

April 26 1973

Highway traffic indicates that the Shortgrass wool harvest has started. Shearing machines and shearers are bustling around nearly every morning. Buildups of empty beer cans on the county roads prove that large numbers of sheep peelers are on the move.

The opening of the season looks good. Stories are circulating of 12 drop machines that have as high as three shearers. Some rigs, I've heard, are turning out sheep in numbers that'd make the operator of a one-chair barbershop think he had lost his license.

Here at the ranch, we have a good chance of finishing what used to be a three day or four day job by the middle of June. It's going to take some luck and planning to get through that fast, yet I feel certain that by dividing an eight hour working day into five coffee breaks, the shearers will accomplish more than anyone thinks.

Mr. Nixon's war on inflation has certainly reduced shearing expense. Our captain is charging the same price per head that he charged last year. Incidental expense had triples, but I know of a few things that have barely doubled in cost.

I did have a bad break yesterday. A big discount house in San Angelo was selling hot dogs for nine cents apiece and giving away Coca Cola and popcorn. The morning paper came too late to gather up the shearing crew and take them in there for lunch.

Nine cent hot dogs and free cokes and popcorn would be a good way to break even on these boys that have been standing around the pens the past week. At that price, I could afford to have sacks of hotdogs everywhere. I sure was disappointed that I couldn't make that deal.

Most of the days have been spent sitting on the wool sacks and whittling. The old boy who drenches our sheep keeps me company. We've learned a lot in our idle time.

For instance, until the other day, neither one of us knew why shorn sheep breathe in the shearing pens faster than the woolies do. What happens is, these modern sheep shearers are such fierce blood-letters that the unshorn ewes hold their breath from fright.

I never would have figured that out, trying to stay up with a big crew. The boys over in Mertzon are doing a lot of laughing about this near circus we are carrying on; however they may not laugh so loud when they find out how smart I've become.

The early morning roundups have been our salvation from the long boresome days. Shortgrass sunrises during a green spring bring a charm that outreaches any of our other natural settings.

Blue quail herald the opening of the day. Bob whites sound their best in the morning stillness. Some sort of blackbird, I don't know his name, sings just like the prettiest note on a harp. He doesn't know much music, but what he does know is beautiful.

What wool that's brought in this year is going to be delivered at the expense of a lot of money and a lot of patience. I think the main reason that most of us are working so hard is to keep from leaving our children a bunch of unshorn sheep.

Modern shearing is a sorry mess at the best. The Good Shepherd would have a difficult time preserving his virtue now.