

Chapter Three

"Roy's Coming"

With the arrival of spring comes the ramping up of the logging business in the Pacific Northwest. The logging companies are able to get their loggers and equipment into the mountains to harvest the trees and get them to the mills. As the work increases so does the flow of money. Most of the ranches around Newton were small, part-time affairs. They provided extra income for the folks that worked in the logging trade. Horses were a big part of ranching in Newton, and of course everyone was sure they were going to clean up at Playfair Race Course in Spokane.

In reality a few of the horses did make their owners some money but most of them and the other livestock only made money for my dad's feed store and for the local Veterinarian. The vet was Doc Moore who had a place on Union Street, just a few blocks north of the feed store.

Now the rodeo was another matter. The Newton Rodeo is a regional, professional rodeo. It brought thousands to our little town. It was the biggest annual income making event for miles around.

Newton was founded in 1903. The first rodeo was held in 1904. This made 1954 the fiftieth anniversary. The town was pulling out all the stops to make this the grandest rodeo ever. The town had been gearing up for several years to make this a sentinel event. I don't know how a little town of less than 1,500 people pulled it off but Roy Rogers, King of the Cowboys, and most popular cowboy western star of the time, was to be the main attraction.

It was Saturday and I had to spend the first half of the day helping at the store. My dad usually kept five to six tons of hay on hand for

the small ranchers and farmers who couldn't afford or didn't have room for a large stack of their own. It also helped that the feed store had a large hay shed to keep it dry during our winters. Newton often had snow on the ground from Halloween to Easter.

Lots of customers would only buy a bale or two at a time. Every couple of weeks a large truck would show up with about four tons of hay. It had to be unloaded and put in the shed by hand. These were large alfalfa bales that weighed about a hundred pounds each. This Saturday the truck arrived and dad was too busy to help unload. The truck driver said he had a bad back and couldn't help. I think every trucker I'd even met had a bad back. I weighed 103 pounds and was only 11 years old. The driver looked at me and then looked at the load.

"Son, I'm going down to the cafe to get a piece of pie and a cup of coffee. I'll be back in about an hour, you should have it unloaded by then." With that he slapped me on the back and hobbled down the street to the Pantry Cafe. I looked at the load and turned and looked at my reflection in the store window. The bales were as big as me. Loading a bale or two in some old guy's pickup was one thing. Unloading a whole big truck load was another. I wasn't a quitter, I knew I had to do it.

"Hey Howdy, looks like you could use some help."

I turned and there was Hound Dog on his bike. I looked at all five feet of him and thought to myself, this is a city kid from Spokane, but he's better than nothing. I smiled at him and said, "I think I could use some help, wait here a minute." I hurried into the store. My dad had

about six customers lined up. I went up to his side and whispered in his ear, "Dad the driver can't help me unload, he's only giving me an hour. If I can get it done will you pay me double?"

He looked at me with an irritated look and said, "If that's what it takes, yes. Just get it done and get in here and help me." I hurried to the hay shed and grabbed two sets of hay hooks and ran out and gave a set to Jeff.

"You get up top of the load and slide the bales down to me. We'll get about ten bales here on the side walk and then we'll both carry them in and stack them." Jeff climbed up and started pushing bales down as fast as I could catch them. After each ten he would climb down and together we'd carry them in and stack them in the shed. We did this eight times in an hour. Boots sat on the older bales and watched us. The driver came back and saw that the bales were unloaded, looked at the two of us, and started laughing.

"I never would have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. I don't think two grown men could have done this as fast as you two scrawny boys." He got in the truck and drove off just as my dad came out to check on our progress.

He look at the two of us, drenched in sweet and covered in hay dust. He had never seen Jeff before but his obvious stare indicated his amazement, both of his looks and the fact that he was the reason for our success. I was a bit humbled too. How could a little guy like Hound Dog work so hard, never complain or ask how much he was going to get paid?

"Is this why you asked for double pay, Howdy?"

"Yes, Dad."

He continued, "Well, I'll be danged, I thought you were taking advantage of my situation. I realize now you wanted to make sure you had enough money to pay your friend here.

Is that right?" I said it was and he reached in his pocket, pulled out his wallet and gave us each five dollars, about tens times what he should have. "Now you two go over to Kimmels Drug store and get each of you a banana split and tell them to put in on my account."

We looked at each other and couldn't believe our fortune. We turned to run to Kimmels with Boots in tow and then I grabbed Jeff by his shirt and stopped, "Dad, this is my new friend Jeff Carpenter, he's new in town and in my grade at school."

He reached down and shook Jeff's hand, "Please to meet you Jeff."

"Please to meet you sir, and you can call me Hound Dog if you want."

Dad laughed and said, "I can see where you got that moniker, now you boys go get your ice cream, and hurry back, I need your help."

We hollered back as we ran down the street, "We will."

Boots waited outside as we entered the store. Kimmels was as typical of a small town drug store as you'd ever seen. A soda fountain with tubs of ice cream in a glass topped chest freezer, a pharmacy at the back of the store and a Rock-ola Jukebox in the corner.

A high school boy dressed in white pants, a white shirt, and a soda jerk paper hat served us. As we ate our treats Jeff commented, "Gee your dad's nice. If my dad were still alive I hope he'd be as nice as yours."

"I guess I'm lucky to have him, it just takes someone like you to remind me."

We finished our last few bites and hurried back to the feed store with Boots in the lead. As we walked I ask Jeff if he knew that Roy Rogers was coming to the Newton Rodeo. He looked at me and said, "No, are you kidding me? I've

watched his show every Sunday since I was eight."

"Me too, I've seen every one of his movies that's been shown at the Roxy theater since I was about five."

"Is he bringing Dale and Trigger?"

"I think so."

"Do you think we'll get to meet him?"

We slowed our walk back to the store and I looked at Jeff and said, "I don't know, but my dad does own the only feed store in town, Roy's got to get hay for Trigger somewhere." Jeff smiled and we took off running back to the store.

In my mind, my dad could make just about anything happen. I just hoped this time I wasn't wrong. Getting to meet Roy Rogers in person would be the greatest thing I could imagine.

Copyright 2011