

FEBRUARY 14, 1980

Thanks to our neighbor Goat Whiskers the Younger, we are down to one bred mare. I suppose it's the smallest number of mares to be on the ranch since it was fenced. My paternal grandfather topped out at 500 head of broomtails. Before the big drouth of the '50s, my late father had every trap and pasture overloaded with all kinds of horses. Until Whiskers terminated our breeding privileges, I'd started back into the game.

But Whiskers deliberately and intentionally put us out of the horse business.

I think I told you that We'd been running a few mares with his stallion for several years. It wasn't like we were taking advantage of him or his precious grass. I'd send the mares over in the fall and as soon as we finished shearing in the spring, I'd pick them up again.

All of the better stud farmers know and accept that breeding their friends' mares means throwing in a little free grass. I went through that when the Boss kept a stallion at the ranch. We figured the pasturage bill on a gestation-plus-one basis. After a mare had been on the ranch for a full term and her colt was a month old, we'd start to make gentle requests that the owner relocate his horse business elsewhere.

The longest I recall pasturing a mare was 15 years. Whiskers never had to keep my mares longer than 10 months a season. I thought we had a good arrangement. I'd brag on his horse everywhere I went. When we had company at the ranch, I'd point out the quality of the colts and how good the mares had wintered over at Whiskers' ranch. For a mere pittance of salt and grass, Whiskers and his horse were making a name for themselves.

Don't think I didn't try to compromise, once he made up his mind to cancel the deal. I offered without any cost to him whatsoever to buy a fine bacon type boar to compensate for the stud fees.

I told him if he ever wanted to go into the hog business that I'd stop ranching and go personally and find a hog to breed his sows.

All I was asking was to keep the mares over there until we quit feeding. You know what a nuisance an old mare can be, running through cattle and sheep on the feed grounds. Not to mention the damage they do stepping on little lambs and baby calves while running and pitching through the herd.

The best way to put his reaction was rude and uncharitable. I ended up having to sell the mares and all the colts. An era of my family's heritage was wiped out without a bit of help from anyone.

Old Whiskers can just keep his grass and his stud horse for all I care. When these horses for all riding get old, I'll sell the ranch. I am not going to be beholden to a fellow that stingy. He's going to feel mighty bad when he sees how he's hurt my feelings, but he'll feel worse than that when hogs go to a dollar a pound.