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The most reckless man on horseback in the family was my maternal grandfather. Rode high-headed, hot-blooded horses across the slick ledge rock gullies at speeds unsafe on flat ground.

As once reported, he collided head-on with a large-trunked mesquite tree while heading a cow and a calf in a race on his sorrel horse. Staggered up the hill to collapse on the ranch house porch from a concussion dramatized by a head wound dripping blood down his face.

It made a lasting impression, seeing him confined to bed for two days' rest. But Grandfather said the most exciting part of the second staging – the stitches the once buggy doctor took in the head wound with a series of broad loops and rough lashing – hurt him worse than the fall.

Before his death, he gave me his saddle and his one remaining spur. He apologized for losing the mate to his gal-leg spur. He said he lost the spur on the rim in the Mountain Pasture, trailing sheep missed at shearing over the slick ledge where Polo Navarro let his horse fall chasing outlawed goats. (Polo worked for both of my grandfathers, the Big Boss, my Uncle Goat Whiskers, and myself. Polo adopted all of our bad habits, thus was considered part of the family.)

Better stop and explain the part about "Polo let his horse fall." The ledge is a 50-foot trip whatever direction a horseman and his quarry choose to cross. Slopes just enough to add to the peril of going downhill on a shod horse, plus is positioned in a header to orchestrate the chase to the awful rasping sound of iron scraping against slick rock.

But the "let his horse" was in wide use on the ranches in the times of lanterns, milk buckets, night horses and cow bells. Those days when such buttons as myself and my pal Dave were out of school for the weekend to day work to "let" horses buck us off, or "let" horses break loose with our saddles.

Some outfits seemed to have more "letting" than others. Big pastures and hard works on green-broke horses left a lot of old boys "letting his horse stumble," or "letting his horse leave him on foot." I don't know why, but I have to write this. If the paragraphs are too wordy, hold your thumb over the "letting" part and please read on.

Granddad went on to say that if I'd recreate the scene, I might find his spur. He said he knew it was the place, as he felt the imbalance while spurring "Old Danny" with one spur to gain speed to beat those sheep to the next rough place. I wasn't able to ask "Old Danny" how he felt

about pouring on the speed crossing 50 feet of the slickest rock in the county. But I didn't have to ask myself if I was going to make a reputation hunting spurs by following my Grandpa's act.

A few years after Grandfather died, we held a Christmas party over at the rock house in Mertzon. The house had low ceilings. When crowded with guests, fumes from the punch bowls lingered in clouds around the room, resulting in intemperate reactions to distilled spirits. Used to the open ranges, I inhaled too deep, and in a state of indisposition, gave a friend my Grandpa's spur. (Don't ever expect me to work again as hard as I did on that paragraph.)

Next thing, his saddle burned in the bunkhouse fire on the Divide. Next thing, his bits disappeared at the line camp. And then the next thing, not in order, my friend died without leaving a trace where he stored my grandfather's spur.

It took reruns and rehearsals to gain the courage to ask his son for my grandfather's spur back. Acts like writing and rewriting openings to use to discuss heirlooms. Excuses and leads to bring up the subject of collections — spur collections. Considered running a classified ad offering a reward the way I did for years trying to recover

the Big Boss's saddle stolen at his headquarters after his death.

I wasn't going to take Grandpa's suggestion and come off the side of that rim looking for the mate. I sure wasn't going to do a test run wearing one of his spurs for fear there might still be a mystic force left to jab an old pony as hard as Grandfather spurred one.

One day I just blurted it out: I would sure like to have my grandfather's spur back if he ever found it. Years passed. Yesterday he called to tell me he found my spur. Makes July 31, 2005 the best day of the year. Spur rowels are the closest Grandpa came to understanding the importance of the invention of the wheel. Wish he knew how important that piece of iron is to me.