



**Thad Box**

# Sin Fronteras

Trinidad Vasquez was born to Mexican ranch hands on a cold, remote Wyoming ranch during the winter of 1926. When he was 6 months old, his father was killed by a horse. His mother took him to her native Chihuahua. There he grew up, finished high school, met his bride on the plaza. His 10 children were baptized in the village church. He was a cultural Mexican, an American birth citizen who knew no English. He lived on the south side of poverty.

Trinidad found a job in New Mexico. One by one he brought his family north. They didn't swim the Rio Grande. They followed a ranch road west of Juarez and entered the United States through a livestock fence. He was the only American citizen.

I hired Trinidad to help me rehabilitate an old adobe house. We became friends—just two old codgers rebuilding a house that was twice our age. We shared common values, but spoke different languages. He spoke Spanish, I English. We understood one another without speaking a word.

He could do anything. He took pride in his work. He did more than was expected. One Friday we drank cerveza and rested. I said I could rent a backhoe for \$50 to fill the 100-foot-long ditch that we couldn't reach with the farm tractor.

He said he would fill that ditch for 50 bucks. Next Saturday at daybreak he was hard at it with pick, shovel, and wheelbarrow. Just before sundown he finished. I gave him 3 \$20 bills. I refused the change. Sunday he was back grubbing out a stump that wasn't part of our deal. You couldn't get ahead of Trinidad.

He was in considerable demand as a farrier. Many weekends he took his tools and went to some ranch to shoe horses. He was welcome on both sides of the border. He had a broken nose and a big scar on his forehead from early encounters with ranch horses.

One morning Trinidad's daughter-in-law came to tell me he had been killed in an automobile accident. I drove to the crash site. His car had been towed away. His old felt hat lay in a pool of blood surrounded by road trash in the ditch.

Trinidad's father died violently while working for a Wyoming rancher. Trinidad died violently where his sweat and blood were part of the land. He left a wife, 8 children, and about 30 grandchildren. His grandchildren are American citizens born here. Several children are in various stages of becoming US citizens. The rest are Mexicans.

This issue of *Rangelands* is devoted to the international aspects of our profession. The ecological and economic potential of rangelands cannot be contained within national boundaries. Nor can the contribution of range people be measured by their chance arrival in a particular economic or social setting. We all belong to the land.

In my last column I wrote about being influenced by hungry children in Somalia. When I returned to Texas, my Dad, a product of the Texas Hill Country, asked what Somalis were like. I told him they spoke a different language, had black skin, and worshiped God differently

than he did, but he had more in common with them than with white businessmen in New York.

My last PhD graduate was Somali. Ali Ahmed Elmi could have had a good job in the United States. He opted to return to his war-torn country. He and his family helped establish, and now live in, the new country of Somaliland, an independent breakaway nation north of Somalia. Though not recognized by many nations, this new democracy is a shining example of independent pastoralists.

Our role, as land care professionals, is to assure sustainability of rangelands. This means keeping options open for future generations whether they live on Texas grasslands, sagebrush foothills in Nevada, mulga shrublands of Australia, thorn tree savannahs of Africa, or cold deserts in Iceland. The climate, vegetation, and people are different in each of these, but the universal need is to pass viable communities on to the next generation.

We develop science to assure sustainability with many varied demands on the land. This means our science must be based on principles—understanding why rather than how. Certainly we need to know how to grow better calves, how to keep recreational vehicles from causing erosion, or how to get rainfall into soil to grow more grass. But to achieve sustainable rangelands these how-to tasks have to be done as sub-headings in the larger framework of getting what people want without violating the ecological limits of carrying capacity.

What people want from rangelands varies between rich and poor countries. Gary Frasier wrote in the October issue of *Rangelands* that he didn't agree with the widespread belief that recreation is the main use of rangelands in America. Rangelands are multiple use lands. Our culture determines the priority of uses. In rich countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia, our food comes via a global market. Recreation, open space, watershed, ecological services, waste disposal, and aesthetic values are rapidly becoming more important than the traditional use of providing forage for livestock or wildlife.

In poor countries, products from the land are more important than ecological or recreational services. Many people in Africa and Asia still depend directly on the land for food. Cattle, sheep, goats, and camels keep people alive. Rangeland products such as charcoal, fiber, and gum are important trade goods. Gum arabic from *Acacia senegal* trees is a common thickener of foods in rich countries. It is one of the most important export products from many African ranges. A US claim that much of its trade is financed by Osama bin Laden has not stopped export of gum arabic. American companies just call it "gum acacia" on our food labels.

Development of a multicultural cadre of range managers who can apply science in very different cultures and environments is perhaps our profession's greatest contribution. American range schools have produced thousands of graduates from every corner of the globe.

I have worked in or visited over 30 countries, some on every continent. Everywhere there are range management graduates from our schools. Although many SRM members working in a number of universities produced those graduates, 2 stalwarts stand out in my mind for their work with international students: Rex Peiper and Phil Ogden.

I've been told Rex produced over 125 international graduate students at New Mexico State University. I don't know how many students Phil turned out at the University of Arizona. But the joke was that you could always locate him, night or day, by the crowd of foreign students surrounding him. Others may have equally valid heroes for spreading rangeland messages internationally, but I have yet to visit a country where I didn't meet a disciple of Phil or Rex.

Our TV screens are filled with genocide and the suffering of the people of Darfur. One of my first graduate students, El Rasheed Abdul Magid, did his master's thesis on the rangelands of that battered province.

On my living room wall is an ostrich feather fan and a giraffe tail wand, symbols of power for a queen and a chief. These were given to Jenny and me by Rasheed after he became head administrator of rangelands in Sudan.

Rasheed died from tropical diseases about 2 decades ago. The rangelands he studied as a student and administered as a government official are now killing fields burned, overgrazed, overcut. Human capital has been wasted. The land, abused though it is, remains.

I don't know when the killing will stop, or when those of us in rich countries will direct our attention and our wealth to Darfur. I don't know who remains in Sudan from the hundreds of students Rasheed sent overseas to study, or what schools they graduated from. But through them—through us—Rasheed lives and his besieged Darfur will rise again some day.

Our individual contribution can be as earthy as shoeing a horse on a border ranch. Or as basic as developing ecological principles at a land grant university. Or as practical as making a range management plan. Or as complex as finding the place of gum arabic in the global economy. Taken together, our actions collectively make us a people without borders—sin fronteras.

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