

COWBOY TALES ALONG THE TRAIL

JACK TERRY



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COWBOY TALES ALONG THE TRAIL

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*To my grandparents
Bill and Maggie Mason and R.L. and Etna Terry.
They were pioneers into the West, and
their lives of hardship, dedication, and faith
helped shape generations.*

*To my parents, Frank and Della Herring,
who have been my lifelong
encouragers, supporters, and fans.*

*And especially to my wife, Anita,
who keeps the fire in my heart burning to
always be the very best I can be.
I love you.*

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My thanks to Harvest House Publishers. You have given me a decade of opportunities to share my stories and paintings. Thank you for your love and dedication to the gospel.



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Are There Any Heroes Today?

Life. Why are we here? What are we doing and where are we going? The mystery of our being, the necessity of our actions, the dependence of all things upon the other, the magnitude and beauty of creation itself, and our desire to know the answers to these mysteries assures each of us that life has a specific purpose that everything points to.

The psalmist David wrote, “You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever” (Psalm 16:11 NASB). Everyone wants to experience joy and happiness on the trail ride of life. As a cowboy controls the movements of his horse with a bridle, the trails of our lives must be guided by this wisdom: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105 NASB). God has not only given us His Word to guide us, but His Spirit to lead us and prayer to communicate with Him while on this great trail ride of life.

I was initially guided down that path riding in the saddle with my grandfather on the bay horse we called Old Dan. Granddad was a working cowboy from the early age of 13, and he rode on some of the last great cattle drives from Texas to the northern railheads. He ingrained in me the code of ethics that the hero known as the “American cowboy” adhered to. I listened to stories of business transactions and trades completed with mere handshakes. A man’s word was his bond. I learned firsthand of the rewards of a loving family guided by principles of faith, responsibility, honesty, and integrity.

My other granddad was a jack of all trades, living on his own and surviving alone in a cave in West Texas while still a child himself. In

his later years, when I was just an early teen, he was a true inspiration and reminder to me that “with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). No matter how bad the drought that devastated his business or how painful the disease that claimed the life of one of his young children. Granddad always kept his faith in God. Prayer always saw him and his family through life’s most troubling times.

Now, my granddads were not the most educated and eloquent individuals, as was true of most cowboys of that era. But they knew that life had a purpose directly linked to their relationship with their Maker. This wasn’t something to be discovered from fortune, power, or personal fame. They believed we are all put here to be caretakers of God’s creation, stewards of the land, livestock, and people we love. They also believed we are to enjoy life and have a little fun while we’re here. A little hunting and fishing, a good rodeo, and a ball game were always welcome.

Both of my granddads would be the first to tell you that it was their wives, my grandmothers, who led them to church and kept them there. My earliest memories of these great pioneering women are best summed up by Proverbs 31:26-29: “She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: ‘Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.’” What a wonderful heritage I have enjoyed! These great women were the mortar that held our family together through many hard times and who fed, taught, and encouraged generations.

My family was always known for loving the outdoors, whether it was pushin’ cattle along a dusty trail or baiting a hook to land a big one from a nearby stock tank or river. I grew up knowing and loving the outdoors and the cowboy way of life. Many folks understand the spirit of the cowboy even though they may know little of his actual profession. Nature has a way of blending the majesty and beauty of God’s great creation into a language everyone can understand if he or she will only take the time to listen and observe. There are many who enjoy fly-fishing for trout or chasing giant redfish in the Gulf

of Mexico, who pursue the great sailfish in the ocean or the mighty bull elk atop a snow-covered mountaintop. While I enjoy so many of these activities and sports as well, the blood of the cowboy runs deep in my veins. Often I find myself lost in dreams of being a cowboy—a true cowboy.

Real Cowboys

What do I mean by a real cowboy? The man who rode his horse through every kind of weather and whose bed was usually the hard, rocky ground. His favorite place to be was atop his cowpony along a dusty trail. The one who lived every day depending on the hand of the Lord to go before him and provide food and water for the cattle and safety and provision for his days in the saddle. The person who rode with the herd from the deserts in South Texas to the mountaintops in Wyoming, and who trusted God for all things—whether it was fish from the river, deer from the hillsides, or a dry piece of jerky in his saddlebag that tasted like manna from heaven. There is a great lesson for us all in that simple trust and dependence on God for all things.

Yes, cowboy blood runs deep in my family. There are few real-life cowboys today, but there are many who share the love and beauty of creation all over the earth, just as the cowboy did. It is no wonder the American cowboy is so revered throughout the world. Simple men, honorable men, humble men who sat in a saddle and cared for their families, livestock, and the land they called home. I am so very thankful that the blood of Jesus ran deep through the veins of my grandfathers, and that love was passed down to me.

Happiness is inward, and not outward; and so it does not depend on what we have, but on what we are.

HENRY VAN DYKE

Many times the cowboy was viewed as being a loner, when in actuality he was a team player. Each man was an integral part of a unifying operation with a specific job to do and the talents necessary for success in the West. On a typical cattle drive from South Texas to Kansas,

the trail boss would generally ride in front of the herd. He would take breaks from the front position and ride back to talk to some of the other cowboys during different times of the day to check on the herd and make plans for resting the cattle that evening.

Behind the trail boss usually came the chuck wagon loaded with cowboy bedrolls and provisions. To the side of the chuck wagon was the remuda, additional horses needed by the cowboys, led by a wrangler. Behind the chuck wagon, cowboys known as “point riders” led the beginning of the herd down the trail each day, keeping them calm and focused on the path ahead. Often with a whistle, a call, or a yodel, they would lure the lead steer along calmly. That usually older and calmer steer wore a bell around his neck that all the other cows could hear and follow.

As the multitude of cattle began to stretch out behind the leaders, cowboys known as “swing riders” rode along the sides to keep the cattle moving forward toward the leaders. The weaker cattle and those with babies moved slower and lagged yet farther behind. They were urged on by “flank riders” on each side. The worst cow-pushin’ job of all was that of being “drag riders.” There were usually three to five young, usually first-time on the trail cowboys, whose job it was to keep all the cattle moving, working with the sickest and weakest at the rear of the herd. No matter how hot and tired they were, everyone had a specific job and a designated position in the drive, and each cowboy was essential to the success of the long journey. They had to be a unified team with faith and confidence in each other to see the job through successfully.

The Cowboy Spirit in Christian Life Today

It was crucial that the cowboys work as one orderly team as they pushed several thousand head of stubborn cattle for many perilous months along the trail to their destination. When trouble came, those cowboys had to operate as one unit. Each man had a separate but specifically crucial job whether he was trail boss in the front or eatin’ dust as a drag rider.

First Corinthians 12:14-20 describes God’s order for His church and the guiding principle of life for each of us:

The body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

Such was the life of the cattle-driving cowboy, and such is the life of the individual member of the church.

As members of Christ’s church, we must accept the responsibility of our great calling and utilize our positions and giftings to watch over “the herd” and lead the lost and wandering to their final destination—eternal life with Christ. When a cowboy signed on to complete a cattle drive and agreed to the pay he was due when the job was completed, he knew it was necessary to fill his position with pride and utilize all his skills to the best of his ability. He understood what it was to be a team member and carry his own weight, even while depending on and deferring to the strength of his team members when necessary or when he couldn’t perform at his very best.

There are many of us in our country and worldwide who love the cowboy and his way of life. Because of my wonderful family history and personal opportunities for relationships with great cowboys, world champion rodeo participants, great country singers and songwriters, actors, and even a “cowboy” in the White House (George W. Bush), I have grown up with a great respect for these true American heroes. The truth of the matter is there are very few true cowboys left—in the Old West sense of the word. I’m talking handfuls across America.

These uniquely gifted, rugged, simple individuals know they aren’t placed on this great earth to *be* somebody but to pursue the desires of their hearts. They know they are men (and women) with a special

fire in their hearts to be who God made them to be—and do it with honor, integrity, and grace. I know that while the lives they live may be different from mine, we share a common thread. We who accept the goodness of God's grace have the invitation to follow our hearts and be instruments of encouragement and change. Maybe we have what it takes to be heroes as well.

Finding and Being Heroes for God

While it is not absolutely necessary here on earth, it sure helps as an encouragement through the challenges of this life to be able to wrap our arms around a real, live hero. The Lord provides the way for the meek and humble to be heroes and to move from last to first in His kingdom. The challenge is to observe our past and present to find these men and women of honor. Who has influenced our lives and hearts for the good? How have we applied their wisdom and skills to perpetuate God's love? Even more importantly than that is to appreciate the uniqueness of every individual and to encourage others to find their purpose and put their God-given talents and gifts in motion. This is the stuff heroes are made of.

Some of the great heroes and encouragers in my life go hundreds of years back in history. Some have been young cowboys riding the open range and surviving perilous years of drought, disease, and hardship. They married at very young ages and quickly grew into mature men and women out of necessity. They needed each other to survive, and they raised families who ranched and farmed and fought for the freedom and survival of this great country in every war we have fought since 1776. My family history is filled with heroes. Two uncles were prisoners of war in World War II, another was wounded and sent home with a Purple Heart, and yet another relative was killed defending the Alamo. Many others sacrificed so that we can enjoy our freedom. My earliest American descendent, my great-great-great-grandfather, William Whipple, signed the Declaration of Independence. From an attorney who helped found this nation to a couple of worn-out West Texas cattle pushers, from heroes in uniform defending our freedom to parents who sacrificed and provided, I have known a lot of heroes. Sure,

they all had faults and weaknesses, but they gave life their best shot and left many great memories and examples for me and future generations.

Our founding fathers intended for our republic to be guided by the principles of God, one nation indivisible. A place where everyone has the opportunity to be a hero by having the freedom to follow the path God put before him or her. No matter our backgrounds or stories, the common thread we have running through us as believers is best summed up by Jeremiah 29:11-13: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” We are all blessed knowing God has a plan for us to prosper, and we have been put on this earth for a reason. We are promised hope and a future—and that’s the stuff heroes are made of.

The Lord wants each of us to have an abundant life. One that is happy and where we make a difference in the lives of others. He wants us to be life-changers through lives that reflect His glory.

He wants us to be great heroes of faith to shine the way for people to come to Him.

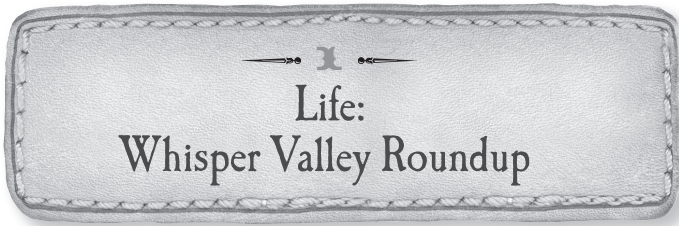
Now that so many years have passed and I am a grandfather, I am finally coming to understand the true role of heroes in our lives. I pray you delight as I do in the one and only true Hero who never disappoints and never fails. Jesus desires to be everyone’s Hero. With so many needs in our families and those suffering throughout the world, let’s welcome Him into our lives. Let’s take God at His Word and invite Him to be everything we need. Let’s allow Him to use us to reach out to the people around us with His honesty, integrity, and love.

The pioneers and ranchers of the frontier would never have made the West habitable had it not been for these wild cowboys, these...hard-riding, hard-living rangers of the barrens, these easy, cool, laconic, simple young men whose blood was tinged with fire and who possessed a magnificent and terrible effrontery toward danger and death.

ZANE GREY, *The Man of the Forest*

Part 1

THE GREAT TRAIL RIDE



JUST A COWBOY

Lord, I'm just a cowboy
Like my granddad who's gone away
I'm really not a loner
Folks just look at me that way.

My life is one of pleasure
I love the work I do
I know I'm special in Your eyes
'Cause I'm made in the image of You.

You brought me into this world
Like a newborn calf in the spring
My legs were wobbly and my eyes were bright
And Your voice in my ears did ring.

You grew me up in this land that I love
With family and friends so true
Showed me the greatness of Your creation
From magnificent vistas and views.

With a good, stout horse between my knees
Down many trails I did ride
Some were rocky and many were steep
But You were always right there by my side.

Like the time we were in Whisper Valley
Drivin' longhorns from daybreak till dusk
The cool mornin' breeze blew through the great bluffs
As hawks soared in the clouds up above.

We herded those cows across the great creek
And up the steep hills high and wide
Through grass lush and green and rocks big as trees
And hot sun beaten' down on their hide.

We rested at lunch in the chuck wagon's shade
Ate biscuits and gravy and steak
We caught a few winks and swapped a few tales
Then tracks for the trail we did make.

We rode hard and fast through canyons and rocks
Where some of us stumbled and fell
Then climbed the great mountain where camp was set up
With a campfire and stories to tell.

The full moon was risin' in the night sky above
As I lay in my bedroll on the ground
The stars were so bright, what a glorious sight
The silence was deafening, not a sound.

Save for the whistle of a hawk on the wing
And an occasional coyote yell
I drifted to sleep in a slumber so deep
It seems You had a story to tell.

"I am the Lord, I've been with you all day
I'm the sun and the moon and the stars

I'm the water and grass and the birds in the sky
I love you, My son, 'twas for you that I died.

"Like your granddad before you, I'm there when you fall
When you stumble while riding life's trail
I'll pick you up and guide you each day
You'll help others with the story you tell."

When the new day had dawned, I remembered my dream
And I thought of the streets paved with gold
Where my loved ones have gone and wait there for me
I reflected on the story God told.

But wait, I'm a cowboy
With lots of work yet to do
The coffee is ready and the cows are awaitin'
And the trail boss is callin' me too.

So for now, Lord, just let me ride on the trails of this life
Till my job on earth here is through
'Cause I'm as close to heaven as I'll ever be
Till I ride that great trail home to You.



Character:
There's One in Every Bunch

Some years back I spent a week on one of the oldest and largest ranches in West Texas rounding up cattle during the fall. The first pasture we worked was about 25,000 acres under one fence. The terrain is very mountainous with large rolling plateaus and deep canyons. The ranch foreman instructed us early the first morning that we were to look for and gather about 850 mother cows, many with calves that were scattered throughout the pastures.

This experience was truly stepping back into what life was probably like 100 years ago for the American cowboy. We rode out from the ranch headquarters at first light accompanied by a chuck wagon loaded with provisions for our six-day roundup. The plan was to arrive at our destination about four hours down the trail and set up our camp. I noticed that the other four cowboys kept watching every move I made out of the corner of their eyes, even though they never said a word to me. I realized at that point they thought of me as a city slicker and intended to have some laughs at my expense. When you're all alone in the middle of thousands of acres with nothing but your saddle, slicker, and bedroll, you feel rather insignificant.

I knew it was time to make a friend. Ramón was in charge of the chuck wagon and preparing all of our meals on an open fire. He had cooked on the ranches of West Texas during roundups for the past 65 years and was a master with a Dutch oven and hot coals.

I discovered early on that one of the smartest things I could do was to make good friends with the cook. We were awakened each morning at four o'clock to the smell of hot coffee, fresh biscuits, and fried bacon.

We cowboys slept in bedrolls around the blazing campfire. There was always a race for the coffeepot first thing. The key was to get it while it was fresh because the coffee grounds always settled to the bottom. No one wanted to get stuck with the last cup.

Ramón couldn't help but notice that I was eating alone that morning at breakfast, shunned by the other cowboys. He offered me a little advice. "Whatever you do this morning, make sure when you come

Character is higher than intellect.
A great soul will be strong to live as
well as think.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

down the mountain for lunch that you have some cattle with you. You have to prove you can pull your own weight." He went on to explain how the cattle in this part of the country were wild, and many of them had

never seen a horse, much less a man. He told me they would have a tendency to run the other way and bunch up in the brush.

The foreman sent the five of us in separate directions that morning to begin the roundup. I felt like I didn't have a friend in the world. It's not too hard to get lost on 25,000 acres, especially if you've never been there before. But I accepted the challenge and rode off as if I were an experienced hand. After about an hour's ride, I heard some cattle over a distant hilltop and moved in their direction. Ramón's advice was right. The cows saw me before I saw them and ran toward a high plateau. I knew I had my work cut out for me.

I must have run back and forth for miles before I managed to gather a young bull, 18 mothers, and 5 calves. You can believe I was counting them. Ramón's words had made a deep impression. Finally I pushed them down the rocky terrain toward camp. There was always one that didn't want to follow the rest of the herd and was continually breaking out for the opposite direction. On several occasions, big mule deer that were lying in the deep grass would suddenly jump up and spook the whole bunch, forcing me to start almost from scratch.

A morning alone on horseback in the middle of nowhere allows a lot of time for thought. I began to contemplate the importance of

discipline. I was slightly more than agitated at my situation. I could have let the one cow go, but I realized at this point that diligence and self-control must prevail. I was responsible for the cows and intended to do my job to the best of my ability. I was reminded of one of my favorite passages from Scripture:

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is near-sighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins (2 Peter 1:5-9).

If ever I needed this passage, it was now. When I topped the last hill and saw the chuck wagon, I realized I was late for the dinner bell. I penned the cattle I'd found. I could see from a distance the smile on Ramón's face as he pointed in my direction. I noticed all eyes were turned toward me. When I sauntered over to get lunch, I tried to hide my stiffness from the long ride. To tell the truth, I was hurting from head to toe. I wasn't accustomed to that much riding, especially in mountainous terrain. Fortunately for my ego, the cowboys overlooked my obvious discomfort with congratulations and slaps on the back for a job well done. They offered me a seat by the fire, a full plate of lunch, and lively conversation. I was now one of the boys.

In life, a person's reputation is formed by the opinion of others. It is the foundation on which trust and respect are built. We can't determine what other people will think of us; we can only determine what they ought to think about us. Strong character is developed when we are faithful to do the right thing no matter how insignificant and inconsequential it may seem at the time.

Success: Living His Dream

My grandfather was a man who knew where he was going and why. He was able to see clearly even through the fog and mist of hardship and suffering. He was a man of strong convictions and he was always optimistic about the future. When I was just a young child, I thought he was the smartest man who had ever lived and wondered how such a successful man could be so gentle and kind. Granddaddy Mason shared his secret with me, and it has been my favorite Bible verse for as long as I can remember: “Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful” (Joshua 1:8).

The world today measures success in how much wealth we can acquire. The rich and famous are often placed on pedestals and admired by millions for their accomplishments. I tend to agree with Albert Einstein when he said, “A successful man is he who receives a great deal from his fellowmen, usually incomparably more than corresponds to his service to them. The value of a man, however, should be seen in what he gives and not in what he is able to receive.”

True success in life is determined by how well we handle the seemingly “little things” in relation to the things we view as most important. In 1928, just prior to the Great Depression, Granddaddy was prospering in the cattle and sheep business. With five children and another on the way, he decided it was time my grandmother learned how to drive a car. Few women from the surrounding ranches could drive. The men generally went into town and took care of the shopping while the women spent their days taking care of the family chores. Granddaddy

thought the old Model T Ford would be too difficult for Mamaw, so one day he drove home in a new green Chevrolet. It was a fancy, four-door family car that had gear shifts and even windows that rolled up

Success is the sum of small efforts—
repeated day in and day out.

ROBERT COLLIER

and down. He was especially proud of that because when it rained they had to always stop to put the curtains up on the Model T. They were now a two-car family.

Mamaw had always been handy with a mule team and wagon, and she took to driving her new car in short order with Granddaddy's instruction. They drove all over the ranch as he patiently told her every move to make until she was ready to solo. It wasn't long before she was driving into town to shop for family and friends. While few people owned even one car, they had two. The neighbors in the community viewed them as very successful.

I think the greatest success, however, was that a devoted husband realized the value of a wife and mother who had sacrificed everything for years to care for the ones she loved. She had worked the fields, driven the wagons, raised her own poultry and vegetables, made her own soap, washed the clothes by hand, and always had three hot meals on the table that she prepared from her wood stove. He chose to honor her with a new car. That was Granddaddy's way of saying, "You are a very valuable woman and a very successful wife and mother." Proverbs 31:26-29 describes Mamaw well: "She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: 'Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.'"

What have I taken to heart from my grandparents' lives? I traveled down two different trails in my pursuit of success. One was *my* way. It left me disappointed, dejected, unfulfilled, and alone. I thought it wasn't necessary to follow the guidance of my family; I could make it on my own. With no place left to turn, I decided to try God's trail and discovered His Word is true. Hebrews 6:12 best explains the important

heritage my family has left me: “We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.”

In your own search for success, I urge you to hear these words:

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers (Psalm 1:1-3).