

Pat Cline

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I'VE COWBOYED for just about everyone in this valley (Owens). You might say I've got the reputation of being an all-around hand, seeing how I was brought up in it. There has never been any doubt in my life as to what I wanted to do. I've always wanted to be a cowboy, even in high school during the sixties when Elvis Presley was rockin' and grindin'. I was ridin' and ropin'. When everyone else in the school had their hair all greased up ridin' around in cars goin' nowhere, I always thought they were about the dumbest bunch I'd ever seen. They were forever just "hangin' out," doin' nothin' that I could see. Of course my being a cowboy made me an outcast to most, but I've followed my lifestyle straight through to today, while most of my classmates have gone through several and some haven't found one yet.

My life has been very active, and although I've changed jobs a lot, I don't think I've been out of work for more than a day at a time. I take a lot of pride in being a cowboy and feel that I do it well. I was a lead

man for the Harris Ranch — it's a feedlot with up to 100,000 head — in the San Joaquin Valley. I like working horses. It's an accomplishment and a challenge. And there are no short cuts — none that won't show up in the long run. You've got to have an understanding of horses and how they think. Same way with cows.

Since I've been married, which is eight years, we've never spent Christmas in the same place twice. We move two or three times a year and I can tell you my wife is gettin' pretty tired of it. My wife, Carol, likes Fish Lake where we are now, and I'm goin' to try to rig it so that maybe we can settle down here. Carol likes it here, and we've got a real nice place to live now. We're rentin' it, but Carol has a part-time job with a country grocery store and bar. Before we had kids (we've got two) it was okay movin' around, but it slowly got worse and worse. Now we both feel the need to settle down.

My movin' around, I guess you could blame on my temper. I've got to watch that, but it's gettin' better.

Lately I've run into some pretty non-professional employers, and I don't like workin' that way. I like workin' off a horse. My first cowboyin' job out of high school was open range brandin' for the RX Ranch that had 6,000 head. Just me and another fellow would ride the range, movin' cattle and brandin' the ones that escaped the last year's brandin'. We would come upon a yearling or maybe a two-year-old heifer with no brand. We would build a fire, and with this iron that we had rigged so it would break in the middle to carry it, we would put the old RX on her and be on our way in no time. We'd have to rope her first and tie her down, 'cause there were only two of us. At a regular brandin' you've got five people on one calf.

Right now I'm workin' on an oil rig, 'cause the money is so good. I've made as high as \$3,000 in a month's time. It's a wildcat operation, no benefits or union or anything, and we all work like hell; we average about 12 hours a day, six or seven days a week. I work at the top of the rig, 70 feet in the air. I have this leather strap around my waist. When the drill comes up out of the ground, it needs an extension, and it's my job to swing out over it as it comes up and secure this 35 foot casing to it. Then I get the next one ready as they send the drill back into the ground. It's dangerous, and you have to be fast because the walls of the hole start to cave in without the casing. We change casings 80 times in four hours. The drilling collar fell in the hole Monday, and we can't get it out, so we'll have to shut down.

I've got another deal goin' with a rancher a half mile down the road from our house. It will mean some

farmin' and puttin' up some hay, but they raise quarter horses and have a bunch of brood mares. I'd be takin' care of them, and I'd be in charge of the place. In the winter I'd bring in outside horses to train and breed. Also I've got a good friend who is in the race horse business who wants to send me colts to train — you know, not to race them, just to get them used to the saddle and to make sure they're cared for right. I'd have to put in more corrals and stalls, but I could get \$250 a colt, and that would more than double my salary. It could work out. Carol's been tops through it all.

One time I went to northern California. I worked on an outfit, and I blew up and got mad. I had a bad habit of doin' that. I'd get mad and, boy, I'd quit. I wouldn't put up with it. I guess you could call it pride; that has been a problem with me. Carol was eight months pregnant at the time and quittin' meant we had to move. And it was rough on her. She was pretty unhappy.

I took a day off and went and got a new job. It was a good job, but it was no kind of money. But it was one of the best jobs I've ever had as far as cowboyin'. Within six months I was jigger boss, that's "lead-off man." This outfit ran 8,000 head of cattle, one of the bigger outfits. In the summertime they take 80% or 7,000 of their cattle up into the mountains in the forest, so the jigger boss takes care of them, and the cow boss stays below and takes care of all the weaners that were weaned the year before and the other cows they need down there. I lived with the crew in the forest. That was a good job as far as cowboyin' is concerned, as I said, but one of the problems with a lot of the ranches is poor management.



Left: "I've always wanted to be a cowboy. Even in high school during the sixties and when Elvis Presley was rockin' and grindin', I was ridin' and ropin'. When everyone else in the school, well, most anyway, had their hair all greased up and went ridin' around in cars goin' nowhere, I always thought they were about the dumbest bunch I'd ever seen. They were forever just hangin' out, doin' nothin' that I could see. Of course, my being a cowboy made me an outcast to most, but I've followed my lifestyle straight through to today, while most of my classmates have gone through several and some haven't found one yet." Pat Cline

Right: "The first time we drove cattle over that 8,500 foot summit 25 years ago, this ol' buckaroo tried to do it in one day. You just don't do that. I guess he was just tryin' to test our air to see how much bottom we had. We ended up sleepin' up there on that hill behind the cattle all night long because we'd got 'em all screwed up. They weren't mothered up [cows paired with their calves]. We'd lost our leaders [seasoned cows that lead the way], and all our cows went off. We had a hundred calves in the back end; it was a real wreck. If that wasn't enough, our horses got loose, so we were afoot and finished the trip walking behind the cattle 'cause our horses went back home to the ranch." Bill Thornburgh



They get into a bind for money, and the cowboys don't get a raise. I've had that happen a lot. The operation was a seasonal circle, driving cattle from the desert to the lakes and into the forest in the summer and then driving them out in the winter. It took ten 3-day drives to get them out of the forest. We had a chuckwagon on that outfit that made camp every night. We'd camp out by the cattle and be able to move next morning — real old-style western. I liked that.

I learned to horseshoe from my dad and his brother. It's real hard work. You're bent over all the time. It's real hard on your back. You're holding up the horse's hoof, too. I like to please the owner and shoe 'em like they say. I've been kicked lots of times. Usually the horse jerks away the foot you're holdin' and gets you off balance. Then he'll let you have it! But I can usually tell if a horse is goin' to kick by the way he acts and especially an older horse who is wise to what's happening. He'll kind of watch you all the time and try to catch you napping. You've got to stay away from them. You've got to get underneath them and hold them. If a horse won't pick up his foot for you, won't stand, tries to get away, or is always watchin' you and he snorts a lot, why watch out mister! You're goin' to get kicked! A colt is different. If you're easy with him, you're not as likely to get kicked, I've found as a rule.

Don't hit a horse! I mean, there's times when you have to get after them a little, but nothing heavy. In the long run patience is best. I got a reputation of going easy with them. I hardly ever hit a horse. Many times I don't wear spurs. A lot of times a horse will get to

thinkin' about those spurs and won't concentrate on what you want from him. Sometimes an older horse will get lazy and lug a bit on you. If you want his attention to get a job done, spurs are a good way to ask him. But with a younger horse, all this is new to him. Heck, he doesn't know what's goin' on. All of a sudden here's someone tryin' to get on his back. He doesn't know that his future life is goin' to be pushing cows around and that he's supposed to go to the left when you lay the rein on the right side. By using spurs you're just adding one more worry for him.

I've got a real western background. My grandfather came across the plains in a covered wagon with his family and brothers Acey, Vacey, Pleasant, Houston, and Jim. My grandfather was a well-known veterinarian. He trained trotting horses too. He finally settled up here between Round Valley and Bishop and managed the Diablo Ranch. It was one of the big cattle ranches. That's where my dad and his brothers all grew up. He ran that ranch until the city of Los Angeles took the water down south, and all our land dried up and the lakes disappeared. I mean this valley had orchards in it, and now it's all dried up.

My grandfather had seven boys. They all had about five kids each. With most of them cowboyin' at one time or another, you can see that my family has brought a lot of cattle into the feedlots.