

DECEMBER 7, 1978

My cousin Goat Whiskers the Younger has been on the prowl for several months. Mrs. Whiskers is over in San Angelo sending the kids to school. Young Whiskers uses his freedom to ride a chuck and coffee line that must cover a big part of the Shortgrass Country.

Nearly anytime I talk to him, he mentions having had supper at old so-and-so's house, or dinner over at such-and-such outfit. The stories sound more like a visiting preacher's than a herder's. Whiskers has put on a nice gain to go into the winter. Gasoline, so it seems, is his biggest expense.

I've begun to respect his methods. He carries a thermos cup in his pickup. At each stop he fills it up. Whenever he leaves, he replenishes his drink with whatever beverage the hour dictates. Coffee during the day and the more lively refreshments in the evening.

Whiskers must save \$7 or \$8 a day by being such a gregarious chap. I see his pickup parked on a regular route. I don't think he ever has to fix a pot of coffee at the ranch. It looks to me like he's underwriting a substantial amount of his town house expense just by turning a cheap beggar's stunt into what's practically amounting to a local tax for his friends.

Once or twice a month he reestablishes himself by bringing a sack of donuts by my house. Child Who Sits in the Sun and my boys are fond of sweets. By playing the discount house sales, Whiskers is able to exchange a sack of hiney coats into an open-ended happy hour that makes the graft in the Bowery look like the bums have appointed an ethical committee on handouts.

I'm not that excited by donuts. Figured on the price of groceries and liquor today, the chance to buy donuts at, say, \$3.75 a piece ranks in line with my enthusiasm for a job carving faces on Mt. Rushmore on the contingency that President Carter is going to reimburse me later on. Maybe not that low, but somewhere in that range.

Whiskers' act never seems to wear thin. I'll be standing down by the post office and some strange lady will walk up and say, "Your little old cousin was by had supper with us the other night," or, "I got the chance to feed one of your family the other day." I don't suppose they ever notice that he's 6ft. 3 and weighs in stones what the French and the English consider above and beyond their standard of measure, or that the word "chance" isn't related or applicable to a well organized ring of freeloaders that deliberately feast off the land.

But like I started out saying, you have to respect him. As bad as inflation is, a man has to do a lot of hustling to keep from facing where his ends are meeting. Mrs. Whiskers gave him a set of thermos cups last Christmas, so she approves of the deal. Charity begins at home. This just happens to be the first time it's turned into a business.