

*Writing "A Rancher's Legacy" was a welcomed opportunity to express my personal cowboy heritage. In the early 1900's, my great-great-grandfather homesteaded, and my grandfather still farms on the in the Peace River country. Although I live in the city, I will always retain my country ties and frequently visit my grandparents on their ranch. The following story is inspired by the experiences of my grandfather, and of my father growing up on the ranch, and what they have learned through their lives.*

The air was thick with summer heat, as he looked over the green slopes of the Interior that curved sinuously, just as they ever had. Another few steps, taken slowly, took him to the top of the gentle hill which was his vantage point from which he could see his modest home, and most of his ranch. Removing his hat to wipe the sweat from his brow, his gaze swept across the sea of gold and green, wishing to forever implant the vision into his memory. These hills had been his life; they had seen him grow from a spirited youth into a man both determined and industrious, into the wizened soul he was today.

His musings had, without his knowledge, tapped into his memories, and now they flowed out strong and clear, so strong in fact, that each detail and the feelings that each of these moments produced remained clear; time had not dulled them.

He was a boy of twelve sitting cross-legged on the apex of the very hill on which he now stood. Before him his grandfather was slowly lowering himself to ground level, so he would be eye-to-eye with his grandson when he spoke. When he began to tell his story the words flowed out of his mouth with all the sweetness and sorrow of life, and behind them echoed the magic of a legacy.

"In my youth," he began, in a deep, nostalgic tone, "I was like you: full of passion and life. My father had brought us here to provide beef for the miners during the gold rush. I remember walking along the banks of the Thompson to bring chop to the cattle, my eyes full of excitement despite the frigid air biting my exposed face. Nothing pleased me like helping my father.

"We built our house up from the ground with our bare hands and a couple of saws and hammers. It was hard work, but we did it gladly because we were really constructing a new life for ourselves with those timbers, one that we could be proud of."

He was now twenty, and sweating in anticipation. This trip to Williams Lake for the stampede marked the first time he had competed riding bareback. He inserted his hand into the handhold and gripped the riggin, squeezing tight. There were only mere moments left until he would test his strength against that of the horse. Glancing at his boots he saw his sharpened spurs glinting in the sunlight, keen for their work to begin. One more deep breath: he inhaled the air, and closed his eyes. Opening them, he gave a stiff nod, he was ready. The gate swung open and the roar of the crowd met his ears.

Several years later he stepped out into the night, his flashlight penetrating through the darkness to reveal trees and sleeping cattle. He trudged through the grass to find the one cow he was looking for who had distanced herself from the herd preparing to give birth. With the help of his father she was ushered into the barn. Her calf had dropped: it wouldn't be much

longer now. He sat waiting, with his father's presence silently keeping him company, until she began to give birth. Getting to his feet, he and his father assisted the cow, pulling out the calf until it was free from its mother's womb. He cleaned the newborn and dried it off, the hint of a smile dancing on his face while he worked. In the background his father prepared to tattoo the calf, and to mark it as one of the herd and allow it to become part of the story of the ranch.

His foot tapped to the music, following the steady beat. Now middle aged, he surveyed the crowd he was playing for. The usual group of folk from the surrounding area were all crammed inside the community hall and could think of no better place to be that night, and neither could he. The people danced, carefree, soaking up each joyful moment as his band played on the miniature stage. His fiddle sat comfortably in one of his hands as the other drew the bow back and forth quickly across the strings, each movement creating another note that blended with the sound of his companion's guitar and accordion to form the lively music that was flying through the room.

Finally, he came back to himself and back to time. He was once again an elderly gentleman who stood surveying his farm: the product of his life's work. Ranching used to be simpler than it was today, back when no one worried about genetically enhanced animals and crops, complex markets, or the threat of urban development creeping closer every day; he could even see the townhouses on the outskirts of the city from where he was currently standing.

Certain things never changed, however, including the uncertainty. The weather was still an unpredictable concern, whether there would be too much rain, not enough rain, or if the summer would last too long or the winter would come too soon was always a point of distress. One learned to deal with this though, and smile through it all. No rancher could influence the weather, nor fluctuations in the market, which is why it took a resolute, steady character to do the job.

The sound of someone approaching from behind forced him out of his reverie. Turning, he saw that there were actually two people behind him: Rebecca and James. The faces of his grandchildren grinned broadly up at him with an air of mischief.

"We snuck up on you," Rebecca pronounced proudly, while James nodded his head in agreement.

Chuckling, he told the two children to take a seat on the grass and he lowered himself down to their level. Looking into their keen, innocent eyes full of youthful hope, he saw an enormous network of possibilities expanding into their futures. Today he would recount to them the essence of his life on this ranch, his growth from a child to maturity. He was about to impart to them the history that they were an integral part of, the history of their family which extended into the past and will reach far into the future with each life adding importance to the legacy that they shared.

"In my youth..."