

A Shepherd's Lament

Quit bad-mouthing watermelon and fried chicken. By Bill Jones

Slim Atwater is a successful sheep rancher in Wyoming. By successful, I mean he “breaks even” most years and has avoided bankruptcy more than a few times. Most of his good fortune has been based on the efforts of his wife, Cherry, who is a licensed beautician and has a thriving shop in Baggs, The Best Little Hairhouse in Wyoming. Cherry has saved the ranch from foreclosure many times since Jimmy Carter was president.

Starting out with a couple dozen “bum” lambs while he was still in high school, Slim has parlayed his livestock venture into three bands of sheep that he grazes on government land with the help of some Basque shepherds. Slim’s dad, a failed llama rancher, had advised Slim to avoid sheep because sheep “spend their time looking for an excuse to die.” Slim learns from an early age to not give his sheep any excuse for dying. Also, to watch his flock like a starving coyote, make sure sheep and shepherds have enough to eat, and be nice to the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management workers who control his grazing permits.

Slim was recently elected president of the Wyoming Wool Growers Association and, in what Cherry describes as a “stroke of genius,” initiates a plan to get folks to eat more lamb. Slim surmises some ethnic groups eat more lamb than others—mainly Arabs, Jews and people from New York with funny-sounding last names. A subsequent huge and expensive advertising campaign is a colossal failure because in Wyoming there just aren’t that many Arabs, Jews, or people from New York with funny-sounding last names. Another campaign idea, stolen unabashedly from our beef-producing friends, has the slogan, “Mutton—a great choice for dinner!” This seemed brilliant at the time but turned out about like you would expect....

In reference to Slim’s first ad campaign, a Casper newspaper reporter accuses Slim of

being a racist because of his suggestion that Arabs, Jews, and folks from New York with funny-sounding last names all like lamb. Furthermore, he maintains this bigoted, prejudiced suggestion is akin to implying that all African Americans like watermelon and fried chicken. Slim replies in an emotional letter to the editor that he really doesn’t even know any Jews, Arabs, or folks from New York with funny-sounding last names. Also, he only knows one African American, namely Jebediah Washington, a team roper who cowboys on a nearby ranch, and Slim states that he knows



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for a fact Jebediah loathes watermelon—although admittedly Jeb is somewhat reluctant about bad-mouthing the fried chicken.

The notoriety Slim obtains from these issues results in Slim being invited to a fancy dinner party hosted by an environmental group. It seems this particular organization is concerned that cattle and sheep on public land will turn the state of Wyoming into the Sahara Desert and cattle flatulence will contribute to global warming and the destruction of the ozone layer. Slim is invited to represent the sheep industry and participate in “meaningful dialogue.” Several cattle ranchers are also invited, but, not so respectfully, decline.

At dinner the main course is some runty little whole chicken and some undercooked green beans. (Later, Slim learns they were not chickens at all but...quail.) Wine is served but

it is lukewarm and Slim asks the “wine guy” to bring him a large glass with some ice in it.

During dinner Slim has already sucked the meat off the drumsticks of what he thinks is a midget chicken and now is at a loss what to do with the bones. A perfumed and pampered little rat-faced poodle is skulking under the table—obviously the spoiled pet of the hostess. Slim’s dog, Harpo, loves chicken bones and consumes them with a lot of gnawing, slobbering and obvious enjoyment. Slim, in an act of kindness, slips the two little “chicken” bones to the little dog under the table. Unfortunately, Fifi (the dog) has not experienced any kind of bone in her privileged life and immediately chokes and rolls over on her back kicking all four legs in the air like a dying cockroach. Slim springs into action and drop-kicks the little bug-eyed dog into the hallway—a distance of about 30 feet—at which time Fifi upchucks the offending bones onto the Oriental rug.

You would think, Slim considers on the drive home, that folks would be appreciative of him saving the dog’s life with his canine Heimlich procedure, but nooooo, not a chance. There was a lot of screaming, crying and talk about “cruelty to animals” among the dinner guests and Slim determined maybe he should make a hasty exit. On the way home, still hungry, he stops in Farson for a Pepsi and a Mr. Goodbar.

By the time Slim reaches home he concludes, “High society just ain’t what it is cracked up to be.” ■

A regular contributor to RANGE and a Vietnam veteran, Bill Jones has never been “politically correct” and sees no reason to change now. Bill maintains that the entire politically correct movement is the worst thing to happen in this country since line dancing, social media and nonalcoholic beer. If anyone has been offended by any of Bill’s rants or opinions...well, he doesn’t care. If you have not been offended yet, he promises to get around to you eventually. According to Bill we all need to lighten up, eat a doughnut and chill out. We are all headed in the same direction—none of us are going to get out of this deal alive.