

OCTOBER 27, 1977

Squirrels in front of the ranch house have stooped to storing dry dog food for the winter. Buzzards took off for the southlands in such a rush that they left some of their work undone. Mexican cowboys claim they have heard geese passing through in the night. Signs and sounds point toward a hard spell for the Shortgrass Country.

Rains over the weekend put our fall total to .7 of an inch. I've sold all the heifer calves and most of the ewe lambs. If I'd known we were going to get the half inch on top of the two-tenths in August, I'd have been buying instead of selling replacement stock.

1977 has been a bad year without counting the fall drouth. grass fires made August a nightmare that'd spoil a honeymoon trip within earshot of Niagara Falls. Water wells failed in the water sand districts and cisterns cracked and broke in the dry areas. Old men suffered from the dry weather that didn't move to the cities wasted their vigor fighting fires and propping up burned down fences.

Everything was wrong. My neighbor Goat Whiskers the Younger and myself stretched our luck into a terrazo tile business in Mexico. Just by accident, we found out that you'd have to drive clear to Dallas to beat the price at the Mexican factory.

The Mexican border, you see is 90 miles closer than Dallas. We figured that we'd go in the game over \$14 a load ahead on freight. Nobody we knew wanted any terrazo tiles, but nobody we knew this side of the Northwest Territory wanted any cattle either.

One trip ruined our partnership. We skinned the Mexicans so bad that I expected the Secretary of State to intervene. We avoided the border watering spots with a zeal that'd make a riverside church camp look like a nest for sinners. I'd already selected a name for the business. It was going to be called "International Tile and Associates," All the advertising was going to be directed toward vegetarians and other decent folks that wouldn't be boycotting out tile because it cost more than 89 cents a pound. Whiskers and I both agreed that we weren't going into anything else that had four feet and four stomachs. We could hardly wait to get that load of tile back up to Mertzon in order to own something that didn't have to eat grass and bawl all winter long. Whiskers said the first thing he was going to do after we unloaded was go down to the drugstore and buy his wife a wristwatch for Christmas. I felt so good that I told him to go on and pick up a curling iron for my wife and charge it all to the company.

The buying spree ended before it really began. The Mexican Immigration charged us 44 pesos for bringing the trailer back. Our own government stuck us \$27 for bringing the tile back in the same trailer. Whiskers was hungry for some Chinese food that cost \$13 plus the tip. I'd lost my appetite by then, but I did rally enough to eat a few of the egg noodles that fell from the basket.

Our luck is going to change. Not every year will be like '77. Once the half inch soaks into the ground, the old country will respond I sure wish the tile business had worked. I'd like to have seen Old Whiskers giving his wife that watch.