

# Meanwhile, back at the Running H...

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Lately I have had time to do some thinking. I mean do some really serious, been sitting in a deer stand for 4 hours watching squirrels procreate kind of thinking. One of the topics that has been on my mind is loss.

Throughout life, we all have lost something or someone we love. It's a part of life. Some of the betters in our herd of humans handle loss gracefully, while some of us turn red and cuss and spit and look for anything to fight to deal with the loss.

In the ranching business, I think we producers have times of losses like no one else. I remember one instance at a Florida operation that I was working at, some decorative trees were planted throughout some bull pastures. The feller that planted the trees really wanted to take care of these things so much so that he built better fences around the individual trees than the corrals where he worked said bulls from said bull pastures. It was one blustery, late-July day when a little weather system came through like they tend to do and with that little system came a bit of lightning. You may already see where this is going...

Now I won't name the breed of the said bulls in said bull pastures in hopes to alleviate any prejudices, but 5 of the highest dollar bulls in said bull pasture felt that one of these decorative trees would provide the most excellent cover from that little weather system. And you guessed it, one particular bolt of lightning felt that one particularly decorative tree would make the perfect landing. It didn't work out so well for those bulls.



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I remember well, sitting at the fence the next day thinking to myself that I was not sure that I had ever seen \$25,000 worth of roast beef before, which reminded me that I needed to pick up a chuck roast for my better half on the way home that evening. The other cowboys, cowgirls, hands, and those who just got in the way all had their own reaction to the situation. Some chuckled at the absurdity, some gagged at the smell of burnt hair, but all of us feared what would happen when the boss showed up.

The boss was a giant of a man. He had hands like bear paws and some say he was the inspiration behind Jimmy Dean's Big Bad John, even though the boss was born a short 23 years after that single hit number 1 on the Billboard Hot 100. He was not known for being a soft man either. In that part of the world, a cowboy often is called a cracker and the boss was a top cracker. This man once roped a 13 ft gator just to see if he could, without once fretting about how to get the rope off (the gator quickly showed reverence and relinquished the rope when the boss politely asked).

The boss did eventually show up. We all stood there with our hands in our pockets, shoulders slumped, inspecting the stitching on our boots waiting for the explosion. After a few moments of the most excruciating silence pocked with cow bird calls, a couple of us dared a peek.

What we found was not a red faced, cussing, spitting boss man, but instead a feller who had lost something he loved. This cowman worked hard all his adult life to produce some of the best commercial calves shipped west out of the southeast. He sweat and he bled among the best of us and there he stood having to lay eyes on the death before him. He looked up from the carnage, looked around at all of us and spoke a few words about loss. He said, "Hands, someone go grab the loader to pull these bulls out of here. It will take another 15 darn years to regrow that tree, we better get started now." And somehow, life moves on.



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