

## Life Is a Moment, But It Is Our Only Moment!

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The beef business is and always will be challenging. But life can be too. While writing this article, I was trying to get done because I needed to call Tom. As I was halfway writing and halfway thinking about the upcoming conversation, a message came up on the club web site. The message indicated a club member had passed away. When I moved my cursor and clicked, Tom's name appeared.

The passing of a life, a moment in time, created a momentary emptiness that ran so deep. Every cell stopped, pausing as the brain reconfigured, verified and confirmed. All signals are down and yet all sensations are peaked. Truly, the Yin and the Yang – all that comes to be. A brief reflection: Life is but a moment for any of us, but it is our only moment.

What was really eerie, was that the column I was writing, this column, is about death — the death of a calf. The first 10 days of March were very cold and coincided with a surge of calving activity. The first three days of March were -15, -16, and -15 degrees Fahrenheit, followed by a few degrees warm up and then March 9 and 10 were -20 and -19 degrees Fahrenheit.

This is not the time for analysis. Sure, an occasional thought of “why do I do this?” creeps in, but time is critical and can't be wasted with idle thoughts. The day is generally divided between getting dressed, getting undressed, getting dressed, getting undressed, getting dressed and getting undressed, etc. Venturing out is no easy task, and yet calf checks need to be made.

The first calf heifers are generally close up, as they represent the dumbest group. Not having ever experienced calving, the cold can quickly consume their new born calf. Without the insistent licking, nudging and strong encouragement of an older experienced mother, a calf's moment may be very short.

After checking the high risk group, waddling through the older experienced cows is generally more

encouraging. Thank goodness for calf warmers. Marginal calves are almost always revived with a brief stay in the warmer to dry off and a quick trip to mother's side for a fill of warm colostrum. Cold, at least marginal cold, is hardly noticed by a dry, full calf, laying in a pile of straw awaiting the morning sun.

Come morning, a quick review shows last night's efforts were good, but the eye catches a new mound in the corner of the pen, at least a mound that wasn't there yesterday. As you approach, although you know, denial keeps you moving toward the mound, which slowly reveals a tuft of hair blowing in the wind between the fresh fingers of blown ice and snow. Denial removed, what was to be calf 2194 lies stiff. A quick glance around, and cow J9396 has been watching you all along. She was hoping also. You nudge the calf, but no response. A quick thought, if I had only been earlier, but no, the calf is dead, and some form of compassion hopes the calf was born dead.

You pick the calf up, not really wanting to see the underside. But you can't help but notice both sides of the calf were licked clean. You slowly glance over to J9396, and notice no quarters were suckled. The calf froze, before ever having a chance. Survival of the fittest is not fair, but we know there is only so much any one person can do. So if you run into a beef producer, a bit on the cantankerous side, keep in mind cantankerous is just another word for caring, caring without a moment.

A simple click on a computer, a cold night, life can be tough. So for all the “Toms” of the world, enjoy the moment. And may you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at [www.BeefTalk.com](http://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](http://www.CHAPS2000.com) on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0084.

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## Minimum Temperature and Maximum Wind Speed Dickinson, North Dakota

Date	Minimum Temperature	Maximum Wind Speed
	(F)	(mph)
March 1	-15	14
March 2	-16	20
March 3	-15	27
March 4	21	29
March 5	7	23
March 6	-6	21
March 7	-1	20
March 8	-4	20
March 9	-20	19
March 10	-19	25