearted sap that I am, I agreed. He wasn't asking for donations; he was enacting a friend-to-friend surtax.

I had to think fast. He knew we had some fat goats. Also, some blabbermouth at the cafe had told him we'd just butchered a beef. So for openers, I offered to bring a big sack of gooseneck squash. As openers generally are on such transactions, he rudely rejected the deal.

The next idea, however, worked like a steamfitter's wrench. To divert him from cabrito and steak, I hit his weakest point. I told him if he'd furnish the hominy and seasoning, I'd bring the rest of the ingredients for a big pot of son-of-a-gun stew. (for the few who don't know, this stew is a dish made of beef byproducts, ranging from the brains to the marrow gut.)

It was too much to offer. Offal is a high priced commodity. Butcher shops try to sell everything that'll lie still on the scales. I had the liver and sweetbreads from the fresh killed beef, but I still was stuck with buying the heart and the milts.

It doesn't surprise me at all, the way folks fuss about meat prices. Can you imagine a pound of heart costing 79 cents or a package of milts (that's a delicate way of saying the spleen) costing a dime?

Those confounded packers and butchers think they are being cheated if they don't sell everything from the tracks on the kill floors to the echoes roosters make in their cages. I tell you, a man can get cheated so fast in this age that the action will burn the lines from his checkbook. I never thought of spending that much money. By the time I counted the gasoline, I still had to do the cooking.

After making that contribution, I didn't feel obligated to bring anything else. I mentioned several times that the stew was courtesy of old Noelle. The crowd seemed unimpressed.

You know how ungrateful some people can be. If the good Lord had intended for us to eat free son-of-a-gun, He'd have made a river or two that flowed the wonderful brew. What was ailing that bunch of unappreciative wretches was the strain that the cow market was putting on their gratitude glands. You know it's plenty hard to be thankful when the wolves have knocked down the door and eaten the latch string. But they could have muttered a thank you.

In my last will and testament there's going to be a clause forbidding the executor to donate my brain or heart to mankind. As tough as this old world is. 19th Century thinking and Christian charity are a sure shot path to the poor house. Clinics don't accept the brains from herders, but you never can tell when there'll be a slip up.

As for my friends, they are going to be mighty ashamed when they see my hungry widow and disappointed heirs leaving the church house. All those dollar bets and swindles they've put over throughout the years are going to flash across their troubled minds.

They're going to remember the IRS allowing my gambling debts to be deducted as bad business judgment, and they'll be mighty sorry when they find out how much it costs to make a pot of son-of-a-gun stew.