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My Early Day Experiences

By Margie Snowden North

Serendipitous

Cowboy boots and a cowboy hat. They were fitting for a Roy Rogers movie, but I didn't care for them in real life. Maybe that's why I was the only teen-age girl in Erick who wasn't impressed by this guy named Ben.

My friends pointed him out to me at football games, on the streets, and in Puckett's Food Store where he worked. My impression: yes to the tall, dark, and handsome aspect and no to the Cisco-Kid look.

The year was 1959. Western gear wasn't yet standard issue here in Oklahoma as it is today. Quite frankly, I considered "cowboys" a little immature and cloddish. Besides, I had my eye on someone named Skip. When Ben asked me out, I accepted only because I didn't want to hurt his feelings.

When he drove up to my house that Saturday night in a 1941 Studebaker, I wished that I had hurt his feelings. He expected me to ride in that eighteen-year-old rattletrap? The car had been manufactured the same year I was born!

Understand, I wasn't a snob by nature or by birth. Born into a family of common laborers, I was used to hard work, hand-me-down clothes, and the tarpaper shanty that had been our home until 1957. I had even ridden to town in a wagon pulled by a team of horses—while almost everyone else I knew rode in cars. I thought I had outlived all those humbling experiences. Now, I was apparently dating one who not only wanted to play at being a cowboy, but who drove a car right out of Bonnie and Clyde's era.

Before the evening was over, however, I found this cowboy to be very down-to-earth. His well-thought-out opinions lined up with mine, and I was captivated by his unusual sense of humor. I had dated guys who were as difficult to talk to as an answering machine. By contrast, it seemed that Ben and I could talk all night. Since he had left his cowboy hat at home, I could see that he was even cuter than I had thought. Even so, I couldn't see myself permanently linked with a would-be cowboy.

Ben was the type who makes up his mind what he wants and then zeroes in with deadly determination. He bought an engagement ring when we had been seeing each other for only a few weeks. Then he came to ask Papa for my hand while the rest of the family looked on and while I asked myself, "Why me?" None of my friends were having to endure such outdated gestures.

Papa liked cowboys, though, and in the ensuing confusion I found the ring on my finger. That night I prayed, "Please, Lord, I think I still care for Skip. And besides, those boots...that hat..."

I gave the ring back a couple of weeks later. As a result, I got a strange inward reaction. Moping wasn't a part of my character, but I moped anyway. I told Mama, "I don't really care for him, but I feel sorry for him." Mama smiled a bit, and it seemed there was a knowing, faraway look in her eyes.

Ben came over a few days later and we talked.

I agreed to begin seeing him again if he would keep the ring and give me time to think. My time to think came when he went away to Amarillo to attend Barber College, and we saw each other for only a few hours each weekend.

We were married on Christmas Day, 1959. Ben

was a cowboy barber by then. Later he was a cowboy mechanic, a cowboy turkey farmer, then a cowboy welder. Finally, we settled into ranching, and he became the authentic cowboy he had planned to be all along.

My boots sit beside his, ready to slip into at a moment's notice. My hat hangs next to his in the bedroom. I've helped him break horses and brand cattle. I suppose my early days watching Roy Rogers must have made a lasting impression after all. At any rate, Ben knew a latent cowgirl when he saw one. Lucky for me.

*(MARGIE SNOWDEN NORTH of Sweetwater is and has been a faithful WESTVIEW supporter for a long time. She helps us with our themes selections and then supports us with manuscripts.) **

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