

I'm an Old Cowhand

By Dennis Knight

The challenge is to write about cows. I can handle it, because I'm a fellow who knows a little bit about a lot of things. On the subject at hand, I know which end of the cow moos, and if and when I become a dairy man, I will study up on the other parts.

I can share one tidbit I happen to have. Have you ever noticed and wondered about the short piece of heavy chain suspended in a typical cow pasture? You usually see them near a water tank and a block of salt. Well that, my friends, is a bovine back scratcher.

In fact, I actually do have some experience with cows. Many years ago, I was a guest on a farm that happened to have a herd of maybe fifty or sixty cattle. To pay for my dinner, I was pressed into service to help move the herd from one pasture to another. It was not hard work, because when the cattle saw us coming, they simply rounded themselves up at the gate to their new paradise. It took only fancy footwork, if you get my drift, and if I didn't have it, you would have got my drift for days.

Maybe it was a grass-is-greener mentality that drove them to the gate, but I'm not sure cows have a mentality. It was probably just the same Pavlovian reaction I have to a sizzling steak (irony intentional.)

When we got organized, our leader opened the gate and the first four cows took four steps in to the new green pasture and commenced to graze, creating an angry, hungry bovine jam at the opening. It was the same inconsiderate, "me first and me only" attitude I associate with people we now call 'one percenters.'

We carried braided whips which we applied to the backsides of the first and successive waves to get them moving along, with words like 'go boss'. I heard cussing here and there but I didn't want to be a copy cat and, besides, I was a rookie and probably not yet deserving of full use of the wrangler lexicon.

I don't think there was a single cowboy hat among the four or five humans on the project but there were a couple of sweaty green John Deere caps which leant some authenticity. My cap was a clean blue thing without even a logo. To fit in, I did some spitting, but it left my mouth dry.

Maybe we didn't have horses and lassos, and there wasn't the whooping and hollering of epochs on the scope of the Chisholm Trail, but it was a cattle drive nonetheless. And, while the sum total of my experience, perhaps an hour, is not enough to put on a resume, if I'm ever invited to a cocktail party in Manhattan, I'll drop it in.

"That reminds me, ma'am of my days punchin' cows out in Colorado. Yup."