



12-15-1986

Cowboy and Old Number Nine

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Recommended Citation

Williams, Grady (1986) "Cowboy and Old Number Nine," *Westview*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.
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Illustration by Kelley Doyle

Cowboy and Old Number Nine

eventful lifestyle of Cowboy and friends

By Grady Williams

Cowboy never wanted to be a cowboy, but owing to his penchant for clothing his wiry frame in Levi jeans, Acme boots and Stetson hats, that is what everyone called him. But even more than he didn't want to be a cowboy, Cowboy didn't want to be a rodeo rider. He hated horses.

All of that changed in Gage, Oklahoma, for it was there he met Miss Viola, the girl of his dreams.

Miss Viola was a waitress in the Red, White, and Blue Saloon, a bar frequented

by Cowboy and Earl Gene, his lanky, alcoholic roommate. A professional photographer, Earl Gene fancied himself a philosopher and claimed the bar got its name because the patrons generally demonstrated red eyes, sallow white complexions and blue dispositions.

Miss Viola, the liberty belle of the RW&B, was known to be liberal with her liberties with everyone except Cowboy, so naturally he was determined to marry her. Miss Viola remained cool toward Cowboy, preferring as she did

the heroic deeds of rodeo riders.

Cowboy got wind of a rodeo to be held in Enid and decided to enter the saddle bronc contest. His aim was to impress Miss Viola even though horses scared him.

Earl Gene drank another beer and wished him well.

The morning of the contest, Miss Viola announced she had to visit her ailing mother in Amarillo and promptly drove off towards Kansas with one of

her many uncles in his Lincoln Continental.

Earl Gene drank another beer and wished them well.

Determined to impress Miss Viola, Cowboy rushed right out and purchased a Polaroid camera that any fool could operate, and asked Earl Gene to come along and capture the ride on film. He had done set his hat for Miss Viola.

Earl Gene agreed that he would on the condition Cowboy furnish all the beer Earl Gene could drink. As it turned out Earl Gene's drinking caused no difficulties other than one speeding ticket and the mangled automatic transmission in Cowboy's car when Earl Gene slipped the gearshift up into "P for Pass" as he flew around a state trooper doing eighty.

But things took a turn for the worse when they arrived in Enid and Cowboy drew Old Number Nine, a dust colored roan that was a wall-eyed, pin-eared mustang from a string that was so mean and evil tempered nobody could come up with names bad enough, so they just stuck numbers on them.

Resolved to win the heart of Miss Viola, Cowboy begged one of his beers from Earl Gene, screwed his hat down tight, and vaulted his bandy-legged little body into the chute with that pigeon-toed piece of dynamite.

Old Number Nine cut his hate filled, blood shot eyes at Cowboy and let him get settled in the saddle before he reared and lunged against the inside railing, breaking Cowboy's leg in two places and shattering a knee-cap.

The handlers got a fistful of the roan's ear and clubbed him upside the head with a short piece of two-by-four they kept handy for such occasions, and asked Cowboy if he still had intentions of qualifying.

When Cowboy pictured the heroic figure he would cut at the RW&B with his leg in a cast, a look of euphoria crossed his face and then handlers figured him for a macho masochist who would ask no mercy, and so they threw open the chute gate and gave him none.

The two-by-four must have addled Old Number Nine a mite, because instead of exploding out of the chute as was his custom, he sauntered out casual like, laid his ears down along his neck, calmly turned his head and gnashed his teeth around Cowboy's other knee to bust it up some.

Cowboy cut loose a blood curdling Comanche scream, grabbed his hat and commenced to fan his leg trying to cool the heat out of that bite.

Well, the handlers understood right quick that Cowboy was powerful mad on account of Old Number Nine not bucking to suit him, so they all snatched off their hats and set in to whooping and hollering to help as best they could.

All that excitement seemed to incite Old Number Nine and he mushroomed toward the center of the arena in a bone jarring series of frog hops, then made a leaping bound or two before he crashed into the wall. Then he reared and fell over backward, using Cowboy to cushion the fall.

Staring down into that dirt, Cowboy realized right away that his puny body was never intended as a horse sofa, and he allowed as how Earl Gene had had ample time for pictures, so he seized that opportunity to part company with Old Number Nine. He turned the reins loose and bid that cayuse good-bye.

Old Number Nine got up right spryly and, as his way of saying adios, did a tap dance across Cowboy's rib cage, separating every rib the boy had and breaking several of them. Then having had his say, Old Number Nine headed for the barn and his oat reward for having busted another rider.

The handlers had done realized this rider wasn't no hand to ask for help and so none of them stepped forward to offer any.

Having little desire to breathe and cussing himself through the agony every time he did, Cowboy hobbled painfully toward the fence, anxious to exit the arena before they turned another horse loose on him. He managed to make it to the fence pretty handily in sort of a hunchbacked crab crawl.

There stood Earl Gene, sucking on another beer and eyeing that Polaroid with a baleful stare and mistrustful frown. Looking up, Earl Gene shrugged and said, "Cowboy, you're gonna have to show me how to work this here camera."

While Cowboy was in the hospital, things took a turn for the worse. But that's another story. 

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