

# Life on the Ranch

By Lona Tankersley Burkhart

There was a big valley on top of the Cady Mts., on the old ranch, right in the middle of our range. We called it Hidden Valley. The guyetta grass would get stirrup high, and there were joshua trees. Water was good there in the spring and winter, but it was dry in the summer. Dad decided to dig a well up there by a mesquite tree, so he hitched up old Spot and Flaxie to an old wagon and he and I went up and camped. He dug and I turned the windless and dumped out the dirt. How many years that was ago. It was during the depression. I remember nights around the fire, just he and I and the kangaroo rats. They got so gentle I fed them from my hand.

One thing still in my mind was the box of dynamite that was under the cot I slept on. I was really worried about that. That was the first time I had ever seen bighorn sheep. What a sight they were. We never shot any game. Times were really tough, and money non existent, but we ate beans and beef and what-ever we raised in the garden.

About half way up to Hidden Valley a prospector lived in a little dug-out and worked a barium claim. We used to stop and visit with him when we were in that part of the ranch. He was one of the strays that we always had for Christmas and holidays. One time when I was about eight or nine Dad and I rode up and hello'd and he came climbing out of his tunnel. As he put his hand on the rim, a sidewinder bit him on the neck. He died so fast it was unbelievable. I used to think of him for years after that when I rode in that country. He left the claim to Dad, as we were about the only friends he had. Dad worked it a little, with me turning the windless again, but Dad wasn't much of a miner, and it wasn't worth very much.

Over on the South side of the ranch, there was a big bentonite mine that was no longer being worked. They had a old miner named Joe for a watchman. Joe really like his booze. We had a line camp about five miles from there, and the road over the railroad tracks was used by both of us.

In spring of 1946, I had left my horse at the line camp, the folks picking me up, in our little Plymouth coupe and taking me back to the ranch for a couple of days so I could go to school. Dad was taking me back to the line camp and when we got to the crossing, there was Joe and one of his buddies whom had come to visit him. They had been to Ludlow to refresh the liquor supply and were really feeling no pain. They had an old army carry-all, loaded with this buddies life's

gathering. They had not hit the rail road tracks straight on the little road that went over them. They were STUCK. Really stuck between the rails.

Joe ran up to us dragging this huge chain and asked Dad if he would hook on and pull them off. Now you could look up that track for miles and miles, and here comes a train. It was over a hundred miles between stops and those trains REALLY traveled. Dad looked the situation over and said "sure Joe, just as soon as this train goes by." Well, Joe and his buddy settled down for another drag on the bottle. I told Dad that wasn't very nice, that the train would hit the car. Dad said "yeh, and if we tie on with that chain, it will hit us too. We can't drag that big thing off those tracks with this little car." About the time the frantic engineer started blowing his whistle, Joe realized what was going to happen and he tried to flag down the train. When that train hit that truck it was going about 80 miles an hour, the brakes a' skreechin'. That ol' truck just sorta' exploded like a rotten egg when you throw it in the rocks. Feathers from the pillows drifted for a mile, and parts of that truck were scattered down the tracks, as far as we could see. They finally got the train stopped a mile or so down the track. The engineer and trainmen came running back, sure that they had hit Joe (who'd jumped aside at the last second), then they got pretty mad. Joe was going to sue the railroad for his old pardner' s truck, but nothing much came of it.

Riding on that South side of the ranch, you could hear the old steam trains whistle miles away as there were two crossing on Highway 66. It would be ten or more miles to where I was riding and the sound would drift to me. It is a lonesome wail that still echos thru my memory. And a sound we'll hear never more .....

