Odds And Ends (Best Of)

I knew something was wrong from the beginning. It was a very difficult birth and the calf was real slow getting up. She kept falling down all rubbery legged, even more than usual.

It seemed the cow was losing hope. She needed her calf to live. A cow will usually survive a difficult calving if she has a calf to care for. After the birth we didn't know if the calf had lived or died because the mother hid it for more than a week. Looking back now, I guess the cow was ashamed of her inferior calf.

We called the heifer Palsy because she shook a lot. I just figured she'd grow out of it. The hump in her back was not apparent at that point in her life, but as she grew older it became obvious that Palsy was special. At weaning time we gathered the herd and there was Palsy struggling to keep up at the end of the line, walking sideways. The arch in her back was becoming more pronounced.

It was my intent to load her up with the rest of the calves and ship her to the auction market. But a big pair of pleading, soulful eyes convinced me that I would not ship her... and that was just the look on my wife's face. Palsy looked even more pathetic.

"We can't go on keeping all the odds and ends," I told my wife.

"Why not? She's not hurting anything. Besides you keep a lot of other misfits around," as she pointed to Gentleman, my horse, who was sharing a flake of hay with Palsy. She was splayed out in the feed bunk. All the other animals seemed to like Palsy.

It was true. I had kept other worthless animals around. I had a three-legged ram and an impotent bull. There was my cat who was afraid of mice and my watchdog Aussie. I had to admit if there was a suspicious noise, I had to wake her up to bark. And of course, Gentleman, my horse. But at least they all had a purpose. It was not the same with Palsy.

A couple of weeks later my wife and I were sharing a spot of tea in our local bakery when once again the subject of Palsy came up.

"What will we do with her?" I asked my wife. "We can't keep her forever. Surely the bulls won't breed her and what if she did reproduce? We could have an epidemic on our hands."

"We could try to sell her," my wife suggested. "But whoever buys her has to promise her a good home."

"Are you kidding? Nobody is going to buy her."

"We could donate her to charity or put her up for adoption," pleaded my softhearted wife. "We could have a 'Name the Heifer Contest.' Palsy isn't a very good name really. And whoever wins the contest gets to keep her for the rest of her life."

"I'm not any happier about this than you are," I said. "We really should just send her to the auction, but I really don't want anybody seeing our brand on her."

"She isn't branded," recalled my wife. "She kept falling down in the chute when you tried to brand her, remember? But anyway, I don't want everybody laughing at her when she walks sideways into the auction ring."

Just then, a crippled old man with a crooked back limped into the bakery. At the counter he turned his pocket inside out, which brought forth some lint and 12 cents.

"What will that buy?" he asked the clerk. The young girl behind the counter gave him a day-old donut and a smile. He shuffled out the door with his donut.

We decided later that day to keep Palsy. It was my way of buying that man a cup of coffee to go with his donut.