

July 26 1973

On the morning this happened, loading conditions were perfect to haul a broken down washing machine. Dawn was barely breaking; the wind was just right to use our driveway for a loading chute.

I had two of my oldest boys to do the lifting. Nobody else was awake to give advice or block the doorways. It appeared that the fastest, smoothest appliance move in history was in the making.

Well, that isn't what took place. The boys carried the machine to the pickup. I'm the one who turned peace into pandemonium. Anybody my age should have known better than to go off and leave anything untied in a pickup that didn't have sideboards. Instead of going back into the house to drink coffee, I should have snubbed that sapsucker snugly and dallied to the tire rack.

While I was inside, the machine jumped out of the backend and did a belly flop on the concrete. I'd forgotten that it had never been hauled before outside of a crate. If it'd been the dryer, I could have got it to nearly jump into the truck. We've hauled that dryer to town so many times for repairs that it knows half the streets and all the appliance mechanics in San Angelo.

The doors slamming and the "I'll be go to helling" woke up everyone in the house. Springs and clips from the washer were spilled out on the ground. The lid was about six feet from the body. Porcelain was chipped and one hind leg was bent backwards.

I knew the neighbors weren't going to interfere. Although the racket was bound to have awakened them, they are plenty cautious about coming to my lodge. Squawmen sure don't have to worry about nosy neighbors or over ambitious peace officers. After the time my Indian wife hit me across the forehead with a piece of mud chain, we've had more privacy than the C.I.A. People go in for gory sports like football and ice hockey, but not many citizens can stand to watch an out-and-out battle when a red hostile is one of the principals.

It was an awful struggle to reload the machine. You know how crazy it makes something to break out. I'd rather roundup wild lizards in the heart of the South American jungle than to go on regathering operations. Some of the worst experiences I've ever had were caused by stuff that had jumped out of a corral or been allowed to break from the herd.

The next bad scene was at the outfit that repairs washing machines. A big old dumb kid started the misunderstanding. He just had to ask how the washing machine had been so thoroughly wrecked.

I might as well have tried to explain the incident to the back end wagon loaded down with clay. City folks must be kept in incubators until they are 16 years old.

Any sort of dumbhead ought to be able to understand that an untied washing machine can jump out of a pickup. Sailors aren't the only ones who need to know how to tie knots. We herders couldn't raise enough beef to make a six-pack of potted meat if we couldn't tie a bowline or a double half hitch.

I want to tell you something. I'm getting sort of edgy about the urbanites as it is. About four more of those phase IV deals and edgy isn't going to be adequate to express my opinion. Going around doubting that a washing machine can't jump isn't going to help, either. One of these days they are going to wake up wishing that peanut butter sandwiches were against the law and that somebody would sell them a bowl of meat gravy for six-bits an ounce.

Recovery date of the washing machine is indefinite. Blue jeans are stacking up in proportions that are beyond the imagination of anyone who has never lived in a house with seven boys.

My wife is back in one of those muttering moods that make the air so tense the television set blurs. Last night she took a swing at me with a dust pan that would have made a fencing instructor trip over his feet.

Modern conveniences can sure cause a lot of trouble. The next time I haul a washing machine to town, I'm going to have a catch rope handy.