

No Error Is Greater Than Life

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We can't stop, although there are days we wish we could. Life and death. We seem comfortable with life, but death, that's another walk.

As the news spread, the realization of one being absent was startling. As one's mind wanders for some rational thought, normalcy departs and, in its place, one is filled with a deep sense of wandering, a senseless wandering with a seemingly pointless destination.

One of our own was gone and no matter where one looks, the emptiness was there. He was just here yesterday; the day before we had a nice visit. Not long ago, I saw him over there, but today he is gone.

As difficulty clouds our minds, the need for reassurance remains dimly lit. A small light against the tidal wave of grief; there are more important things to do today than sort the cows. The tractors can wait, the fields will remain barren and the neighbors will see to the chores. For today, we need not think of the numerous processes we embark on in our daily routines. These routines perhaps should be less embedded than they actually are.

The walk across the driveway reminds us of the power of nature. The wind still blows, the chill nibbles on one's face, the final destination reached without much ado. The first acquaintance only met with eyes, words left lost in fields afar; finally, a resemblance of desire may surface, only to be tucked away in Northern silence. It seems safer that way, for what reason one does not know, but like a rogue cow on the run, containment seems to be the need and so we do what we do.

The present seems so raw, the future somewhat gone, so in the past comfort comes, bringing reassurance, memories of good times, times not even so good, but assurances that life does go on.

Life and death are no strangers to the prairies, a world full of energy that is stored, used and brings a cycle of life. We all are involved with the cycle, regardless of thought.

Perhaps old Rain-in-the-Face reminded us best, when he would repeatedly assure those around him of the strength of the prairie born, as noted by the late Rev. Louis Pfaller, OSB, Assumption Abbey, Richardton, N.D. He wrote "The Fort Keogh to Bismarck Stage Route" many

years ago. The Rev. Pfaller recalled the words of history as noted by Rain-in-the-Face as he passed by Young Man's Butte while riding the western train.

The conflict had left one man on the butte and facing inevitable death. "The lone survivor managed to get to the top and began to dance and sing, calling out that he would never be captured or killed. The young man then quickly stabbed himself ... an act of supreme courage."

The loss of a life, the taking of a life and all that remained was a pile of rocks for a monument. However, old Rain-in-the-Face brought life to where there was none, an energy to go on, thus feeding the cycle of life on the prairies.

Yes, a tough day. A day reflective of all that is and all that is not, but, fueled by the omnipresent, the day goes on. Unexpected death challenges us all to a self-examination as we continue the work of those who touched our lives.

In the high stakes of business, international duels, perfecting competition, playing partner leap frog or a simple game of "gotch ya, you're it," there is more than perfecting the barter system. Lest we forget, those around us are not icons. They will leave and the brief time we are together should be shared, not bartered.

Granted, the business of beef will not stop. Recent and continuing fast-paced changes, market anticipations and industry dynamics will continue to increase tension as dollars are invested in higher-priced cattle. Risk, multiplied by value, with returns limping along, will create an intense business environment, an environment accepting little error.

However, no error is greater than life and for that, we must never forget.

May Andy rest in peace.

May you find all your NAIS-approved ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com. For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.com on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0274.

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