

SEPTEMBER 5, 1974

Rain reports are varying from ranch to ranch. Private drouths are continuing to be the case in the Shortgrass Country. Some areas are still feeding from last winter. You never know whether a herder is humped up from market failure of the terrible combination of bad weather and the market collapse.

The turnout has made a big change in the outlook of the people. Last night, I was a cow promotion banquet sponsored by a ladies' organization. Banquet conversation, as you know, is normally as lively as an inquest, but something had broken the spell.

Across the table from Child Who Sits in the Sun and myself, two ladies were planning their future. Though their husbands were only about 40 years old, they were making detailed plans of partnering on race horses after their husbands had departed for the Beyond.

Now I don't mean they were casually discussing running horses. The one to my right had already picked a line of grey ponies at a New Mexico track that she was hotter to own than the richest dream a tout ever had.

I couldn't tell whether her husband was uncomfortable from hearing an outline of her widowhood or was merely suffering from the old starched collar and necktie misery. Surprise wouldn't have described his expression. It seemed she'd been talking the deal over for a long time. He just went rolling the mashed potatoes into the green peas as if he was used to the idea of his post-wake celebration being a conversation of a bunch of old cows into a stable of grey horses.

It upset me. Child Who Sits in the Sun doesn't make jokes. She was studying every word the other girls said. In the old days, her people preferred paint horses; nevertheless the bright colors of the track plus the slight difference between a grey and a pinto wouldn't be much difference. Ground glass is too easy to add to mashed frijoles to think that a horse's color would provide insurance. I began to notice my collar was getting too tight. White-eyed women should keep their humor in better control.

One short year ago, husbands were as precious as the fat calves that crossed the scales at fancy prices. Old gals were so lovey-dovey that it sort of embarrassed me the way they clung to their husbands.

Look how much it's changed; Open conversation about the expected joys of languishing at the tracks watching a grey horse break from the starting gate. Unconcealed anticipation of hearing the announcer shouting wildly that Widow So-and-So's grey horse had outrun the field. No shame and no regrets. Child Who Sits in the Sun took it all in word by word. On the way home, I refused several times to let her ride in the backseat of the car.

Cow prophets say the worst is yet ahead. However as you study the faith that the women have in the future it all can't be bad.

Oilmen are calling us patrons of Mission Impossible. Both fair and good weather friends will drop out of sight. I'll bet, however, that we surprise them all. Broke cowmen are nothing new. It's part of our game.