

Is anything OK?



I'm a hot and cold kinda guy. I can be soaring with eagles one minute and pecking dirt with the chickens the next. One minute I'm on top of the world, and the next minute it's coming to an end.

I just knew that when the clocks struck midnight on 2000 we were all gonna die. I'm always either overly optimistic or overly pessimistic. There's no cruising down the middle of the road for me, no sir, a guy could get killed in a grisly accident driving down the middle of the road. See what I mean about my negativity?

I'm a worry-wart with "B-negative" blood who can only stand so much optimism. I feel bad about feeling good. Here's how bad it's gotten. My old computer died, and I had to buy a new one. When the salesman asked me if I wanted the Apple-Care plan I said "no" because you had to pay for two years, and I thought, "What a waste that would be if I suddenly died in the 18th month and I ended up paying for six months I didn't need?"

I used to be more optimistic, but that was before I met my doctor, a seven-year drought and a couple crashes in the cattle and stock markets. I got so pessimistic by betting on too many optimists. I suppose I've read too many Garrison Keillor novels about "dark Norwegians" who believe that success is just a deferral of failure and that a good year is just the postponement of disaster. Being so over-sensitive is good if you are a short seller on the futures market but not so good if you forget to take your "happy pills."

I'm telling you all this as a prelude to what's been really depressing me for a while now: all these government reports that tell us the number of cattle on feed, how many bushels of corn will be harvested, how many heifers are being retained, the estimated slaughter levels, the blue sheet, boxed beef report, meat trade review and on and on.

First the USDA projects fields and yields, then they issue interim reports, final reports and six

month's later they admit that it was all a cruel joke and they were wrong. Sorry. But by then the grain has been sold and the beef has been eaten. It's enough to drive an unbalanced person like myself over the edge.

When I get in a particularly gloomy mood I wonder, what business does the government have asking us how many cows we have, or acres we farm, in the first place? Haven't they ever heard that it's not polite to ask a rancher how many cattle he owns?

The government says the information is public and that the number of cattle you own is "proprietary information." I say that any time the government uses two big words with nine syllables that you'd better watch your wallet and your freedoms. Next they'll be wanting to know how much money you have.

Oh, I forgot, they already do. It's called the IRS.

You don't show your hand to everyone when you are playing poker do you? Why should you show the speculators your hole card? It always follows a familiar pattern. First the USDA says there's lots of grain so the price of feed goes down and cattle go up. Then they change their mind, issue another report and say it will be a short grain crop so the price of feed goes back up and cattle go down, all without one steer being slaughtered or acre of corn being harvested. The government says things will get worse and then goes about fulfilling its prophecy.

And we all know the numbers are wrong anyway. If you've ever committed a faux pa and asked a cattleman how many cattle he owns, you know that he or she will fib. We all do. So how accurate can the USDA reports be? I'm trying to be more optimistic, I really am, and I know that we're going to enjoy some great years ahead, but then I worry, what will I do with any money if I make some? See, I'm hopeless. And I know I'm never going to get any better.

That being said I'm not as bad as the old-timer I ran into recently at the hardware store. Everyone calls the old man Gloomy George because he goes around walking on his lower lip and looking like someone just ran over his dog. I greeted Gloomy with a familiar phrase, not really expecting a meaningful answer: "How ya doing Gloomy?"

It's the Pitts

Written by Lee Pitts

“Well,” said Gloomy, “I had an OK day last month.”

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