

DECEMBER 4, 1986

The reason this report has been held back was to see whether more evidence might develop. The action took place way back in mid-July at the big international ram sale at Del Rio. My sister wasn't feeling well, so I took her down for the sale and a shopping trip across the Mexican border in hopes the change might revive her spirits.

Mexico was sort of dull and draggy, but the next morning when those Rambouillet dealers got their sale fired up, you'd have thought they'd imported a bunch of pit traders from the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, to fill the orders. In the first few minutes of the sale, a yearling buck broke all previous sale records by bringing \$10,000.

The auctioneer was thumping out a steady tune of 16 hundreds and harder thumps of 25 and 26 hundreds of dollars. We were sitting down close to the front with a neighbor of mine, trying to keep from being smothered down and trampled by the fury of the sheep buyers. Big exhaust fans were having a hard time overcoming the body heat from so much excitement. By private sign language, we'd let our neighbor know that we had two bucks marked to buy, and he'd shared his choices by letting us peek at his list. But it looked like the three of us had about as much chance as if we were taking part in the diamond market in Antwerp, Belgium.

Then suddenly a dead calm hit the barn. There in the middle of the ring was one of my choices. Before I could bid the auctioneer was closing him out at \$300 and asking my sister what my purchase number was. While we were digging around in her purse and my pockets, the next buck was being fought over by a party of Mexican ranchers and a group from up north. I think he brought four or five thousand. I really can't say as I was still digging around looking for my card.

Our other selections caused the same negative reaction from the audience and same swift close from the starters. I don't know what my neighbor paid for his, but mine was standing at \$325, or about \$1000 under the average of the sale.

I knew something was wrong. I motioned to my sister to meet me at the pickup. The bookkeeper had my sales slip on the top of the file. She took my check with hardly a word being exchanged, and the loading dock boys barely glanced at the checkout papers before they were running my two bucks down the alley.

I'd never paid out of a sale so fast. But only after I got inside the pickup did I realize that all those checkout people had been calling me by my neighbor's name. At the first stoplight we checked the bucks' ear tags and they corresponded to the numbers in the sale catalog.

We didn't stay around to ask questions. I'd wanted to go back and warn my compadre that something was wrong, but our getaway was working so smooth, I didn't want to break stride.

To this day I don't have an explanation. It doesn't look like that many people would have known what a hard winter we'd had in our neighborhood. I've never thought of papered sheep operators as being soft hearted.

So I've been holding off writing a report, thinking that maybe someone would blow their cover. The sale was a big success. It might be worth the trouble to go on and

file for a tax exempt status. I sure was surprised to find out that we'd qualified for a charitable donation.