

**TAILWIND
BOTH WAYS**



Photo by Watt M. Casey, Jr.

TAILWIND BOTH WAYS

A Cowman's Chronicle

**LAURENCE M.
LASATER**



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The "Family Cow Outfit" on the Lasater Ranch. On horseback: Sally, Tom, Laurie, Dale and Lane. Standing in front: Brian and Alan.

GROWING UP ON THE LASATER RANCH

I was born at the Nix Hospital in San Antonio, Texas, on October 21, 1941, the eldest of the six children of Mary Casey Lasater and Thomas Miller Lasater of Falfurrias, Texas. My parents, founders of the Beefmaster breed of cattle, were both very dynamic; they were a great team, highly educated and united in their ambition to raise a fine family, establish a great ranch and leave the world a better place. They had some failures, but also great successes. This story focuses on the successes.



Falfurrias was founded in 1904 by my grandfather, Ed C. Lasater. His ranch there grew to 350,000 acres. The area is flat, sandy, hot and infested with brush—an extremely harsh environment, which probably accounts for the fact that Beefmasters and other American breeds originated in that area as ranchers sought cattle that could thrive under such conditions. The culture is a mix of Texas and Mexico, of which the inhabitants are very proud.

My childhood experiences were typical of those of all first-borns. I was the beneficiary and the victim of my parents' ideas and campaigns such as no movies, cokes or candy until six years of age. I also received the best they had to offer at the peak of their powers, for which I will always be

grateful. My experiences and outlook are probably characteristic of those of any oldest sibling. I felt obliged to take the lead in many situations, and my younger brothers and sister, Dale, Lane, Sally, Alan and Brian, humorously referred to me as “king of the royal mountain,” a favorite game we played. My second brother, Lane, wrote my epitaph when he said, “You patrol the high ground ruthlessly.”

Spanish was nearly a native language for me. Both Mother and Dad spoke it well, and all the cowboys and maids in South Texas were of Mexican origin, so it was spoken every day. I was called Lorenzo as a child in South Texas, and again twenty years later, as a grown man in Northern Mexico. The Hispanic language and culture have been key ingredients in our lives. My business has taken me to Mexico and Central and South America, where I have always felt comfortable with the customs and liked the people, who reciprocated the feeling.

Grandparents

I did not know my grandfathers, but both grandmothers were present. Dad’s mother, Mary Miller Lasater, the second wife of Ed C. Lasater (his first family having died of various frontier illnesses). Dad was born in 1911, the youngest of five children; his father was born at the time of the Civil War.

I remember Dad’s mother, Maya, to whom he was close, very well. She lived across the way from our little cottage on the original family ranch at La Mota, five miles from Falfurrias. We used to go walking together and she called me her *compadre*, a word I have always loved. I can still remember when she died in the mid-1940s. My brother Dale and I were together in Mother and Dad’s bed when they came home with the news.

• • •

“Just sweeten it, Tom.”

—Ethel Matthews Casey

Mother’s mother, Ethel Matthews Casey, was the daughter of J.A. and Sallie Reynolds Matthews of Albany, Texas. Grandmother was an important influence in our lives, not only as the daughter of pioneers but

also as an arbiter of culture. I have numerous first-edition books, many signed by the author, dating back to the 1940s, that were gifts from her.

I never knew Grandmother's parents, Sallie Reynolds Matthews (Other Mama) and J.A. Matthews (Other Papa) who married on Christmas Day, 1876, in the Barber Watkins Reynolds House. The house is still there at Reynolds Bend on the J.A. Matthews Ranch at Albany, Texas, in the bend of the Clear Fork of the Brazos River.

Both great-grandparents have always been a presence in our lives—Sallie, through her pioneer chronicle, *Interwoven*, of which this book is a descendant, and J.A. through his legendary status as a trail-driver, pioneer and philosopher, as well as founder of the Lambshead Ranch. With five daughters, he was experienced in dealing with prospective suitors. His normal opening gambit was usually, "Young man, what is your approximate annual income?" My favorite of these anecdotes concerns a young suitor who came to the house wearing a handsome pair of slacks. Other Papa asked him what they cost. The young man, not wanting to lie and not wanting to reveal the true cost, picked a middle figure. Without hesitation, J.A. replied, "Order me two pair."

Grandmother Casey was part of our lives until her death in 1985. As she approached 100 years of age and became enfeebled, I began writing her a letter each month as a means of doing something for her. My uncle, Watt Casey, told me that she had my most recent letter in her little bag of treasures when she died. Being a ranch woman, she was an active participant in our family life. Dad used to take her and us children horseback riding. In our family, the cocktail hour was sacrosanct, and although "Mrs. C.," as Dad called her, was of the generation of women who did not smoke or drink, she would enjoy a scotch and water and a Lucky Strike cigarette, if offered. When it came time for a refill, her inevitable response was "just sweeten it, Tom."

Aunts and Uncles

Aunts and uncles are important in every family. For someone like me, from a family where the standards were high and the discipline severe, they seemed to provide a buffer. Although aunts and uncles have the same standards as the parents, they deliver the message in a gentler, more nurturing way.

Dad's older brother, Uncle Garland, was an elegant, delightful man, beloved by all who knew him. Dad was proud of his big brother. After Uncle Garland and Aunt Carolyn built their home at La Mota, just before we moved to Colorado, we saw more of them. My earliest memory of



Uncle Garland flies Grandmother Casey home to Albany in the late 1940s. I am standing on the wing.

Uncle Garland, when I was five or six years old, is of his coming by our house to see if “old stick-in-the-mud” could go dove hunting. In retrospect, I think he knew I was having a hard time and needed a break, which he provided. Uncle Garland was one of my models for graciousness. I also followed in his footsteps as an aviator, and actually went to

Mexico, which was one of his dreams. In our last visit before his death in 1997, he told me that my book, *The Lasater Philosophy of Cattle Raising*, was his favorite reference book.

Aunt Carolyn was very dynamic and influenced everything and everyone within her radius of operations. When she was diagnosed as terminally ill, I flew to Falfurrias to spend the night and to pay my respects. I was expecting a somber occasion, but it was a delightful evening, ending with Cousin Edward and me sitting on a bench at the foot of their bed visiting until both aunt and uncle fell asleep.

• • •

I shared a close bond with Mother's uncle, Watt Reynolds Matthews, who was born in 1898, as we were both Princetonians and ranchers. While I was at Princeton in the 1960s, he came twice for the Yale game. Both times, he brought dates and went to my club after the game for the parties, which were on the rowdy side. He said his only regret was that they did not have parties like that when he was a student. He remarked once that from the fall of 1917, he had not seen Princeton lose to Yale.

Uncle Watt lived his entire life at the ranch in a Spartan bachelor cowboy's bunk-room with bed, dresser, desk and chair, just as we had at Princeton. Visits to the Lambshead Ranch at Albany, Texas, which he managed for his family, were special occasions for me as a child. He had been a mentor to Mother and pals with Dad as fellow Princetonians and lifelong ranchers. A highlight for me was getting to stay with him in his quarters. In my earliest memory, I was worried to the point of sickness about wetting the bed while staying with him.



Uncle Watt, Grandmother Casey and Uncle Joe in 1976.

Mother evidently had alerted him, because he told me it would pass and nobody cared anyway. Such kindness is not soon forgotten.

In 1989, one of the highlights of our family life was flying to Lambshead Ranch for Thanksgiving dinner. Uncle Watt and the ranch are famous for preserving historical buildings and cattle trails. The ranch has restored three historic houses, a one-room schoolhouse and a dugout, as well as the headquarters. That day, he took us on a private two-and-a-half hour tour, showing Isabel and Lorenzo several of his preservation projects for which he was justly famous. When he told Annette and our children that such and such a house was constructed in '76 (meaning 1876), they were witnessing living history. I realized on this tour that it also meant much to him for me, a younger rancher, to bring my family to see his life's work. As often happens, the circle of our friendship rounded out nicely.

• • •

Mother's brother, Watt Matthews Casey, and his wife, Dosia, have been important in my life since early childhood. My first memory of Uncle Palo was his coming home from World War II, in which he served as a paratrooper. I can still see him wearing part of a uniform. Over the years, the age gap has narrowed, and we are now close friends. Throughout our lives, he and Dosia have been like second parents and a vital part of our family and business life. They have been a source of

encouragement, knowledge, financing and genetics, all crucial to the success of our business.

During the time my brother Dale and I were in prep school and college, the Caseys operated the Tri-Valley Ranch at Kiowa, Colorado, about 50 miles from the Lasater Ranch. We would go there to have dinner and inevitably stay up all night visiting. Dad usually turned up around



Aunt Dusia, Uncle Palo and Dad, with me on the truck.

7:00 a.m. the next morning, with the whole ranch crew in tow, to haul the “bodies” home.

Although they were polar opposites in every way, Uncle Palo was Dad’s closest friend and business associate—the

“first disciple” so to speak. They discussed and debated everything with lots of joking and carrying on, egging each other on in every situation. I remember them sitting in our living room at Matheson in the late 1950s, deciding to switch both herds to fall-calving in order to wean heavier calves in Colorado, and to get better breed-up on the yearling heifers. My favorite business story contrasting Dad and Uncle Palo (nicknamed “Palomino” by Uncle Watt, who called me “Lozo”) occurred in 1974 after the great cattle market break. Dad came to San Angelo to visit us for Easter. Annette and I were broke and needed cows. I knew he had not sold his sales cows, so as we drove to the airport, I suggested that he sell them to me and finance them. He flinched, thought a minute, and said that he would look for a cash buyer. That was the end of that. A few days later, I contacted Uncle Palo, who graciously offered to sell me his sales cows and finance them.

My partner in California, Max Watkins, said that Watt Casey defined the term “gentle man” in being kind to all and incapable of a negative word for anyone. Uncle Palo and I had numerous business deals on bulls and females while we lived in Mexico, and we have had numerous other transactions of cattle and frozen genetics since 1974. Their excellent cattle have been invaluable to many of us. In 2000, he and I partnered to

purchase stock in Nolan Ryan Beef. Our bull sale on October 4, 1997, was dedicated to Uncle Palo.

From Texas to Colorado

“Young man, you just bought yourself a ranch.”

—Mr. Dent

We were a four-generation Texas family, dating from before the Civil War. Dad, at thirty-six years of age, had no intention of leaving Texas when his friend Charlie Dick from Laredo called from the Broadmoor Tavern to tell him there was a good ranch for sale at Matheson, Colorado, 55 miles east of Colorado Springs. Dad was working cattle when the call came into his office in Falfurrias (toll station call: Lasater Ranch, USA). He caught the train at Rivera and got to Colorado Springs several days after everyone had sobered up and gone home. Dad decided to go look at the ranch and stayed at the Simla Hotel, sleeping fully clothed including hat, overcoat and boots to keep from freezing in Colorado’s winter. As Dad did research on the ranch’s potential, a friend in the Soil Conservation Service told him that the Ogallala aquifer surfaced under the ranch and that pockets of windmill water could be found. Dad’s father had been able to buy cheap land and use windmills to water it for cattle in South Texas—a process Dad repeated 50 years later in Eastern Colorado.

“Can you believe that little S.O.B. had that much money?”

—John M. Bennett, Jr.

After Mother and Dad decided to buy the ranch, the negotiations took place in the office of Dad’s lawyer and lifetime friend in Colorado Springs, Don Haney. As was customary, Dad had on a suit and tie. Mr. Dent and his lawyer sat across the table. Dad said, “Mr. Dent, I can’t pay your price, but am prepared to offer....” Mr. Dent reached across the table to shake hands, and said, “Young man, you just bought yourself a ranch.”

In 1948, Dad paid cash for the first 10,000 acres, having sold part of his foundation herd of the Beefmaster breed to his uncle, L.D. Miller

(after whom I was named). Dad's friend John Bennett, Jr., framed that check when it came back to the National Bank of Commerce in San Antonio, and showed it to all their mutual friends, saying, "Can you believe that little S.O.B. had that much money?"

Mother and Dad accumulated 28,000 acres in Elbert County, Colorado, which is now the home of the Foundation Herd of the Beefmaster Breed, recognized by the U.S.D.A. in 1954. John Cargile, of San Angelo, told me at the end of Dad's career, that that ranch was closer in environmental purity



Photo by Sally Lasater

Classic winter scene on the Lasater Ranch, looking northwest toward Indian Hill.

to the 1492 standard than any other ranch in the country. My brother Dale and his wife Janine have ably managed the ranch for the family since Dad's retirement. Mother and Dad's success is certainly one of the outstanding ranching business stories of the 20th century. Both of their families had been devastated by the Depression, yet they

raised and educated six children and left the ranch and cattle debt-free.

The ranch at Matheson lies along U.S. Highway 24, fifty-five miles east of Colorado Springs. The defining feature of it is fourteen miles of the Big Sandy Creek that runs through it, providing a sub-irrigated valley and winter protection for the cattle. When Mother and Dad bought the ranch in the midst of the '50s drought, it seemed forlorn, with bare adobe flats and very little grass. But nearly 60 years of dedicated management by Dad and Dale has re-created a paradise of beautiful grasses in the open, rolling high plains.

When Grandfather Edward died in 1930, there was debt against his property and most was lost, except for what was saved with the help of Uncle Laurie Miller and Mr. John M. Bennett, Sr., of San Antonio. Dad withdrew from Princeton in the middle of his sophomore year in 1931, to come home to help, and essentially went to work as foreman at \$80 per month on what had been his father's headquarters ranch. Among the

assets salvaged were the remnants of Grandfather Edward's upgraded Brahman herd and the remains of his 20,000 purebred Hereford cows. Dad's mother and uncle sold him these cattle on credit. In an interview taped in the 1980s, Dad's friend, John Armstrong of the King Ranch, said that Dad had "paid out" 2,000 cattle by the time he married Mary Casey on December 7, 1940.

The Long Move North

The Tom Lasater family made its first trip to Colorado in the spring of 1949. It was a 1,000-mile trip on two-lane roads in our new Desoto Suburban, with no air conditioning. Besides Mother and Dad, there were four children (Dale, 4; Lane, 1; Sally, a baby; and I, 6) plus a maid and a dog. The two-day trip was broken at Dumas. On all of our trips to Colorado, we stopped at Dumas, and invariably someone was sick.

We arrived at Matheson about May 1, and to our amazement and delight, it snowed the first night we were there. We lived in a modest frame house with only two bedrooms, one bath, kitchen, living room, attic and basement, and Mother cooked on a wood stove. The drought was just getting to Colorado, and the grassless pastures were blowing dust so hard that visibility was minimal. It was a grim beginning.

I remember well the arrival of the first cattle from Texas. Kauffer and Blue Truck Line of Hebronville, Texas, contracted to haul the herd on 36-foot trailers. They had to search far to find that many trailers, and must have used 30-40 trucks. When the trucks arrived at Matheson in a snowstorm, the Mexican drivers wore only tee-shirts and nearly froze to death.

Our horses, including the "kid" horses, *Flecha* and *Cubana*, also came on the trucks, along with our King Ranch saddles purchased in 1931 for \$30. The horses and cattle prospered at the 6,000-foot altitude. Both the older cows and older horses caught their second youth and began growing again. The move was a success. Mother and Dad made up their minds to be successful and never looked back. They were both progressive-minded and politically liberal, and I feel that they subconsciously were seeking new horizons for their cattle as well as for themselves.

I loved Texas and can remember working cattle with Dad in South Texas. I still can smell the horse sweat in the saddle-room on the

Seeligson lease at Premont. I remember the men having Bim, the first great Beefmaster bull, in the chute and the Charbray herd in the house trap prior to shipment to Charlie Dick about 1945. I did not want to leave Texas and never did take root in Colorado.

Looking at the larger picture, I believe that it is not a coincidence that I returned to Texas to pick up the tradition started by Grandfather Edward. I have followed his trail, made a lot of the same mistakes, enjoyed similar successes and feel a strong kinship with him. It is my belief that in every family, half of what is taught is the wisdom of the ages and half is baloney. Maturity comes when we discard the latter.

School Days at Matheson, Colorado

In 1948 we spent the summer in Colorado, and returned in 1949 to live and to start school that fall. We attended the proverbial country school



Dixie, Ruth and Annette Nixon in 1957.

with eight grades in three rooms. I was in third grade and Dale was in first. The school was a Spartan affair. The three teachers, Mrs. McLennan, Mrs. Cain and Mrs. Nixon, ran everything with an iron hand, including discipline, doctoring the wounded and making minor repairs. There were no “aids to education,” assistant principals or elaborate playground equipment. We had blackboards, worn textbooks and strict discipline. While one grade had its lesson, the other two studied in silence. To the limit of his abilities, each student learned the lesson every day. If those three ladies were put in charge of elementary education today in the U.S., our education system would be better off.

The school bus, which pulled into the ranch headquarters a quarter mile off Highway 24, picked us up each morning. We waited by the

loading chute, having already broken ice for the horses and having fed whatever calves we had on feed.

Our family and the Nixon family became friends immediately. Ruth Nixon, my future mother-in-law, was a pillar of the community, loved and admired by all. Edgar operated a service station and convenience store in town. They had two daughters, Dixie, the older, and Annette, my future wife—two gorgeous girls. Seeing them was a big event in our social life. We learned to drive early, and as the ranch surrounded Matheson on three sides, we children could drive ourselves to the edge of town to go to Sunday school, get the mail, and visit the Nixons or other friends. Our Drivers' Ed vehicle of choice was a 1949 four-wheel-drive Jeep truck.

Before starting the sturdy vehicle, we were taught to check all four tires with a gauge and to check the oil, water and battery. My children now laugh at the fact that I always give an automobile a “walk-around” check, but they did not grow up on the Lasater Ranch. Like all ranchers, Dad was touchy about having his roads torn up. The road to town was a two-lane ranch road, and one day after a rain, he gave me detailed instructions about not driving through the puddles on the way to get the mail. After coming off a little mesa near our house, there was a long, straight stretch of road that had lots of puddles. At each, I stopped, wrapped up the engine, popped the clutch and hit the puddle with tires screaming and blue smoke pouring out of the exhaust. After about three of these puddles, I looked over and saw Dad about a quarter-mile away sitting on his horse on a hill watching the operation. I thought I was in terrible trouble, but the incident was never mentioned. I got the message without a word being spoken.

The Foremen

“Just do whatever Eddie, George or Richard would do.”

—Tom Lasater

The foremen who worked on the ranch were nearly as important to us as our aunts and uncles. There was great *esprit de corps* on the ranch due to Mother and Dad's dynamism and the fact that we were all part of a world-changing project. The foremen respected the fact that everyone,

including Mother and the children, worked hard and that the children received no favoritism. The men understood that we children lived in a harsh regime, and they did everything they could to ease the passage. We felt great affection for them, a sentiment which was reciprocated.

The first foreman whom I knew well was Norman Brooks, who came to work in 1946, just out of the Marine Corps. Starting in Falfurrias, Norman and his wife, Rena, also made the move to Colorado. Dad and he, both being hard-hitting and energetic people, made a great team. They had figured out how to gentle the cattle with sack corn and to train them to come to a siren, which revolutionized working cattle in the South Texas brush.

Walter Carter and his wife, Virginia, were next. Walter was a Texas A&M graduate, and Dad interviewed them together. At the end of the interview, Dad asked Virginia if she thought her husband could handle the job. She replied, "You just try him!" Walter ended his career as manager of



Photo by Time

Riding with George Evanoika, Eddie Stanko and Dale in the summer of 1955.

the Broseco Ranch in East Texas, a large, famous ranch. While there, he established an outstanding Beefmaster Cross cow herd and instituted a rotational grazing program. He bought bulls from me in San Angelo, which was quite an honor. In 1986, I attended their annual ranch picnic near Omaha, Texas, and had a good visit with Walter and Virginia. As we reminisced, she told me that the Lasater Ranch job was the best they had ever had, but that they had to leave to get a rest.

Eddie Stanko was the main man in helping Mother and Dad develop the ranch in Colorado. As Dad said, "Eddie came to work for six weeks and stayed 28 years." All the children, in succession, worked both on horseback and on foot with him—punching cattle and building fences, pens, and other repairs and maintenance. Eddie was an institution on the ranch, and, along with Mother and Dad, has a memorial plaque on the south face of Flatrock Hill, overlooking the ranch.

Two other men who worked with Eddie were also part of the family. Richard Pazzin and George Evanoika were family favorites. Richard always described himself as “too light for heavy work and too heavy for light work.”

Eddie, Jr., George and Richard all attended Dad’s funeral in 2001. Afterwards, George told me a great story about Dad. Our family used to camp on the Hammond Ranch, private property on Beaver Creek, in the mountains west of Colorado Springs. One day, Dad asked George to go with him to help make some repairs to our cabin there. On the way through Colorado Springs, they bought a bottle of wine, and when they arrived at La Escondida (The Hideaway), they sat under a tree, visited and drank the wine with no work being accomplished that day. George told me that was how he would remember Dad. When I went East to school, Dad told me that if I were ever in a jam, “Just do whatever Eddie, George or Richard would do and you’ll be all right.”

In 1956, the U.S. cattle industry was the cover story in an issue of *Time* magazine, which my parents used as their source of information before television, just as Annette and I did while living in Mexico. *Time* sent a photographer from Brooklyn to get pictures for the part of the article on Dad, (“Woe to the Cow that Slips”). This great photograph, taken with a telephoto lens, tells the story of the ranching industry. I was 13 years old and Dale was 11, but we were not boys; we were little men.



The Lasater Philosophy

In a feature business story in its May 7, 1956, edition titled “The Golden Calf,” *Time* discusses the improvement in beef quality and quantity due to scientific cattle breeding. The two cattlemen pictured are Bob Kleberg of the King Ranch and Tom Lasater, founder of the Beefmaster Breed. The caption under Dad’s picture says, “Woe to the cow that slips,” referring to his revolutionary policy of requiring a merchantable calf every year from every female over 24 months of age.

The Lasater Philosophy of Cattle Raising (the title of my book published in 1972) has been the most influential beef production system worldwide since 1960. Dad’s concept is based on using

natural selection in a large population of cattle for the “Six Essential Characteristics” of beef cattle breeding, which constitute his “Standard of Excellence.”

The Six Essentials are Disposition—meaning intelligence and ease of handling; Fertility—meaning reproducing every year without extra assistance or individual attention; Weight—meaning weight per day of age, the ultimate measure of efficiency; Conformation—meaning functionality and red meat production as exemplified by muscling; Hardiness—meaning the ability to thrive under harsh conditions with little assistance; and Milk Production—meaning mothering ability. Any animal lacking any one of these traits cannot be profitable and should be culled, leading to the public view of Dad’s program as “ruthless.” The use of this program in any herd anywhere will result in the complete elimination of low-profitability cattle.

Visitors and Cattle Buyers

One unique aspect of our childhood was a steady flow of visitors to the ranch from all over the world. Mother and Dad were the first of a large number of Texans to buy ranches in Eastern Colorado. Dad’s ideas about raising cattle and working with nature fed his growing worldwide fame as a cattleman. In addition, rather than building a home, Mother and Dad remodeled the ranch barn as a home with the help of architect Carlisle B. Guy. The Texas heritage, the house, the cattle, the six children and Dad’s ideas were all topics of interest that led to a number of articles in the Denver and Colorado Springs newspapers. As a culmination of all this interest, the U.S.D.A. recognized the Beefmaster breed in 1954.

Dad was a dynamic teacher, Mother was a great hostess, and all the children played a role in the ongoing public relations campaign. When I was about twelve, I drove visitors on ranch tours. At that time Dad had created a system of number-branding the herd with a code that visitors could not read. One day while I was driving a husband and wife on a tour, I was reading the brands, telling them how many calves each cow had had and which was her calf that year. The husband was bragging on me until

the wife finally got mad and said, “Jimmy (their son) can do that.” The husband replied, “No he can’t.”

By the mid-to-late fifties, all the Texas-born siblings could drive, and we looked forward to deliveries when many customers came to pick their bulls. We drew straws to see who got to tour our favorites. Some of them were Weber and Brauchle, Humberto Garza and the Musser Brothers. The Brauchle family, who visited us in Múzquiz, and Garza family are still in the Beefmaster business after more than 50 years.



From the Bernice Musser Collection

Tom, Pat, Bernice and Jack Musser at the Lasater Ranch, circa 1971.

Our many foreign visitors marked the beginning of my focus on international business. Over the years, more than 1,000 Australians have signed the guest book at the Lasater Ranch. Also on the list are many famous animal scientists, including Dr. Jan Bonsma of South Africa, who, along with Dad, revolutionized cattle breeding in the 20th century. I was home from college when Sally Forbes of Wyoming came to the ranch to ask Dad’s advice on establishing the Red Angus Registry. I heard him tell her to base the registry on individual animal performance, which they did, and that breed is now the fastest-growing registry in the U.S.

Dr. Dick Clark, a scientist in charge of the U.S.D.A. Miles City Experiment Station where the Line I Herefords were developed, was a regular visitor. He was instrumental in getting the Beefmasters recognized as a breed. I remember Dad and Dr. Clark discussing the relative merits of Limousin and Simmental cattle in the fifties, before any had been brought to North America.

In addition to an extensive array of outstanding animal scientists and cattle people as visitors, we hosted lawyers, writers, artists, architects and celebrities. Although we lived on an isolated ranch with no television and

limited phone service, we grew up in the mainstream of the discussions of events and ideas.

As I mentioned, the cocktail hour was sacrosanct at our home. No one (except Mother) was asked to do any work at that time. She would come home from working horseback, put on a long dress, fix Margaritas and cook steaks or Mexican food for the assembled multitude. Dad was a great raconteur. Many times, as he explained something about ranching to an interested guest, I could almost see the light coming on in the visitor's face. Sometimes, when Dad told a joke, he would end up laughing so hard that someone else would have to finish it for him.

Joseph T. Dawson and his wife, Melba, were favorites of everyone. Joe was a flamboyant Texas wildcatter, and Melba, like Annette, was a smart,



Joe and Melba Dawson.

beautiful woman who could make him behave. Joe and I were friends immediately, and although we never were in business together, we always talked business. He had had experience in Mexico before World War II, and when I told him I was going to Mexico, he said, "You're going to learn to

suffer, Boy." At the same time, Dad said, "I cannot imagine a man of your personality going to Mexico." They both knew that the patience needed would "try my soul," and they were right.

Melba Dawson was a close friend of my cousin, Peggy Lasater Clark of Corpus Christi. Peggy told me that Joe and Melba, who had two daughters, Diane and Roslyn, considered me the son they never had. Annette and I had a close friendship with them until their deaths. Joe was a war hero, the first man off Omaha Beach on D-Day (leading the Allied breakout). He introduced the President of the United States at the 50th Anniversary celebration at Normandy on June 6, 1994. In September 1997, an elementary school in Corpus Christi was named for him. I had

the privilege of attending the dedication of the Joseph T. Dawson Elementary School and enjoyed my last visit with both of them.

Capitalists in the Making

“FCO—Family Cow Outfit”

—Mary Casey Lasater

Everybody on the Lasater Ranch worked hard nearly every day. We were paid a daily salary when working. In addition, a schedule of jobs and wages was posted on the laundry room door: wash cars, wash windows, haul trash, trim horses’ hooves, oil saddles, and so on. We also had projects feeding calves for ranch consumption. Dad furnished the calves and feed. We mixed the feed by hand, fed the calves twice daily and, if necessary, broke the ice. We earned good money, and each of us financed our social lives as well as hunting and fishing equipment, athletic equipment, gifts and many other items. Each year, with money in hand, we awaited the new Montgomery Ward catalog with keen anticipation.

An independent bus service ran twice a day from Limon to Colorado Springs. We had a box by the highway where the bus could pick up and drop off items from the city. The bus would also stop if one of us was waiting. Frequently, I would go to Colorado Springs on the early bus, go shopping, deposit money at Columbia Savings, visit a friend or go to the movies and come home on the late bus. My friends in Colorado Springs were in awe of the amounts of money we earned.

Like most ranch families, our lives centered on the work. Dad was a lifelong cowboy and Mother was a fine athlete (swimming and tennis) and horsewoman. She rode a Porter saddle, made by the famed Porter Saddlemakers of Phoenix, which she received from Uncle Watt as a wedding present in 1940. While I was home, the “FCO” (Family Cow Outfit), as Mother called it, consisted of our parents and the four oldest children. Due to the length of the ranch and the fact that we lived near the west end, we did a lot of riding. There was no trailer on the ranch (probably by design), so we rode everywhere and handled all cattle movements on horseback. We kept a night-horse in the corrals, and one

of the older siblings wrangled the horses at 6:00 a.m. While Mother cooked breakfast, the older brothers helped Dad get the six horses saddled. Everyone carried a slicker and canteen. Except for hail or lightning, weather was not taken into consideration, and Dad did not tolerate complaints about being cold, hot, wet, thirsty or tired, which took some



Mother on Ginger.

doing given the age spread of the crew. At that altitude, horses are powerful and we could ride at a slow lope (collected gallop) for long distances. On a really big day, we each would lead a fresh horse to ride home. We rode cavalry style, by twos, and no one was to cross in front of another or crowd them from behind. As we approached a gate, one of the older brothers or one of the two cowboys would break ranks and gallop ahead to open it. We did a lot of sorting and cutting out pairs, such as cows with calves, on horseback in the pasture. Dad and the foreman would bring the cuts out while the rest of us held the herd or rode in to help separate the cattle being taken out. We kept the head count, loudly calling the count for each pair.

Everyone in the FCO was taught the classic maneuvers for handling cattle on horseback and on foot. Visitors were at a loss as to what to do. The cattle business was serious business in our home. All of the family was involved in the business and we all carried notebooks and pens to write down instructions, pasture counts, hay bale counts, etc. We had a man from Nebraska who worked a short time, but Dad had to fire him because he talked too much and told too many jokes. We were part of a very successful enterprise, we learned a lot and made money, but we did not do it for fun. Dad once told me, not joking, that we should pay him

rather than the reverse, and when I was about thirteen, he and I had a pivotal conversation. At that time he had three men working on the ranch. That day, he told me I could count on the third job if I needed it, but that he did not want any advice or suggestions from me. Some, on hearing this story, think it was harsh. In my mind it was clear communication between two strong personalities. Dad knew I could not work for him, and I did not plan to do so. I left home, went on my own and became his biggest customer. Growing up on the Lasater Ranch was an unforgettable experience that one would not want to repeat or extend. In retrospect, I am thankful for the training I received. After leaving home, I was never anywhere that the standards were as high or the demands as great as on the Lasater Ranch, including Princeton and the U.S. Army. Dad, one of the most famous cattlemen worldwide in the twentieth century, did not exempt himself from the severe standards. I remember distinctly when the first cows were pregnancy-tested in 1945. In 1948, Dad began requiring that all females calve every 365 days, starting at twenty-four months, which is the crux of the program. The adoption of this policy coincided with the onset of the drought of the fifties. By 1954, Dad's cow numbers were way down. One day, Dale and I were helping him, and we had cut out a group of drys and late-calvers in the corner of a pasture. Dad agonized for several minutes over whether or not to turn them back with the herd. Finally he said, "Open the gate." Nobody but Dad would have stayed with such a rigorous program. Thirty years later, Bud Adams of Florida, founder of the Braford breed, told me, "Your dad showed us what a cow is all about."

The Final Phase

Although Dad attended Princeton for a year and a half, the highlight of his educational career was attending Phillips Academy at Andover, Massachusetts, from which he graduated in 1929. Andover, with Exeter and Lawrenceville, were considered the Big Three prep schools just as Princeton, Yale and Harvard were the top colleges.

In 1954 Mother and Dad took me to New York City and to Andover for Dad's 25th reunion, which was one of the greatest experiences of my life. At that time, the Rock Island Rocket ran from Colorado Springs to Chicago,

where it connected with the Twentieth Century Limited, the crack train to New York City. Since the ranch ran ten or more miles along the railroad track, the conductor stopped the Rocket at the ranch gate so that we could board. The train trip to Chicago and New York was very exciting, with dinners on white tablecloths and two nights in a sleeper car. Twenty years later, Annette and I rode this same train, which had been sold to Ferrocarriles Nacionales, from Saltillo to Mexico City, and as we boarded, I recognized the car named "Spirit of St. Louis" after Lindberg's plane.

After arriving in New York, Mother, Dad and I saw various people, including our second cousins Tom and Dot Brittingham (Mother's family) and my first cousins, Edward and Garland Lasater. Edward and Garland took me out, with their dates, to Eddie Condon's nightclub, which I am sure was a drag for them. But being gracious people and wonderful cousins, they made no complaint. They also took me to Coney Island, where we rode the famous roller coaster, initiating my lifelong love of roller coasters.

We had dinner with Tom and Dot at Luchows, an elegant, renowned restaurant, and the subject of discussion was whether or not scientist J. Robert Oppenheimer was being railroaded by McCarthyites. When our daughter, Isabel, went to Vanderbilt University in Nashville in the 1990s, Annette and I frequently visited Dot (then widowed and living in Nashville) and became close friends.

Knowing how I loved baseball, Dad took me via subway to a Yankees game in the Bronx where we saw Mickey Mantle hit a home run batting left-handed against Detroit. When Mantle died, the national media all ran pictures of him batting left-handed in pinstripes in a home game, just as I had seen him.

After seeing Andover, I counted the minutes until I could leave for prep school. Sometime later that year, Mother and Dad took me to Colorado Springs to Fountain Valley School for a tour and interview with the headmaster, Henry B. Poor. Dad, Mother and I liked Mr. Poor and the school, and I decided to attend FVS. I was accepted to begin ninth grade in September 1955. That summer FVS assigned books to read, book reports to write and also sent a list of clothing requirements. We were to wear dark suits, white shirts, conservative ties, black socks and black

shoes to dinner. On Friday nights, sport coats were allowed. The dark suit/blazer formula, followed by all private school graduates for over one hundred years, has served me well.

During the summer, Mother drove me into Denver where we bought the whole wardrobe, including the footlocker we were required to take. Although I had no idea what was ahead, Mother did, and she knew I was going to thrive in my new environment. She also knew that although Dad and I were alike, we were also very different, and that I was leaving for good. She blessed my uniqueness and encouraged me to follow my star. I will always treasure the memory of that day with my mother.

Later, Dad took me to the Exchange National Bank in Colorado Springs and opened a school checking account for my education. When we went down to the vault and cashed U.S. Savings Bonds, bought when I was born, I realized for the first time how much effort Dad had put into being a father and how much he cared for his family. Now that he is gone, I realize how fortunate I am to have had such an experience with him.