

JULY 31, 1980

At this time, I'm at the Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers' convention in Kerrville. The innkeeper that loaned me a typewriter thinks that I'm writing a story about her motel. Landladies, either big league or boarding house style, have a warm streak in their bodies about a half-inch wide. If that old sister ever learns that I failed to brag on her beauty rest or neglected to mention her swimming pool, the settlement on the typewriter ribbon alone will be too much for the Fifth Federal District Court to decide.

It's late at night on the last day of the convention. Motels thump and make gurgling sounds instead of creaking like hotels do. All the herders and their wives are out at the Country Club at a buffet and dance. Writing time is short because once the party is over the silence will end.

I don't mind the commotion that comes after these parties. The bad thing about trying to sleep around a bunch of woolie operators is knowing what terrible nightmares they have. Long ago I stopped sharing a room with my colleagues. Everyone of them, from the executive secretary to the directors, spend so much time testifying in hearings and fighting to keep the industry from being literally eaten up by coyotes and eagles that their dreams are worse than the hallucinations that plague old soldiers and prizefighters.

In case you don't know, I'd better tell you that the remaining sheep men in the United States are as tough a band of fighters as exist. I think one reason the government misunderstands the business so bad is that the lobbyists that come from the lanolin and mutton game must make them think General Motors is backing their action.

I never cease to be astounded at the way these boys are unable to overcome the odds of the cloakrooms. Had the present day sheep man represented even a moderate sized industry, he'd have made the concept of balance of power look like a bad joke.

But that doesn't mean I like risking my major nap of the day in a motel filled with shepherders. After one of their gatherings, hotel maids have to get jigsaw puzzle experts to untangle the bed sheets. I remember sleeping with an old boy off a big outfit in Montana that'd do a sitting act. Along about three in the morning, he'd slowly rise up in the bed and start paddling like he was in a canoe. Frantic, hard paddling, too. I suppose he was re-enacting the course of his life. It was a perfect pantomime of a man trying to make his way upstream in a birch bark, using a limber oar. I'm no dream analyst, you understand, but I do know something about the sheep business.

One new feature of the convention has been the addition of an oil and gas seminar. I attended two sessions, mainly because I figure that the people interested in making oil and gas leases will end up having some money this fall to maybe buy a few solid mouth ewes or perhaps a load of cows. Items, which needless to say, are much heavier on my list of problems than leasing any land for oil will ever be.

I made quite a show of being concerned about their taxes and overrides. In case any of them do hit a gusher, I wanted them to be sure and remember that old Noelke was on their team back before their oil bonanza arrived.

Some time or the other, the sheepman is going to win the reward he deserves. The unfairness and the injustice of the past 30 or 40 years are going to be wiped away. It's too bad that so few know how hard he's worked. His efforts would be an inspiration to all.