

SEPTEMBER 20, 1984

At the time of this writing, I am making notes on a tablet supported by an old magazine, at seat 3, row 8 of the Angelo sales barn. I have about 28 rows and that many dozen seats to choose should I care to move positions. It's late in the day. It'd be presumptions of me to say that most folks had gone home, because times are so unsettled that you can't tell where the citizens are bedding down. Midnight truck drivers and drouth-weary ranchers look the same at the morning coffee house sessions. The dry winds and dry waterholes have put a lot of Shortgrassers to wandering far into the nights.

The reason I'm here so late is to check off the ewe lamb portion of my drouth emergency de-stocking plan. When we shipped the mutton end of the lambs in August, I choose to hold back these lambs to cash in on the big boom I foresaw so clearly that the big September rains and the runaway sheep market were going to bring.

The lamb market did crest in August, and as you probably heard, we did have 2/16ths of an inch of scattered rain during the month, bringing our totals counting shade and cloud cover to 39/64th for the year. So I'm over here sitting alone, surrendering my replacement sheep and desperately hoping the small knot of buyers can stay around until they go through the ring.

As I came in, I noticed that a guy had set up a shop as a key maker and locksmith on the front parking lot. He has one of those stub-nosed little vans with all his tools and blank keys hooked on the walls. Mounted behind the two front seats was a battery powered fan to cool his hind legs. His blue cotton shirt was soft and unbuttoned at the collar. From what I could see of his britches, they were blousy and full like the pants that gypsy flamenco dancers are apt to wear to perform for tourists and other suckers that might give them a big hand and a bigger tip.

Apparently, he's a very democratic fellow as he was greeting one and all with a broad smile that invited them to join in on the big key and lock frolic that was enriching his life. I think I saw a gun and fishing pole rack inside the van, which might be a clue to his happiness. But whatever he had going, he sure seemed to be willing to carry his part of the load of life.

I don't think I have to tell you that the locksmith's lack of prejudice wouldn't stand out around a cattle sale. Ever since this market wreck met the weather failure, the "haves" have been separated from the "have nots" to an extent that'd make the social structure of the Great City of Boston look like the Daughters of the American Revolution had forgotten how many decks there were on the May. flower.

Less than 10 minutes after I'd investigated the locksmith, a man I'd known for 35 years couldn't call my first name. He sure couldn't have recognized my face unless he'd called the foam truck over at the firehouse to sweep away the cigar smoke he was blowing in it.

President Lincoln, you know, said that we were created equal But Mr. Lincoln had those thoughts before there were so many grades of ostrich skin boots and so many models of General Motor pickups. I bet the cigar smoker and the locksmith started out about the same time I signed my first note to buy that fateful first bunch of ewes.

It's too late in the game to change careers. There's not much around cattle sales that need locking up, nowadays, but I suppose amid all the distractions a lot of pickup keys are lost and misplaced.