

1SHORT.DOC 2-1-96

Seven unpapered aliens passed north of the ranch on the coldest day we were to have in December. They walked 10 days before taking a chance of asking for food and shelter. The leader knew the ranch country, but found the people gone who once fed the southern foot soldiers.

Over three years have passed since a Mexican stopped at our outfit. From time to time the Border Patrol at Del Rio report mass crossing of illegal aliens, however, the trails across country changed after employment became against the law. In the 1950s and on to the next decades, at least 50 or 60 men a month passed down the railroad by the ranch looking for work. The big drouths in Mexico brought such heavy influxes in the 1960s, the kitchen at the Old Ranch often used 50 pounds of flour a week supplying the transients meals and tortillas for their lunches.

The blame for my yard fence toppling over and the flower beds dying off has been waiting for the immigration laws to change. The heavy office load of running a bitterweed sheep and a sometime cow and calf operation destroys the muscles necessary to dig or bend over on the ground. Sitting at a desk subtracting feed bills, adding on insurance premiums, and deducting taxes discourages doing manual work and encourages rocking in a recliner in front of the Wheel of Fortune show on the TV channel.

Jerking the unpapered guys away from us so quick didn't give us time to loosen up enough to dig postholes or shoe horses. Indoor gym equipment flexes the body, the TV advertisements claim, but who wants to be a rubber man unable to hold himself erect? Also, the male physique develops differently than females. The first part of my walks in Mertzon lead past the teacherage of the school district. The other day I watched a young mother scoop up a kid on her hip in the street and pick up six pecans before she made it back to her front door. Had her husband bent over that deep carrying a 30 pound child to pick up a pecan, the stars swimming in front of his eyes would look like the screen on a rocket ship headed for the moon.

The objections to working wets are dim in my memory. I do recall a worthy rising in the House to declaim that prohibiting the employment of illegal aliens meant ruination to every mom and pop operation in America. His name is lost in the passage of time. Nevertheless, I suspect the "mom" he referred to was his wife over in Georgetown, working a wet Mexican maid and cook to keep from straining her back pushing a vacuum cleaner, or shoving a pack of mean kids out in the backyard to play. And the ruination part was going to be the lifting of "pop's" scalp if he and his colleagues took away her help.

We were so frantic repairing the outside fences using a wet crew of men before the law passed, half the mom and pop operations in Texas may have closed without us being aware of them. About the only contact with the outside world then was buying camp groceries and mailing money off to Mexico.

I think when the "pop" end of this operation became threatened was the first shearing season the captain failed to have enough extra help to put up the wool, and we were too short-handed to round up the sheep. I don't remember "ruination" being the key word. I think "damnation" was in the forefront.

After the law became effective, all the unpapered action centered on construction sites and minimum wages around the hotels and restaurants. This was to be my last opportunity to speak Spanish in the U.S. Several times, I asked bus boys for tips on cabs, or food places. Sheratons and Marriots must not be such a bane to the country's immigration balance as ranchers and farmers are.

Politicians still blab about closing the borders. New proposals are even more strict than old ones. The raises Congress granted themselves cover other sources for nannies and cooks. All the worthies have to guard against on the domestic scene is some nosy newspaper scribe discovering a missing social security payment on \$50 worth of babysitting.

No new laws need to be passed on my account. The best bunkhouse burned down six years ago and the one other shack is too far gone to house anything but mice and termites. Old saddles hanging in the shed are half-rigged, and maybe one extra bridle remains.

I miss sitting out in the yard on a summer evening talking to those little guys from Monclova and Allende. Before Christmas, a friend invited me over to meet his guests from Mexico. How good it felt to share the warmth and humor of a forbidden culture...

OmniPage #1
OmniPage #2
OmniPage #3
OmniPage #4
OmniPage #5
OmniPage #6
OmniPage #257
OmniPage #258
OmniPage #259
OmniPage #260
OmniPage #261¶
Tms Rmn
Symbol
Courier New