

Here comes the judge

The nurse left work at 5 o'clock. I rushed from the high school woodworking shop on Thursday afternoon at 5:05 to find the clinic door locked. Disappointment set in as I pressed an already damp handkerchief to my right eye.

I should have used goggles to skill-saw those last few pine boards for my FFA feed bunk project. A piece of sawdust flew into my eye. Now I would have to wait until morning to see the school nurse.

My eye smarted and watered constantly, so I kept it closed as much as possible to assuage the pain.

Cars followed each other out of the school parking lot as I hurried to the old maroon Jeep waiting in the far corner to rattle me home. "Miserable" would be a good word to use in describing the ride. I don't recommend using one hand and one eye to drive an old Jeep, but did get home.

I walked into the house with the now-wet handkerchief jammed into my eye. In a few words, I apprised my mother of my carelessness and its resulting consequences.

She said, "Your eye is all red from irritation. You shouldn't have rubbed it so

much. There's probably sawdust still in there. Maybe it'll work its way out while you sleep."

She took a Visine bottle from the medicine cabinet and

told me to open my eye wide. The drops thundered onto my eyeball and made me instinctively try to close my eye. Some of the drops landed on my cheek instead of in my eye as I squirmed with discomfort.

I somewhat automatically performed the evening chores of milking cows, feeding barnyard animals, and carrying wood and water to the kitchen. Sleep failed to bring relief, and pain remained next morning.

After another bout with Visine, I did a mechanical repeat of completing chores before riding the bus to school.

Mrs. Jahrmann, school nurse, had just



**Center
Stage**

Duane
Portwood



unlocked the clinic door when I arrived. She did not even remove her jacket before sitting me in a chair for the eye exam.

Tall and pretty, she made me feel at ease. Gently she moved my eyelids around and searched. After a few brief moments, she announced, "I don't see anything. I'm going to take you to the doctor. It's just a couple blocks away, so we can walk."

I rather enjoyed the walk. Like I said — tall and pretty.

The doctor sat me on a stool and swiveled a machine into place in front of me. "Lean forward, put your chin on this pad, and look straight ahead."

I followed his instructions while he sat on a stool on the other side of the machine and observed the innards of my eye through an opening that, I guessed, magnified. He voiced his prognosis in just a few minutes.

"You have a corneal ulcer; it's a scratch on the cornea. We'll put a patch over your eye and give you a prescription for some

drops to soothe and help heal. In a couple weeks you should be good as new."

On the way back to the clinic, we stopped at the Rexall Drug. At the clinic, Mrs. Jahrmann sat me down, skillfully administered eyedrops, and taped a patch over my eye.

I returned to school feeling conspicuous (classmates tend to stare); other than that, the patch wasn't too bad.

As luck would have it, our FFA instructor scheduled a judging team, with me as a member, to participate in livestock judging contests the next two weekends, one in Sundance, the other in Douglas. The prospect of finding minute differences in animal characteristics with only one eye troubled me.

The regional contest in Sundance saw our team win with myself as high-scoring individual. The next weekend at the state contest in Douglas, we fared almost as well. Our team came in third. Once again, I walked away with purple.

I hesitate to mention the only time throughout my high school and college career that I ever won first in livestock judging took place when I could observe the animals with only one eye. How do things like that happen?