Cow wassailing

I'm about to enjoy my 60th Christmas on earth and yet there are still many things about the holiday that I don't understand, such as:

Who is good King Wenceslas and what does he have to do with Christmas?

Does figgy pudding taste as bad as it sounds?

When people "Come A-Wassailing," are you expected to feed them?

Who hasn't sung the words, "Love and joy come to you, and to your wassail too, and God bless and send you a happy New Year." And yet no one dares ask the question, what's your wassail? Are they a body appendage? A relative? And, do we all have them and, if not, why?

It turns out that a wassail was brought to us by the Saxons, of Anglo-Saxon fame, and it has a couple meanings. One definition in Medieval England of a wassail was when rowdy and frightful trick-or-treater-like hooligans would crash into your house and demand food and drink. (Sounds to me like when the in-laws come to visit.)

The other definition of a wassail is the custom of going out into your orchards and fields and honoring your crops and livestock and encouraging them to grow and lead a healthy lifestyle. As an example, apple growers might get all liquored up on cider and go out into their orchards and serenade their apple trees.

Or, a medieval rancher might ride out into his pastures and toast to the good health of his

medieval cows. He and his wench also might beat on pots and pans to encourage fertility and scare away evil demons, like wolves and the neighbor's trich-infested scrub bull.

I think wassailing, or honoring our livestock during Christmas season, is a great idea, especially now that they are worth something. The question is, how do we honor our livestock in this day and age? Do we have a banquet for our cows, serve them chicken and name one of them "Citizen of the Year?" I suppose we could feed them a little extra hay on Christmas, but today's high hay prices make that cost prohibitive.

Another way the old-time ranchers did it was to shoot guns in the air and light fires, but in view of all the disastrous fires this year, and our government's reluctance to put them out, I think there simply has to be a better way to wassail our cows.

Saxon wassailers would take their wassail cup and drink a toast to their cattle, but most of today's popular toasts seem poorly lacking. I mean, how much honor do we bestow on our cows by swigging from a bottle of Jack Daniels and saying, "Through my teeth, and round my gums, look out belly here it comes?" Or, "Here's to our wives and sweethearts. May they never meet."

See what I mean? They just don't have much relevance to a cow.

I suppose we could borrow from a friend of mine who always recites the same toast whether he's at a funeral or a wedding. He says, "Keep your wagon between the ditches and the lightning bugs out of the buttermilk." At least there is a milk reference, but still, I don't know that your average cow would feel honored.

In looking through several books on the subject, I did find some toasts that could be altered to bestow some semblance of honor on our cows. For example, "May your face always be in feed and may the wind at your back always be your own." And I suppose you could say to your cows on Christmas day, "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow I'm hauling your ugly bag of bones to the auction market."

Due to the language barrier and livestock's uneducated palate for fine wines or champagne, I

think we should probably rule out wassailing our cows with toasts and boasts. That leaves only one way I can think of to honor our cows this Christmas, and that is the highly entertaining format of a roast. Yes, that’s what we should do, have a wassail and roast our cows this holiday ... at 30 minutes a pound at 375 degrees.

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