

Shortgrass Country

By Monte Noelke

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You couldn't have asked for a better day to be working stock. Wind direction was perfect; temperature was ranging in the low 70s. The sun had to work to push through the cloud covering.

Everything looked just right. Then the earth caved out for under the horse I was riding. He went down on a sort of slanting piece of ground. To get up, he had to use my left leg as a prop. As a guess, I'd say he was in my lap about 30 seconds.

At the point of impact with the ground, I started making mental notes of my thoughts and the reactions of the people that I encountered on the way to the corrals and eventually to the doctor's office. This is how it went:

A young cowhand rode over after the horse had got up. He asked, "Did he hurt you, Mr. Noelke?"

My thought: "Oh no, young scatterer of sheep and cows. 1000 pounds of saddle and horse flesh is but a mere brush of limb and tissue for a 43 year old man. In one fortnight, I will probably be patronizing a masseur who will drop horses on my left leg and left thigh."

Next scene was the corrals. Two older hands rode up. They said: "Didn't that pony fall on you while ago when we were coming in?"

My thoughts: "No, and hell no. I always do circus stunts out in the pasture. In the early days my family was made up of European stunt riders. The traditional act was to have a horse fall at the climax."

Scene two: A telephone call to my wife to advise here that I was going to have to be driven to San Angelo. Her reply went sort of like this: "Are you hurt badly? Well, that doesn't sound good. By the way, did you see the cat this morning before you went to work? We can't find him anywhere."

My thought: Dear one, please look after all of the world's stray tomcats. Those of us who are doomed to a fate of working 15 hands in the air can get by somehow."

Third scene: The emergency room in San Angelo. A busy whitecap asks "Would you like me to call a doctor?"

My thought: No, old girl I am here sitting in this wheel chair to commemorate the sick and the lame who have gone before me. My only wish is to rest a bit while the blood dries on the my left hind foot. Then I will carry on my mission to see that the kind world knows that...damn it to hell, I wish I had stayed at the ranch and died in dignity. Horse and buggy doctors were speed demons compared to these modern healers."

The last scene was the cubicle to which the suffering are finally sent to await the doctor. When the doctor arrived, he viewed my foot propped on a stool, and said, "Hmm, looks like you have a sore foot. Does that hurt?"

My thought: "Blessed One Who Protects Us in All Your glory, please get me out of this wreck. Oh Glorious One, take me far away from a doctor that asks does a toe hurt when it is as purple as an old lady's hat. Send me back to the ranch where the simplest minded unpapered alien that ever crossed the Rio Grande knows that a foot swollen twice the size of a big boot, oozing blood around the toenails, hurts worse than five kinds of hell and six kinds of misery. Keep all the tomcats from straying and I'll never ask again for anything besides more than half-inch or rain."