

It's Possible To Appear Rich Even If You Operate Ranch

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MERTZON — It was Sam Coleridge or Sam Johnson — or was it Sam Rayburn? — who said: “It is much easier to act poor when you are richer than all the Rockefellers combined than it is to act rich when you are so poor that you can't even arouse the suspicion of the Internal Revenue Service.”

Whichever Sam said it, he must have had 1965 in mind, because today the rich in this country can barely afford the symbols of wealth; and the poor are so exhausted from hearing politicians air their plight that they haven't the strength to care what their neighbors think.

We ranchers, who fit in none of the recognized economic classifications, can do little to create the aura of wealth. If we go around clad in raiment we can afford, or drive the sort of automobile our income will justify, the rest of society labels us as the eccentric tightwads. On the other hand, when we attempt to live up to the image that retired writers of fairy tales gave us many years ago, we are immediately tagged as nothing but a bunch of showoffs from Texas.

This leave us no choice but to create a part to play and then to practice the role until our act would make a recognized Shakespearean player blanch with envy at our performance. For the benefit of young people just getting into the ranch business, the following pointers are submitted:

The first step in creating the image of a rich rancher is to foster an air of mystery regarding your outside income. If possible, let it be inferred that our wife has such wealth that she could hire a scullery maid as rich as Mrs. Lyndon Johnson if she liked.

Your own portion of the ruse is accomplished by purchasing a single share of as many different dividend-bearing stock issues as you can rake up the money for. Each time you received the small dividend from one of these stocks, place the check in your shirt pocket and amble over to the crowd loafing at the post office. As quickly as possible, seize the floor and open a passionate lecture on the evils of big government taxing the men who own the country's corporations.

This will work only if you are careful to let the audience see the miserably small amount of the check. However, when properly executed, your little deception can quickly have the whole countryside on fire with speculation as to just how much you're really worth.

The allusion to your wife's wealth is even easier and requires no money. You put this ruse over by constantly seeking a chance to insert in your conversation such short phrases as “my wife's country down at ...” or “The strike at my wife's factory...” or “The crop at her lower plantation...”

You must completely disregard the truth and use these vague allusions even though your father-in-law may have been a worthless old lout who blew in every dime your mother-in-law made by taking in washing.

Your next move concerns your rolling stock. As anybody knows, if he's been as close to America as Ellis Island, citizens of this country respect the owner of a new car more than they do a two-time winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. Yet it is futile, in your case, to try to stay in the high priced, late model cars. Therefore, you merely purchase a membership in the local Antique Auto Association and, by pasting the organization's decal on your windshield, let the whole world know that you love your ancient old buggy more than your children. (Actually, if the truth were known, you'd like to see the oil-burning old bucket on the top of a junk pile.)

Having established the proper image in the transportation department, you come to that all-important object, the home. Even though you are barely protected from the elements, you can take care of this status symbol with a few dollars and judicious exercise of your dramatic talents.

First, you just write a winery for plans of the most elaborate wine cellars in the country. While awaiting arrival of the plans, buy a second-hand drawing board, complete with stand. When the plans arrive, snap them on the board and set it up in the most conspicuous spot in your house.

Then all you have to do is insist that all your visitors help you decide whether the wine cellars should be off the kitchen or in the basement of your new home. Always let it be known that you are not going to allow a brick to be laid until the plans are so complete that you and the family can leave for Europe while the house is being built.

It is needless to dwell on how effective this deception can be when carried out per instructions. And of course there is no time limit; after solving the perplexity of the wine cellar, you can agonize over placement of the swimming pool, fish pond, etc.

Generally, the above tactics will cause you to be so affluent in the eyes of the community that your neighbors' only fear is that your abundance will attract robbers to the area. Naturally, such fears are groundless; robbers, like wives and bankers, have a sense of values that no pretense can undermine.

One note of warning should be sounded: Occasionally your reputation for great wealth will attract solicitors for churches and charitable organizations. To save face, you may find it advisable to purchase a turban and either a Buddhist prayer book or the Koran. Then you answer the door in Oriental attire, book in hand, and solemnly tell the caller that you will be glad to talk to him as soon as you finish your evening supplications to Allah or Buddha.