

MARCH 24, 1983

All around my makeshift office, people are busy disassembling the booths and displays that have been part of the San Angelo Fat Stock Show for the past four days. Tension is high among these folks. They are so tired that a mashed toe might set off a full fledged riot. The crowds have thinned to a few exhausted mothers dragging lame kids that I'll bet by tomorrow are going into withdraws from eating so many snow cones and cotton candy canes.

My part of the show has been to help the Council on Alcoholism sell chances on a TV set. Once I was a small time burial insurance salesman, so the chance to bring back the old hustle under the cloak of charity is exciting for me.

The hardest cases have been the young families driving baby buggies and herding a child or so by their sides. Every time I get a whiff of Johnson's baby powder or see a diaper bag, it tears me to pieces.

In the old days, we used to bring all eight of our children to the rodeo grounds. We'd have an awful tussle, loose herding them away from the balloon salesmen and the hamburger stands. Money was so tight that I kept packing the youngest boy past the ticket takers until he weighed 95 pounds and had a regular job after school. The world's record for the same stunt was a 101-pound freeload kid that a lady carried into a car race up in Michigan. I lacked six pounds breaking her record. However, by the time we got back to the ranch at nights my boy would have probably outweighed the champ.

Grandpas and grandmas make the easiest prospects. Fifty-year-olds get so exhausted from lifting kids on hobby horses and pulling them out of bumper cars that they'll buy a chance on a TV set just for the opportunity to rest their elbows on the counter. I've seen several cases today that'd overmatched themselves with a favorite grandchild. It's far too late now to change the grand prize. But I think next year I'll recommend that we auction off a play pen at mid point in the show. From the looks of my last customers, I think they'd have gone for any kind of holding pen.

The most common objection to my pitch was the dodge that they already had four television sets at home. "Four" seemed to be the golden number. I finally got so sorefooted that I began to tell these multi-owner folks that I'd as soon they go watch their four screens and leave room for the less fortunate. One old gal topped them all by claiming she didn't donate money to strangers. I told that firecracker of a rodeo fan that she wasn't going to get my name for a mere dollar.

At closing time I watched a lady leading her three children slowly up the aisle. She'd pause at each exhibit to give them a chance to squeeze a bit more from her love and care for them. It doesn't matter what era it is, it's mighty rough on young couples to pay off baby doctors and buy baby food. The cause I helped is a worthy one, but as much as I love to be a peddler, I don't think I'll ever so back and try to raise any money at a fair.

I didn't get a chance to see whether the lady that avoided strangers got her money spent. One thing about it, until about 30 minutes ago there were plenty of us around ready to make her friendship.