

Research On Rural Bachelors Is Harder Work Than Bird Watching

By Monte Noelke

5-27-65

Page 10

MERTZON, Texas — For several months I've been brooding about making a survey of jet-age rural bachelors and their dwellings. My hope was that if I could assemble significant data regarding their habits, opinions, and other persona characteristics, some Washington agency would surely buy my findings.

To tell the truth, I figured that selling the study would be easier than putting my finger on one of these representatives of the free world, because, as everybody knows, bachelors range over a large scope of country. Unwedded men are prone to be up in the North Woods one day and hurrying to take the waters on the Gulf Coast the next.

Another drawback to this research project is that bachelors with any age on them at all do not trust anybody who lives in the married state. They have fought off the match-making instinct of their fellow men (and women) until they are indeed a difficult group to infiltrate. I understand, however that "solateros" do trust cats and dogs and in fact are known to be quite fond of them.

Not only are bachelors unreasonably shy and suspicious, they are declining in number. Some sociologists believe that if the rumored development of a vapor-like tranquilizer is added to the already potent feminine perfume industry, by 1980 bachelors old enough to vote will be extremely rare.

Nevertheless, I knew two rural single men who lived not far away. I thought that, with any luck at all, I might trap one of them if they were approached in a kindly, gentle, understanding manner.

The first one was far too "coyote" to catch in the daytime, and a man my age has no business going around places that he frequents at night. So I settled for the second prospect, who lives on a ranch nearby.

Upon arriving at his outfit, I quickly perceived that batching today is in no wise similar to the old days of a shotgun house where a cat often had her kittens, or an old hen might raise a bunch of chicks. The modern bachelor setup is a far cry from the old-timey affairs wherein the resident could get by for years on a box of soap powders, a mop and a broom.

The interior of this house did not feature oilcloth and cane-bottom chairs. Instead, it had a gleaming tiled kitchen. In the living room were such things as a cocktail table and paintings on the wall. Though I can't tell a J. Frank Dobie from a J. Evetts Haley, I knew enough about art to tell these pictures hadn't been torn off last year's calendar.

After my subject-host had poured coffee and we'd completed the usual palaver about weather, I disclosed the purpose of my visit.

I'll believe to the day I die that if I hadn't used the phrase "sell the survey to the government," my study would have had downhill sledding.

If bachelors in general are as sensitive as this one, take my advice and don't ever use the word "government" in their presence — that is, unless you are on the first week of your vacation and have nowhere else to go.

You would have thought I had criticized his Neiman-Marcus brick entranceway, or made a snide remark about his oriental wallpaper, the way he carried on.

"'Government,' he said, "Don't use that word in my house! I've had all the government I want for this year, next year, and for that matter until hell is frozen solidier than a diamond."

Before I could ask the first of my prepared questions, he launched a pitiable tale of trouble.

"I am so sick of the Federal Government, he ranted, "if I were younger, I'd gladly take a boat to Australia. Last week a federal judge had me and five other ranchers come to Del Rio to appear as witnesses in a wet Mexican trial. If you have never spent five or six hours sitting on a hard bench outside a federal courtroom, you may still think diving out of airplanes is frightening business.

"This judge had all of us down there simply to lecture us for working wets. I suspect he knew full well there isn't enough space in all the courtrooms in Texas to hold the farmers and ranchers that have worked mojudos, but he talked to us as if we were the sole offenders."

From this point on, the bachelor raved as if the rest of us employers of wets didn't appreciate his representing us before that federal judge. Nothing could be further from the truth, of course, because there are dozens of men in this very county who were pleased as punch that this bachelor was brave enough to make the trip to Del Rio. After all, any cause that has ever amounted to anything has had to produce a martyr.

Eventually he began to regain control, but by that time it was futile for me to try to assemble any percentage figures on whether bachelors use salt or sugar on their grapefruit. Except for the conclusion that bachelors are far too sensitive to endure little chats with federal judges, my survey was at a standstill. I made preparations to leave, hoping some U.S. marshal wouldn't knock at the door before I got off the premises.

At this writing I am still wondering about making the survey. Perhaps by fall, if this bachelor will follow the judge's kind advice and abstain from hiring wets, he will have settled down so that I can yet get my research off the ground.