

MAY 8, 1980

After President Carter disrupted the money market I began to make regular visits to the banks in San Angelo. I gave you a report on the chilled air and the tense atmosphere around the jugs. What I didn't report, however, was the reason I was visiting so many banks. I wasn't going to cover the financial scene. I was going in hopes that some eager young banker might fall for covering what was looking like a mighty year on a mighty tough money situation.

Last week I completed the rounds by attending the stockholders' meeting of the Texas Production Credit Assn. in San Angelo. I didn't have much hope of that outfit falling for a deal as the whole bank is run by ranchers and farmers who would be hard to convince that 20 percent protein and 15 percent interest can be overcome by breeding an old cow or pasturing a wool blind sheep. But by past experience I knew that these gatherings were highlighted by short speeches and good food, so I was right on time for the morning meeting.

Around 250 herders and planters and their wives were gathered in a huge banquet room. I had a terrible time finding a place to sit. At a bank meeting you sure don't want to join some old boy who has just wasted a bundle of the jug's cash to dry sow a crop of early maize, or bet a wad of the bank's funds on a pen of feeder heifers that were going to lose a lot of cash.

As dry and hard as the weather was, as real winner was hard to choose in that bunch of men. I narrowed my choice by looking for hombres who had survived the awful drouth of the '50s. I sure wasn't going to sit close to any cattle feeders or feedlot operators. Swimmers that cross the English Channel on a steady breast stroke can't pack a load of sand on their back. I learned a long time ago to save the big hellos for feeders until the group was more private.

I'd barely got in my seat before the chairman relieved my agony. He called on the fellow to my right to give the invocation. Most of you are old enough to know that chairmen don't ask just anyone to lead the prayers. I suppose there's a little chance of a miscall being so blatant that the choice offends the One we ask all these blessings from, but it isn't too likely at a PCA meeting.

After the program was over I didn't have to worry about a dinner partner. My mother asked me to sit at her table. She's had a big change of heart toward her son from the days that the superintendent of the school at Mertzon had to force the mommas to claim their kids at PTA award banquets. We had a great time laughing and kidding about the past. I wasn't the only redheaded boy who ever suffered that fate. Lots of rusty-headed freckle-faced boys have been temporary orphans. So-called stage fright has made many a parent reluctant to stand up when they were called to acknowledge their child.

Good or bad times don't seem to shake the courage of the PCA group. Too many of their leaders have already been tempered by drouths and floods to be scared of a 10 month dry spell or a 90 day market slump.

I ate their rare beef with great gusto. "Made myself at home" is the way it goes in the books. I guess it was a waste to try to pick out the favorites. However, I did learn as I left the hall that the guy who said the prayers had received one inch rain the night before from a cloudbank that only dropped sprinkles on the rest of us.