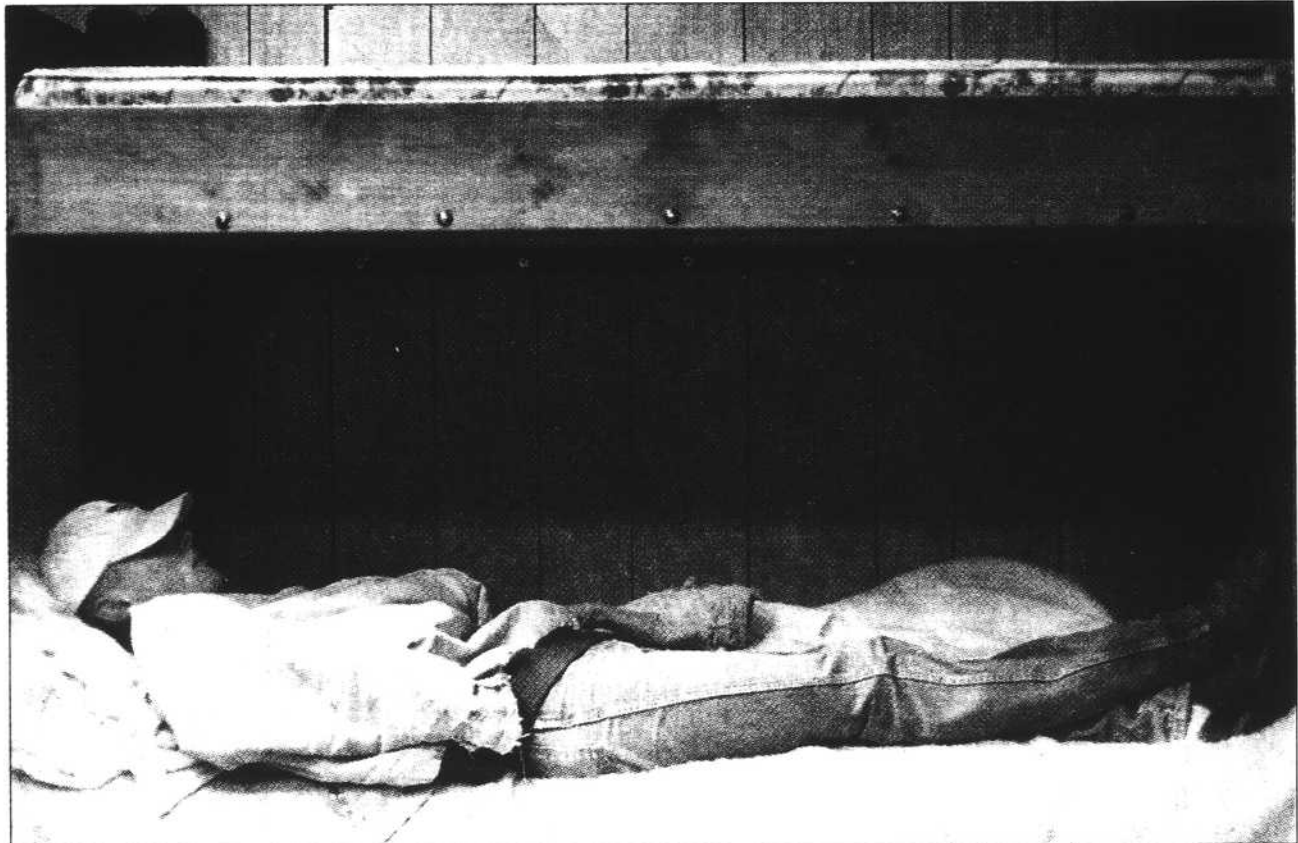
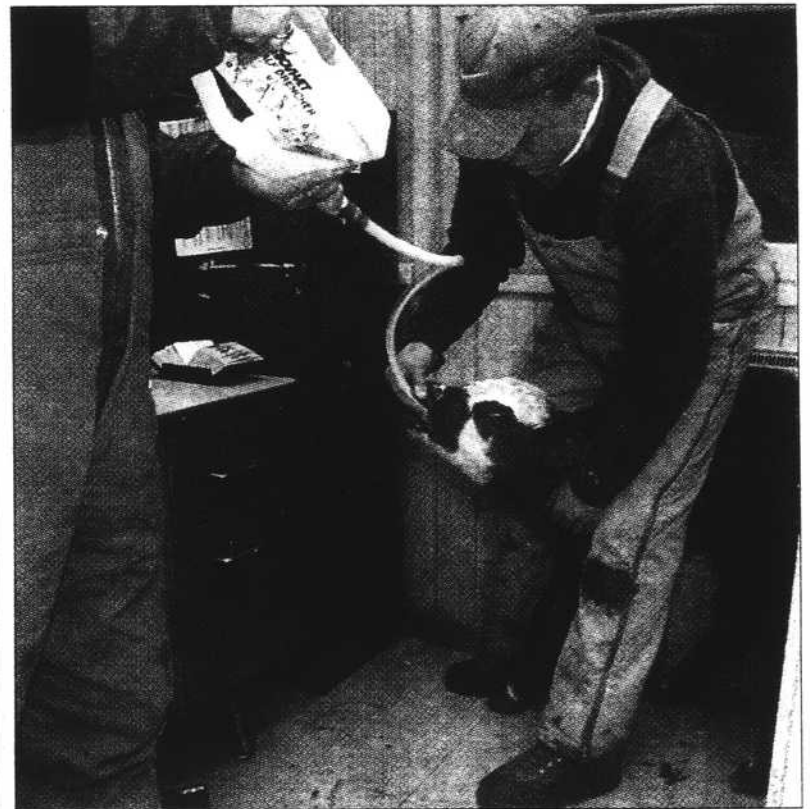




FAR LEFT: UNL ANIMAL SCIENCE MAJOR Chris Ibsen opens the gate to a pasture on one of his several late-night cattle checks. Ibsen was checking on the UNL physiology herd.

LEFT: UNL ANIMAL SCIENCE MAJOR Jason Swanson helps a cow deliver a calf late March 28. Swanson was part of a group of seven students who worked at the UNL Cow-Calf Management Research Center during calving season to help with calf deliveries. Calving season at the center started about the end of February and is beginning to taper off.

BELOW: IBSEN, a UNL junior, tube feeds a calf while UNL Animal Science Professor James Gosey holds the bottle. They were feeding the calf because its mother didn't want to claim the calf at first.



ABOVE: UNL ANIMAL SCIENCE MAJOR Blake Kuebler catches a couple of hours of sleep before having his alarm go off at midnight, 2 a.m., 4 a.m. and 6 a.m. for cattle checks. Kuebler and the other students who work at the research center check the cattle every few hours during the night to make sure they are not having trouble delivering their calves.

LEFT: SENIOR ANIMAL SCIENCE MAJOR Jared Walahoski picks up a calf from the snow as its mother anxiously watches. Walahoski lifted the calf out of the wet snow so it would not get cold and possibly sick.

tures as he looked for heifers showing the tell-tale signs of birth.

They'll separate themselves from the herd, he said. Most of labor is spent standing, but "when they really get into the push of things, they'll lie down."

This night, most of the cattle were strung out across the pasture, which made Ibsen's task a bit more difficult and made travel by truck an anxious task.

"I'd hate to run over one," he said. Ibsen shined the spotlight from his driver's side window across the rainy pasture.

Besides the running board falling off the pickup, the night passed uneventfully.

Ibsen told stories about past nights, including being near cattle in a

room that "smells like there's two skunks under your feet. I just about died."

Then, it was back to the cow-calf management barn and the little dank-smelling office with plain, heavy wooden bunk beds; a coffee machine; a long, brown Formica-topped table; and an old television on a worn, pink, metal medicine cabinet.

He left to feed one calf forcefully, shoving a long tube down its throat and into its stomach.

But mostly, he watched a small digital clock with red, lighted letters that sat on top of the television.

"Whatever" was usually on the television, be it "Dateline," "Inside Edition" or "Seinfeld." Just whatever went well with a yawn, maybe some sunflower seeds and a Diet Coke,

which Ibsen often brought.

"That clock moves pretty slow sometimes," Swanson said.

Once the clock moved past 2 a.m. on a slow night, the cowboys would move over to the bunk beds to catch a quick nap, if they could.

It was essential for Swanson, who would get ready for his other job at a nearby feed lot starting at 5:30 a.m.

The last walk

But, on Swanson's final work night of spring break, the run-off heifer, her abandoned newborn and the daunting task of telling his boss come morning was almost too much for the college man to handle, running on only two hours of sleep from the night before.

About midnight, he did one more walk through the muck of a nearby pen filled with first-year mothers-to-be.

The mud-and-dung mix was a foot thick in some places, and a person could easily get stuck for a few seconds between steps.

"Ssh, ssh, ssh," he said, to move the cattle slightly. He waved a long, skinny white cane similar to what a blind person would use on a sidewalk.

He moved down the hill, framed by a foggy night's deep dusty blue sky.

"All right, girls," he announced suddenly, with frustration. "It's okay with me if you want to take the night off. Take a nap."

Somehow, for the rest of this night, they would obey.

*Photos by
Ryan Soderlin*