

Working alone at a task that does not take all of a person's attention leads to a "stream of consciousness" kind of activity in the mind. Thoughts flit from one thing to another, often with no connecting relationship. This is how it played out in my thoughts today as I did the cattle chores.

It started with hay. And ripping apart a 4X4 round bale and feeding it with a pitchfork gave me an opportunity to look closely at what that bale contained.. It was like a survey I did a few years ago to see how much diversity we had in the pasture paddocks. I named and counted the various plants I found in an area before we turned in the sheep. The bale was the same way, an astonishing number of different grasses, forbs, and browse. It made a very enticing "salad bar" that the cattle attacked with enthusiasm.

But, then, thoughts of "hay" turned to a memory of "hey." I realized that an old saying that was common when I was in elementary school is probably unheard of these days. If someone—usually a child or teenager—addressed a friend with "hey!" the answer was likely to be, "straw is cheaper, grass is free." I have no idea where this came from, but I heard it so many times that it has imprinted itself on my longterm memory.

That thought led to other old sayings that have disappeared from our vocabularies. I remember people assessing another person's ability with the words that she was "a good hand at that." And, of course, there was also the man who was "no hand with livestock" or with machinery, or some other kind of work.

Many of the old sayings were not grammatically correct, but still, it seemed like they evoked the spirit of a particular place, and so, they were good to hear, even as we realized they weren't "standard English." I remember older people saying that someone was "to home" instead of "at home." And there was that pronunciation peculiarity in the English of many descendants of Swedish immigrants, even though they had never spoken the language of their parents and grandparents. I still hear it now and then. If I hear someone say that he or she is "bissy" instead of "busy" I can be pretty sure that person had Swedish parents or grandparents who used an "s" sound instead of "z" in words like "busy."

Still pitching hay, I thought about a book I am reading now. The author searched out foods in danger of extinction and wrote about people trying to save them. Some were actual crops, but others were traditional ways of using or preparing foods. The diversity in the hay bale made me think about the cheese the author wrote about, a specialty made in a small, out of the way area in Albania. It was only made during the summer when the cows were in the mountain pastures consuming all kinds of flowers. This diet gave a special taste and aroma to the cheese. And that led to thoughts of cheese in general. And then to the fact that I have never ingested a slice (if it can be sliced?) of Velveeta in my life. And I have no intention of doing so in the future.

And thinking about that book, *Eating to Extinction*, by Dan Saladino, my mind turned to another book I read recently—this one a novel by Anne Tyler. She had a line toward the end of that book that made it very clear to me why the isolation factor in the Covid pandemic has not been a problem for me. One

of the characters in this novel that began in 1959 and ended in the present pandemic also had no distress caused by lack of social interaction due to Covid precautions and restrictions. I can't quote it exactly, but it was something like this: "I like you so much, but why do I have to see you in person?"

My last thought before leaving the cattle and—carrying a pail of bottles of milk replacer— heading for Runo in the lambing barn was this: I love my long distance friends.

It goes like this for all of us, I think, day in and day out. When we are alone, our minds cover an enormous amount of territory, most of which is irrelevant to our daily activities. But, it make life interesting.