

FEBRUARY 24, 1983

An hombre in a doctor's waiting room in San Angelo the other day claimed that medical scientists had learned how to make a windpipe for humans from a cow's intestine. I didn't know the guy well enough to trust his accuracy. Folks break down so bad waiting on doctor's appointments that you couldn't depend on the founder of the Boy Scouts of America to tell the truth after he'd waited six or seven hours behind a pile of last year's magazines.

Under my questioning, the old boy did reveal his source of information as being a San Angelo fireman. So I figured that was at least enough background to tell you that medical scientists might be taking secondhand parts off old cows and putting them somewhere on old men that might have a hole in their windpipe.

In spite of my skepticism, and to be safe, when I did get in to see my doctor, I made her promise that she wouldn't ever graft anything on me that came off a cow. Like I told her, I don't want to swap any of my organs on the odds that a cow might have a better one. From the way cattle prices have fallen into pieces. In the past 30 years, a man would be better off holding on to a windpipe that had the bottom rusted out than he would having transplanted intestine that would stretch far enough to hold a five gallon bucket full of cow feed.

Furthermore, I don't want to be bellowing every time there's a whiff of cottonseed meal in the air, although I know plenty of herders that are silly enough about cattle to not only want to switch windpipes with them, but might very well order up a set of ears or a big hump to fit between their shoulder blades.

In my time, I've seen cowboys decorated with all sorts of red cowhides on their belts and boots. I don't recall ever seeing an arm tattoo related to a cow, but I think the only reason I haven't is because tattoo parlors are normally around circuses and seaports where the atmosphere leans heavily toward mermaid and sea snakes.

My doctor says she's never heard of the Windpipe transplant from cattle. I imagine those San Angelo firemen have a lot of spare time to concoct wild stories. I've been warned several times to put a huge discount on the yams that fire watchers spin While sitting in towers over the National Forest areas, so I suspect that a city fireman would carry the same handicap.

Until I know for sure that it's untrue, I'm going to watch for a transplant patient. It'd sure be a sight to see a little humpy blood transfused into one of those town fellows. For certain, the inventor of the idea didn't know much about cattle, or he'd have picked a hardier donor.