

## You Are What You Eat

By Susan Feldhake

The folks at the farm supply store would have never guessed. We have had livestock afflicted with the severe psychological disturbances that cause the dreaded modern maladies: eating disorders.

Granted, we had no trouble with our hogs. Those dudes were very single-minded about it all and protected their hoggy reputations. As long as there was corn in the feeders, they were content to do their thing: pig out!

Over the years, it was our Angus cattle that created chaos with their oddities. Calfy was the first. An avowed glutton with an insatiable appetite, he ate anything and everything: Hay. Corn. Molasses. Leaves. Wood bark. Ashes. Dirt. Rubber hoses. Tin cans.

"He must be emulating the goats," we decided. For some reason he preferred Gottfreig and Hilda to his own kind.

Anything in Calfy's path—even tidbits he had to demur to find—he was willing to try. Generally, he not only tried them but he found them to his liking.

Calfy was known to devour barbed wire, can lids, baler twine and any stray bit of rubbish that he could locate to satisfy his perverse desire for junk food.

Typewriter ribbons became recyclable, without my permission or efforts. One day Calfy jumped the fence and raided the garbage cans. He was easy to find. We

trailed the thin black line to where he stood in a nearby thicket, chewing and chewing.

If we were careless, Calfy didn't have to go searching for something to munch, it came to him. This happened one hot summer day when we temporarily parked the pickup in the pasture and later returned to find Calfy with his head poked inside the cab.

"Look at Calfy!" my cry startled the famished beast. He sprang into reverse, clubbing the mirror off the door. Inside, the visor hung in crumbling shards from the steel frame. Calfy strolled away, swallowing hard.

Then there was Axehandle. He seemed normal as a calf at his mama's side, but grew up to become a clairvoyant steer, who knew that the faster he grew, the sooner he'd keep an appointment with the Grim Packer.

With a desperate need to control the situation and his life, as is common with those suffering eating disorders, Axehandle developed anorexia nervosa.

Pour corn in the feeder? He'd look ill and back away. "Not hungry," the twitch of his long, skinny tail seemed to say. Put hay in the feeder? He didn't bother to investigate. Pour molasses on oats? That brought an indignant stare. What were we trying to do—get him off his diet?!

Animals came, and animals went—round, firm and fully packed—but not Axehandle. He was narrow across the beam, despite what we'd hoped would be a personality and figure-fitting name. He was the senior-ranking resident in the pasture, and he starved to re-

main neat and petite. That steer dieted as if his very life depended on it!

We believed there was hope one day when Axehandle sauntered up to the feeder, munched down corn, molasses, and even a bit of hay. For three days this situation endured. Then, Axehandle saw his reflection in the water trough. He noticed his missing hipbones, saw his fuller face and plumping ribs, and immediately went on a crash diet to undo the damage of his binge.

As far as we know, Axehandle never broke his fast. In truth, we didn't keep him around long enough to know for sure. He went to the sale barn a few months after Call) went into the freezer.

"This is the best beef I've ever eaten!" came a friend's verdict when she selected a second helping of home-grown meat, a.k.a. Calfy. She raved on about the joys of good country eating.

"It must be what you fed this steer that makes it so delicious. You are what you eat, you know!" she brightly quoted Adele Davis.

Around the table members of our family exchanged looks.

They say that a happy medium is somewhere between being blissfully ignorant and totally informed. The beef roast was well done, but we decided that it was just as well to keep our guest's knowledge on the rare side.

So we chewed, swallowed hard and silently decided that recycled garbage never tasted so good!

AJ