

By now everyone should know of the wild upturn in the cattle market. About steer calves going up as much as five bucks in a sales day and heifers shooting up \$10 in the mere tap of a gavel. How old cows and crippled bulls changed values so fast that the packers needed ringside computers to figure the score. A big surprise in a game that never seems to settle down. I had no idea that August was such a pretty month.

Some time ago, I needed to pay much attention to the market. The fascinating part was the human element involved. Since the people only bid against each other and not on each other, I started watching my colleagues closer.

The smartest psychologist on the staff of Yale University couldn't explain the behavior of a cowman. One day he's out at the ring waving his hat to buy. The next day he's out at the ranch lying on the couch with the same hat covering his eyes to forget his madness.

I can take you right to the spot where six years ago I turned down 60 cents on some baldface steers. Without faltering half an inch I can show you the chair and the row that I sat in at old man so-and-so's 1973 chance of a lifetime dispersal sale. Yet to save me, I can't offer you or anyone else a way to avoid those places.

My Indian wife, Child Who Sits in the Sun, claims that man only uses 10 percent of his brains. She means "man" to the sense of the male of the species, too. She doesn't mince her words speaking of man and his foolishness. I'd tell you what she called us in her language, but you'll have to come to Mertzson to find out as I'm not about to use those kind of words in a newspaper column.

Her theory is hard to deny. I suppose an order buyer is using 10 percent of his brains, because he's using 100 percent of somebody else's money. But as for these firecrackers that float in from the country to blow up the stocker or set fire to the feeder lines with their own cash, I image that a conditioned two percent would cover them at optimum.

The thing that stumps me is whether it takes any brains to be in the cow business. Fire fighters in the northwest learn to think smoke and fire together. I read in a book on marine life that once a sailor had been bitten by a shark, he won't stick his hindleg back in the water even if you give him a hot foot with a kitchen match.

Yet around any auction ring, there's hombres educated in the best colleges and welcome on boards anywhere in the country, that flat go crazy at the chance to buy a curl-tailed calf or its hollow horn mother on a set of odds that'd cause the Nevada Gambling Commission to close Las Vegas.

Maybe it doesn't take any percentage of brains at all to buy and sell cattle. We may have to have a virtual brain tank in reserve in our game. Whatever the answer is, I know I for one would sure be uncomfortable to have it settled in court.

The boom has been refired. I haven't been over to San Angelo to watch the trade, but I bet it's brisk. Leave it to a wild squaw to find the truth. On lots of days I am positive she's right, if not a little high in her claim.