

Mark and Amy McLaughlin bought a ranch in southwestern Nolan County in 1963 and raised their children there. The ranch has been a constant enjoyment and an integral part of their lives. The ranch is Edwards plateau type country and is a lovely spot on the Callahan divide. It is evenly divided between prairie on the north side and breaks and canyons, limestone and live oaks on the south end. The land has springs of some magnitude all over the north and east ends of the ranch.

Previously, the ranch belonged to J. H. Paramor, who was a famous ranchman back in the 19th century. Paramor had given the ranch to his daughter euncie. She died at age 92 and having no children left it to her nieces and nephews. They sold it to the McLaughlin family. The ranch is 75 road miles and 50 airline miles from San Angelo. Initially, it had a large mortgage with annual payments which Mark and Amy felt came around every thirty days instead of annually. They started ranching with cattle and then added angora goats. Also, sales of mohair and calves produced money from the ranch to pay the mortgage.

The ranch needed a name, so Mark picked the name Double M Ranch. He wanted a ranch brand that was unique and that wouldn't blur when fire branded on the cattle. Amy asked Mark at one time, "Double M... Double M...Mark McLaughlin. What's my part of this ranch? I cook lunch for the ranch hands and make a home for the family, and it's Double M." Mark responded, "Now, honey, honey that doesn't stand for Mark McLaughlin. That stands for Me and Momma."

Mark felt a ranch was a place to work. Amy as well as the children all contributed to make the ranch a good, workable, productive piece of ground. In return, the ranch rewarded them. The family feels a strong

sentimental attachment to the ranch as a result of the time spent living and working there. This attachment also comes from seeing the ranch go through hard times such as drought and range fires burning off pastures. There were also good times when there were bountiful rains and grass grew abundantly. A ranch is like any other relationship. There are times of sadness and worry, but there is joy and satisfaction in operating a ranch. A ranch refreshes the soul as one looks around seeing all nature has done in producing a beautiful piece of property.

A ranch must be kept in good repair through constant devotion and attention. Livestock must be protected from predators and adverse weather events.

A ranch produces a variety of incomes. For example, (1) wildlife hunting is a big source of revenue for all ranchers. Its recreational use is enjoyed by people who don't otherwise have access to the beautiful countryside. This is something that will prevail in the future. (2) Mark also feels the livestock industry will continue and perhaps be enhanced with the raising of new livestock breeds. One transition has been from Spanish goats to Angora goats due to their mohair value. Dorper sheep also lead the way today, because they don't require much maintenance and produce a very desirable meat for the market. (3) Neighboring ranches to the Double M have had zebras, ostriches, emus none of which worked but they show the versatility of ranch land as well as owner ingenuity to see a variety of uses for the land and then benefit from consequent revenues.

Mark feels his ranch guests love to drive across the prairies of the ranch to enjoy miles of expansive, beautiful grassland. Then, descend into some of the canyons to see the springs in the bottom of the canyons

with flowing water, deep holes with fish, and rock shallows with little waterfalls at the end of the rock shelves.

The ranch is Edward's plateau type of country blended with the plains environment. There is a wide variety of vegetation, which is very desirable. The interesting thing about the ranch is that the streams on the east side of the ranch flow east and the springs on the west side flow west. That makes for a source of water for the Colorado River on the west side, and a source of water for Oak Creek, which eventually becomes the Colorado River, on the east side.

Mark has been fifty-five years now on the same ranch and still experiences a marvelous feeling when he gets close to the ranch entrance. He knows every fence, every rock, every pond, every spring on that ranch and to him it is like visiting old friends when he is there.

The McLaughlin children have been taught about ranch operations. Their father explained that even though the ranch produces vegetation that cannot be sold so livestock are needed to convert that vegetation into something that can be sold.

Mark reflects on times of drought, as a time of grief and pain caused by seeing your old friend, the ranch, suffer. There is sadness in having to remove livestock because there is nothing to eat; therefore, nothing to convert to a saleable commodity. Ranchers must wait and suffer through the hard times, doing whatever is needed to appease their creditors by telling themselves that better times are coming and normally they do. Ranchers need to have money in reserve for hard times like these.

Mark's children understand that there's nothing free in this life and that success must be earned; The same is true in ranching in --. It takes consistent work. Mark concludes with "I say we owned that ranch. We don't own anything. That ranch was there a long time before we started walking around on it. It's going to be there a long time after we are gone. When I say I own it, it simply means, I had the privilege of managing it during my lifetime."