

Cattle, Cats & Matrimonial Wars

You never know what life will bring. By Bill Jones

It is said that every successful rancher or farmer has a wife who works in town. During these stressful economic times it would be helpful if she has at least two well-paying jobs. If she also helps (in her spare time) with the family's livestock operation, this can sometimes be problematic. Competent unpaid help is hard to find.

Several decades ago I asked my bride to help me load a little bunch of heifers that were penned in the barn alleyway. I wanted to cut one of them out as a replacement and it seemed like a good idea at the time.

"Once I separate the biggest heifer," I explain, "pull out that corral panel and stand behind it, in between the replacement heifer and the little group we are going to ship."

"What if she wants to stay with her friends?"

"This is where you come in," I counter patiently (being the long-suffering and compassionate husband I am). "Just put a 'bluff' on her and she will turn back." Famous last words...

Afterwards I help dislodge her from beneath the panel—run over, unhurt, but agitated as a hen just doused with a pan of dirty dishwasher. She stomps back to the house. "I quit!" she yells. Never have I seen her this mad. "Next time get one of your idiot friends to help you!" (Later, she explains, by "idiot friends" she means anyone engaged in the cattle business.) You would think, under the circumstances, her ire would be directed at the rebellious and uncooperative heifer. Or even take some of the responsibility herself for her poor "bluff" performance. But noooooo...this is all *my* fault.

It is not that the Queen Bee has any animosity to animals in general. Over the years I have purchased literally tons of wild birdseed. She has been known to release struggling mice from glue traps. We quit raising our own beef because she becomes emotionally attached to the young steers with impending execution dates. She has a housecat she treats like one of those royal cats owned by Egyptian pharaohs.

By the way, the cat in question is a pet shop "reject" that was free of charge. A giveaway. So far, this "free" cat has cost me hundreds of dollars in vet bills, diet cat food, special treats, various cat toys and truckloads of cat litter that smell like Chanel No. 5. Plus, the wife lavishes more attention on that feline than I ever got in 45 years of marriage. To be honest, I *am* jealous. Maybe even more than a little.

One night I had enough. "How come," I ask rather unpleasantly, "you don't pet on me like you do that [blankety-blank] cat?" (I

suffering and dying cow or horse. So the assassination of a perfectly healthy housecat is probably a bad idea.

Enter Plan B in my attempt to get more attention than the cat. Since I have had some recent unpleasant health issues, I decide to play the sympathy card. (All is fair in marital skirmishes.)

"You know," I say one evening with a quivering emotional voice, "you never know what life will bring. Maybe we should go over our important papers. Deeds, wills, life insurance policies. That sort of thing."

She reluctantly agrees and all goes well until we get to the life insurance. Years ago, when I was young and healthy, life insurance was cheap. And I had a real job. I purchased several policies and kept them up over the years. As I begin to list these policies, my life partner grows increasingly more attentive. A little "giddy" even. Kind of like a blue heeler pup discovering a fresh pile of horse hoof trimmings. This was supposed to be a somber activity and is certainly not working out as planned.

"Wait just a minute!" she says brightly. "Are we talking tax-free money here?" I explain that life insurance benefits are not subject to state or federal tax.

"Hold that thought while I go get my calculator." I think of something my late father said long ago. "Never get to the point where you are worth more dead than alive."

The next morning as I am leaving the house, the Queen is nowhere to be found. I then notice a pair of legs sticking out from beneath my pickup. The legs have my wife's pajamas on. Is she messing with my vehicle's brakes? Well, not really.

She was looking for the cat. ■



VIA INTERNET, WHEN A PICTURE IS WORTH MORE THAN A THOUSAND WORDS

believe the secret to a successful marriage is open communication.)

"Well," she counters immediately, "you don't have any fur."

How do you argue with that kind of logic? Perhaps I should have said that I don't have any fleas either. But the argument is already lost.

Later the thought occurs that perhaps I can arrange for the cat in question to be involved in an unfortunate and fatal accident of sorts. A local coyote could be scapegoated as a potential and believable suspect. Unfortunately, the cat uses her special "cat powers" and senses my evil intentions. She begins to crawl into my lap, purr contentedly and gaze mournfully into my eyes. Never underestimate the intuitive abilities of the female species. Scratch that plan. It's just as well, as I really have never been able to even shoot a

Bill Jones, a regular RANGE contributor, reports there has been a 30-year truce in their matrimonial war. He agrees not to advise his spouse on how to teach school. She, in turn, agrees not to interfere with his nonprofit cattle operation. Bill maintains that he has 35 years of experience running an unprofitable enterprise and no further assistance is required. The cat, by the way, is still alive and doing just fine.