



ALLYCE'S ATTIC SHOULDA BEEN A COWBOY by MARY ALLYCE



When you live in a place that calls itself, by decree of the Governor of the state of Texas no less, The Cowboy Capital of The World, it sets a standard you feel obligated to uphold. Not a day goes by in Bandera that visitors don't ask, "Where are the cowboys?" Or, having cornered a suspect, voice the question, "Are you a real cowboy?" If I'm a little cranky, I sometimes answer, "What's your definition?"

For lots of folks it's the outfit, the jeans, the boots, the spurs, the hat. You do see plenty of the outer trappings in town and all throughout the Hill Country, but not everyone who wears the outfit can walk the walk or ride the ride.

There's an old saying, "Don't call him a cowboy until you see him ride." As a horsewoman of many decades, this definition appeals to me. As far as what they're riding, heck, we've got cowboys who not only throw a leg over a horse, they also ride Texas longhorn cattle and even camels! If it's got hair, cowboys will try to ride it, so this definition works.

Of course riding's not the only thing cowboys do. The real duties of cowboying are a lot grittier and often not for sensitive ears. Caring for livestock of all kinds, birthing, doctoring, shoeing, building and maintaining fence among other, sometimes heartbreaking, chores are not for most folks. Nor are the backbreaking hours.

Are you shaking your head and grinding your teeth that I'm forgetting a whole segment of "cowboys". I would never forget the cowgirls.

Bandera has a rich history of cowgirls and is commemorating a current crop with a calendar and postcards featuring local cowgirls. We even have a World Champion barrel racer raised in our midst, Callie DuPerier Apfell, whose

accomplishments in the rodeo arena granted her a spot right up there with the male rodeo stars on the Courthouse Monument, like Toots Mansfield and Scooter Fries. Many credit the number of rodeo World Champions, all from Bandera, for our designation as the Cowboy Capital of the World. Now we can count a cowgirl along with the cowboys for our claim to fame.

So we've talked about the outfit, whether or not they can ride, and the rodeo champ factor in determining the credibility of a real cowboy. Some years ago I wrote a short booklet titled, *The Real Deal - or Real Cowboys Write Poetry*. It was a tongue-in-cheek attempt to define the term "real cowboy" by using the art form called Cowboy Poetry. Yes, I used the words "art form" to describe this subset of poetry.

Cowboy Poetry and its first cousin, *storytelling*, have a long and rich history and tradition and there are a number of local entertainers who write and perform it. With roots buried in the unlikely traditions of Irish and English folk ballads, it also owes its strong cadences to a form of song called "negro hollerin'" that came out of the plantation fields. In fact, cowboy poetry came out of the widely divergent cultures that contributed to the very nature of the cowboy himself and those iconic cattle drives, so much a part of the image of real cowboys.

Bandera has a legitimate tie to those old cattle drives as a staging area for the Great Western Trail. We have murals and historic plaques and an entire little park dedicated to this chunk of cowboy lore. Interestingly, the cattle drives, so romanticized and celebrated in novels, TV and movies, only lasted about twenty

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years. Historians bookend the period from 1866 - 1886. How powerful is an image that only lasted twenty years that it still has a hold on mankind?

Bandera welcomes visitors from around the world. They come seeking our wonderful country western music and venues, our restaurants, shops, dude ranches, relaxed western lifestyle, and . . . cowboys (and girls)! They seek out this icon of American history because the cowboy is one of the last remaining hero figures. And we increasingly need heroes in this world.

I don't know if we've gotten any closer to the definition of what makes a real cowboy real, but if you come to believe in him and what he stands for, I think he'll be pleased. Come met him in Bandera.

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