

March 15, 1973

The green shirt and black hat crowd invaded San Angelo over the past weekend. Rodeoing and stock showing covered the Wool Capital. Motels and hamburger joints did a terrific business. The fair, I feel sure, was a big success.

School attendance must have reached a record low level. Schoolmarms got a good rest after they filled out the absent slips. There wasn't a place in town that wasn't filled by youngsters.

The 1973 Model 4-H and F.F.A. kids were certainly an improvement over the ones that circulated in my stock show days. These modern boys and girls are handsome as young pine trees.

In the early 1940s the stock show crowd had all the sheen of a weathered corncob. Most of the prodigies of that era were as ugly as the sins of Bagdad. Beauty operators and barbers were taxed to their limits. It was about as rusty a crew as the Shortgrass Country ever assembled.

I don't remember exactly what year it was, some time along about then, the San Angelo merchants had to abandon the traditional beauty contests. Before it could be held, the sifting committee would disqualify all the contestants.

Livestock judges refused to work unless the exhibitors would face the other way. Mothers and fathers were so ashamed of the way their kids looked, the town constable had to force them to pose for the pictures of the champions.

I don't know what made us all so homely. Perhaps it was because that crop had been raised during the Big Depression. Water lilies lost their beauty in the 30s. Rose bushes, as I recall, looked like twin sisters to tumbleweeds. Hard times put a blight over the whole land.

Romance did blossom at the stock shows. One old kid from Mertzson became so stricken that he ran off and married a girl he met there. In a short time, however, they split up. I asked him why. He said that when he met her at the carnival, he thought the white on her face was cotton candy, but after he got her home, he learned it was shaving soap.

Years later I think he was sorry he didn't keep her, because another one he ended up with would have wilted a vase full of fresh flowers; the circus wouldn't have used her to water the elephants. I never did hear what happened to that whiskered gal he married first. She'd have made a good prospect for a bearded lady act. Man never does use his best judgment. She'd have paid her way on what she saved on rouge and face powder.

Back in those days things got so bad that the rodeo association finally had to buy insurance to guarantee that unclaimed stray kids would be picked up by somebody. Depression kids were hard to lose. Most of us had already had that old "I'll meet you at the gate" trick pulled on us. Hansel and Gretel would have been classed as amateurs in our generation.

Stock shows and rodeos always have been enriching experiences for young people. Many of them would never have learned to smoke cigars or chew tobacco, staying at home.

I like to watch the kids milling and eating their way through a stock show. Internal parasites in sheep or cattle would still be unknown if animals had been allowed to eat carnival food.

San Angelo's stock show is always in March, the best time of the year for a celebration. It's good for us all to get off the feed runs and go to town.

Young people have the most fun at the show, but there isn't a situation going when that isn't true.