

BeverlyHillsCowboy.com



ROPING FOR CANCER RESEARCH

Life and Times of a Beverly Hills Cowboy



I wish I had a dollar for every time I have been asked how a person that has lived in Beverly Hills for most of his life became a Cowboy. Choosing to live my life in the two very different lifestyles of Beverly Hills businessman and competitive cowboy has led to some very humorous and interesting experiences. I hope that you are as entertained by this portion of my life story as I have been living it.

When I was just a Colt

I developed a voracious appetite for two activities while a freshman at Beverly Hills High School. The first was playing on the school's tennis team; the second was reading western novels and books about the early American frontier.

The summer of my freshman year provided me with an opportunity that would impact the rest of my life. My parents, in a decision that they would later regret, sent me to a Malibu summer camp as a councilor in training. The camp had all the usual activities from archery to mini-bikes however what made this camp unique was that every camper was assigned a horse for their exclusive use during their stay at the camp. I had not had a lot of experience with horses prior to arriving at the summer camp however I learned very quickly, so quickly, that within two weeks of my arrival at the camp I was promoted to a paying job as a Wrangler and given a string of 20 horses that I was responsible to have saddled for the campers by 8:00 am every morning. After breakfast I would spend my days teaching riding or guiding trail rides through the Malibu hills. I spent the next five summers running riding programs at various Malibu summer camps. The western novels, old John Wayne westerns, and the many hours I spent around western people who valued common sense over book sense would blend to shape my character and lifelong philosophy. To my Beverly Hill's parents regret, my summer camp experiences would lead me to spend the rest of my life chasing the dream of living life as cowboy and not a typical Beverly Hills gentleman.

I have always greatly admired the cowboy standard set by great men like Will Rodgers and President Ronald Reagan. The western films of the 1950's and 60' portrayed cowboys as I like to envision them, strong willed, independent and with a solid understanding of the difference between right and wrong. Although they are just fictional characters, the western roles portrayed by actor John Wayne and the hard working cowboys in best selling author Louis L'Amour's western novels, best represent the "Code of the West" that I pattern my life after today. I aspire to be like these western characters that led adventurous lives as they quickly and efficiently handled all that nature and the bad guys could throw at them. Fierce loyalty, never hesitating to stand up for what is right and coming to the rescue of those in need are qualities that are sorely missed in the modern world.

Aim High

One of the other teenage wranglers at the summer camp competed as a roper on both the California Junior Rodeo and Professional Rodeo Circuits. I learned that a skilled roper required horsemanship, athletic skill, quick thinking and the training discipline to reach the full potential of horse and rider working together to make the perfect rodeo run.. I went to watch several of his competitions and found the sport of rodeo to be much more exciting than competing as a high school tennis player. If you miss a serve in tennis you get another serve, if you make a mistake in rodeo, a 2,000 pound bull may just try to separate your head from your body. I yearned to experience the excitement of competing in rodeo and decided that my new goal in life was to win the ultimate rodeo emblem of success, a first

prize trophy belt buckle. At the time I did not realize that the goal I set as a fifteen year old kid would lead me down a path that I would follow for the rest of my life.

When I informed my parents of my desire to compete in rodeo, they replied that kids from Beverly Hills should aspire to become doctors or lawyers not rodeo cowboys and they refused my request for the money to buy a horse and support me in my quest for a rodeo buckle. Being a typical teenager I ignored my parents and set out to be a rodeo cowboy despite their wishes. My parents were the first of many people who throughout my life have tried to convince me to be more civilized in my pursuits and refrain from the cowboy lifestyle.

My high school job at the local department store did not pay enough to enable me to afford a horse and practice cattle so entering the rodeos as a roper was out of the question however since the rodeo production companies provided the horses and bulls for the bucking events I would only need to come up with enough money for entry fees and a pair of spurs to enter the rough stock events. I had rode a few bucking horses in my time but had never attempted to ride a bull but I figured it couldn't be too hard to hold on for a short eight second ride.

I entered my first rodeo by forging my parent's signature on the release forms (I was a minor) and using my friends Los Angeles address so no one would know I was from Beverly Hills. My previous dealings with some cowboys and other horse industry types had shown that some of these people might resent my Beverly Hills background. I resented that I felt pressured to hide where I lived, however, I would have to overlook other people's ignorance as my priority was to compete and win a trophy belt buckle and I was resolved to do what ever it took to improve my chances of winning.

Figuring out one's limitations can be painful

I quickly found out that riding bulls and broncs was a little more difficult then I thought it would be. What I thought would be a quick eight second ride on a bucking horse or bull felt more like being trapped in a spinning clothes dryer for an eternity. At my very first rodeo I ended up getting knocked unconscious when my foot was trapped in the stirrup on my first bronc ride and the horse went running down the arena with me upside down ramming my head into the ground on each jump. I regained consciousness after being carried out of the arena not remembering anything that had happened but knowing that I had to "cowboy up" because I still had to attempt to ride a bull later in the performance

Getting motivated to ride that first horse had been simple but after getting my head darn near caved in, getting motivated to ride a bull was not going to be easy. The bull I drew was 2,000 pounds of twisted muscle and although I rode him better than my earlier bronc, he still threw my scrawny 160 pound body about ten feet in the air. I turned out to be a big hit with the fans in the grandstands for the same reasons some fans attend auto racing....when I rode, the crowd was guaranteed a spectacular wreck.

It turns out that the optimum height for a bull rider is 5'8" tall and at my height of 6'2", my center of gravity was too high for me to ever be a champion rough stock rider. Despite this, I craved being a part of the rodeo environment and I was just too stubborn/stupid to give up my dream of being a rodeo cowboy and was resolved to press on. You see, **cowboying doesn't build character, it reveals it**, and this cowboy was not going to be a quitter.

After that first rodeo I figured I better get some coaching if I was to continue my quest or I would be receiving a tombstone long before I would receive my first victory belt buckle. I started practicing with some other rodeo cowboys and quickly found out that practicing bull and bronc riding is just as dangerous as entering the rodeos. Although I never did acquire the necessary skills needed to win a championship, I did manage to earn enough points to qualify for the California State Finals where I entertained the crowd with some championship style wipe-outs. I also became acquainted with quite a few emergency response doctors as well.

Opportunity Knocks

The highlight of my rough stock riding career came while attending a Professional Rodeo Event at the Inglewood Forum during my senior year in high school. It turned out that two of the contestants in the wild buffalo bull riding were injured at the previous night's performance and the stock contractor needed someone to fill in so the 12,000 fans in attendance would get the full show they paid for. My friend and I were sitting on the arena fence watching the roping event when the stock contractor running the show recognized me from a previous event and asked if I would do him a favor and ride a wild buffalo for him. Without knowing that I would be a replacement for the two guys that were injured the previous night and never having even seen anybody attempt to ride a buffalo before, I of course said yes. My friend told me that he had seen cowboys get badly injured while riding wild buffalo and that I was nuts to try and ride one but I told him I wasn't going to pass up a chance to ride at a Professional Rodeo.

The first thing I noticed as I approached the chute was that buffalo are a lot taller than the bulls I had been riding; no wonder so many guys got hurt riding these critters. As I prepared to ride, the rodeo announcer was asking for information on the replacement buffalo rider; before I could answer with my name and that I was from Los Angeles, my friend told the announcer my name and that I was from Beverly Hills. Well my friend had just made the announcer's job a whole lot easier, as I prepared to ride he proceeded to spend the next few minutes telling the audience that I was from Beverly Hills and that there is no way anyone from Beverly Hills could be considered a cowboy or possibly ride a wild buffalo. He also said that they better get a bed ready for me at the hospital because at least a part of me was going to end up there. Needless to say the announcer had the crowd laughing pretty hard at the thought of this Beverly Hills city slicker thinking he could compete in professional rodeo and although I was trying to concentrate on preparing for my ride, I couldn't help but think how I would like to make a great ride so the announcer would have to eat his words.

I got into position on top of the massive six foot tall buffalo and a couple of cowboys tied my hand into the bull rope; as the pissed-off buffalo trashed in the chute he darn near tore my legs off. I took a few deep breaths and nodded my head; they released the bull with me holding onto the bull rope as hard as I would hold onto anything in my entire life. The buffalo ran as fast as he could while bucking and turning his way down the arena, nothing the wild animal did could dislodge my hold on him. I managed to ride that monstrous beast to the limit. After making a qualified ride and in the process of bailing off the enraged buffalo, I slammed into the ground temporarily dislocating my shoulder. I popped my shoulder back into place and dusted myself off as the rodeo clowns distracted the buffalo so he wouldn't try to get his revenge by trampling me as I lay in the arena. The crowd went crazy and the announcer ate crow and told the audience that although I was from Beverly Hills, I turned out to be a real tough cowboy after all. That night I walked out of the arena with my head held high and then told my friend I was retiring from rough stock riding.

Living in Fantasyland

Having the opportunity to escape my Beverly Hills surroundings by spending time in the more down to earth western equestrian community helped me to realize that growing up in Beverly Hills can be detrimental to a persons understanding of how the rest of the world lives. Back in the 1970's, kids from Beverly Hills led rather sheltered and pampered lives, however because my parents had been raised in a more middle class manner, they made sure that we were not as spoiled as most of the other kids we were going to school with. Most of my friends received their first car on or around their 16th birthday; I rode my bike three miles to school each day rain or shine until I start college. My parents also insisted that I hold a job while I was in school, so I started working as a paperboy at the age of 12 and worked in department stores, summer camps and other types of employment throughout high school and college.

Beverly Hills was quite a fantasyland; where else could you live on a block with so many famous neighbors. Debbie Reynolds, Smoky Robinson, Florence Henderson, Ernest Borgnine and other Hollywood celebrities all lived within a block of our house. Shirley Jones lived a few doors up the street and I went to school with her boys. She was a pretty down to earth celebrity mom; she even found the time to leave the set of her show the Partridge Family to act as a chaperone for our 8th grade graduation.

In 1978 I was invited to join the real estate company that had been founded by my father and his partner. I worked during the day and attended college at UCLA in the evenings. It was a difficult adjustment going from fulltime student and summer camp wrangler to all of the sudden having a full time career, but the time was right for my transition to adulthood and I had been well prepared for it. Life in the professional world wasn't all that bad, I was only making \$5.00 an hour but with a little budgeting I found that I could rent a little apartment and still have some fun money left.

The Importance of Charity and Volunteer Efforts

In 1981 I joined a non-profit fundraising organization called Concern II. Concern II was a young adults division of Concern Foundation which is dedicated to funding cancer research. At the time, Concern II was one of only a handful of non-profit organizations that catered to the “young adult”. We produced four or five fundraising events each year and granted an amazing amount of money to cancer researchers around the world. In the 1990’s Concern II was merged with it’s parent group, Concern Foundation and we have continued the tradition of hosting some of the most entertaining fundraising events held in the Southern California area each year.

In addition to funding cancer research, Concern II served the community by teaching young adults about giving back to their community and developing the leadership and fundraising skills of young people so as they grew older they could one day make an impact with other non-profit organizations. The young adults of the Concern II generation are now in their 50’s and many of our past members have used the experience gained with Concern II to serve on the executive boards of many of Southern California’s most important non-profit organizations.

Over the years I have volunteered at Concern Foundation I have learned again and again that no matter how much an individual gives to a worthwhile non-profit organization, you unintentionally get so much back in return. Concern Foundation has opened my life to opportunities and adventures that I would never have experienced if I had not been willing to donate my time to this outstanding organization. Some of these experiences include things like producing a concert starring Stevie Wonder and Quincy Jones and hosting the premier of one of the Star Wars movie openings. In 1991 Concern II was responsible for funding the first cancer research and treatment conference between doctors from the eastern block countries and researchers from the west. As Concern II’s representative, I traveled to Russia with eight of the top cancer researchers in western medicine including a Nobel Prize winner. This was a milestone event in the eastern block countries and the opening ceremonies were televised nationally throughout the region. Our Russian hosts were very hospitable; we were greeted at the airport by Russian authorities and allowed to bypass their stringent Russian Customs Department, they insisted that we eat six or seven meals a day and never stopped pouring endless amounts of vodka. We were able to set up a partnership between Children’s Hospital Los Angeles and the Children’s Hospital in Moscow that continues to this day. This partnership allows the doctors at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles to consult with their counterparts in Moscow in an effort to share their research and treatment information.

Today Concern Foundation raises most of its funds from an incredible event we produce every year that we call the Block Party. The Block Party used to be held on the most famous street in Beverly Hills, Rodeo Drive. We outgrew Rodeo Drive and we currently produce the event on the Paramount Pictures lot in Hollywood. The event is attended by over 3,000 people and utilizes the entire four block area on the lot’s New York Street set. Our guests are kept very busy dining at food stations from over fifty of the areas best restaurants, enjoying our four stages with live entertainment, gaming at our 70 table casino as well as experiencing a host of other surprises.

Homesteading on the Range

In 1989 I proposed to my lovely wife as we were holding hands while horseback riding. We have two children, ages 15 and 12. My son rides horses occasionally and my daughter, who was riding horses in my lap before she could walk, is an accomplished rider and has won many ribbons riding in equestrian events.

I have a 30 year background in real estate investment/development and am a managing partner for a portfolio of industrial, retail and residential income properties. I have also served as an officer for many community based non-profit organizations and foundations.

Getting back on the horse that threw you

While my retirement from bull and bronc riding put my dream of winning a rodeo trophy belt buckle further out of reach. I still thought of myself as a cowboy and maybe when I was making more money and could set myself up with some cattle and horses, I would have a chance of earning a trophy belt buckle by winning a roping event. Over the years a high school friend and I continued to share many adrenalin raising adventures including sky diving, hang gliding, scuba diving, NASCAR stock car racing, and aerial dog-fighting in combat aircraft but none of these activities would serve to reduce my desire to return to competitive rodeo.

In the 1990's I started spending time at a working cattle and horse ranch in the mountains of Montana. This ranch is nothing like the Billy Crystal "City Slicker" movie where it takes fifteen city slickers to drive a hundred head of cattle. At the Lazy EL Ranch in Roscoe, Montana they can move thousands of head of cattle with only five or six ranch hands and a couple of good cattle dogs. This is one of the few working ranches in the country where riders can participate in the day to day work of a ranch hand. We would ride herd on up to 3,000 head of cattle and 800 wild horses regardless of whether it was steaming hot, raining or sometimes even snowing. Riding point on a herd of 800 wild horses running at high speed over broken ground is one of the most exciting things I have ever done, if the rider's horse falls or stumbles and causes the rider to fall, the galloping herd of wild horses will be unable to stop in time to avoid trampling the rider. The people that live and work at the ranch have a real genuine western attitude about things and I greatly enjoyed the time spent with them.

When my children were old enough, I introduced them to the working ranch experience and they both benefited from spending time in a lifestyle so different than the Beverly Hills atmosphere they are growing up in. Our visits to Montana and similar places help me to teach my children many important life lessons. Western people have a philosophy of independence and a "can do" attitude; these people believe that you don't ask someone to do something you can do yourself. If you do not have the knowledge to accomplish a task, you find a way to gain that knowledge and get the job done.

Most working cowboys I have met don't talk much about things like character, honesty, and courage because they see talk as cheap. Instead they reflect these things in their everyday actions and in turn are untrusting of others who do not do the same. Life on a ranch is different than life in the city. The nearest neighbor can be miles away, cell

phone service may not be available and response time for police and emergency services can be measured in hours instead of minutes. As a result, ranchers and ranch hands tend to be more self sufficient and independent than city folk.

James P. Owen wrote a book about “Cowboy Ethics” and how the business world could benefit from accepting the following “Code of the West”

Live each day with courage.
Take pride in your work.
Always finish what you start.
Do what has to be done.
Be tough, but fair.
When you make a promise, keep it.
Ride for the Brand.
Talk less and say more.
Remember that some things aren't for sale.
Know where to draw the line.

Saddle up, its time to rope

After a visit to the Montana ranch in the summer of 2001, a friend of mine was walking through my garage when he noticed some of my old ropes and saddles hanging on the wall. He told me he owned horses and was a roper and that I should come out and watch him practice some time. He gave me a copy of the “Ropers Sports News” which was a publication dedicated to the rodeo event of team roping. The publication had information about several organizations that had been created to cater to professional and amateur ropers on a local and national level.

When I had stopped competing the only way for an amateur to compete in the sport was head to head with the professionals and the odds of an amateur having the skills to compete with a professional were pretty slim. These relatively new organizations had designed a program where amateur and professional ropers were given a handicap based on their skill level and this allowed them to compete fairly with and against each other. I watched my friend rope the next evening and within a week I was shopping for my own horses. Twenty-four years after I had postponed my quest for a trophy buckle, I was going to get back in the hunt. This time I was determined that nothing was going to stop me from achieving my goal!

I had a lot to learn and I wasn't getting any younger so time was of the essence. It wasn't long before I had acquired three horses that had been trained for team roping, a pick-up truck and a horse trailer.

I wanted to quickly get to a point where I could be competitive so I found a professional rodeo cowboy that would give me a crash course in the sport of team roping. Team roping is the fastest growing equestrian sport in the country with thousands of participants throughout the United States. Team roping is a rodeo event in which one cowboy known as the “header” ropes the steer around the horns and his partner the

“heeler” ropes the steer’s legs. A winning team roping run will be in the six to eight second range.

Starting to team rope at the age of 43 put me at a disadvantage as most of the people competing in team roping have been roping since they were much younger. Not to be deterred, I trained very hard and went to instructional clinics run by professional rodeo cowboys. I only had time to practice three times a week on horseback but every morning before work and in the evenings when I returned, I threw practice loop after practice loop at the practice dummy on the tennis court of our Beverly Hills home.

I suffered a setback during my second month of learning to rope. I was taking a lesson and had roped a steer at a dead run when my horse turned away from the steer as I dallied the rope around the saddle horn. As a result my 1,200 pound horse was running in one direction and the 500 pound steer was going in another direction; my hand got caught as the rope pulled tight around the saddle horn and my thumb was instantly cut off and two of my fingers were badly mangled. This is a common injury in team roping and can happen to even the most seasoned professionals, a seven time national champion experienced the same injury on live national television at the 2005 National Rodeo Finals.

My thumb had been completely cut off from my hand but fortunately the glove I was wearing was only partially torn and so the detached thumb was still in the glove. Many times in cases such as this, people have to search the floor of the arena for the missing digit(s). I dismounted my horse and someone brought over a bag of ice to keep the swelling down. One of the other ropers drove me over to the nearest hospital. On the drive to the hospital I called my wife to tell her of the accident and to enlist her help in finding the best hand surgeon in the area in hopes that I might be able to have my thumb reattached. Time was a critical factor if I was to have a chance of a successful reattachment so I figured the doctors at the emergency room could stabilize me enough for me to be able to make it to a specialist who would do the surgery. My friend dropped me off at the hospital and left to go back to the roping arena to see to our horses.

I was the only patient in the emergency room that morning and it took 30 minutes of me bleeding all over their floor before I was seen by a doctor. I told him I just needed to be stabilized and given some pain medication and then I would need an ambulance to transport me to another hospital. The doctor gave me some morphine and told me that my thumb was so badly mangled that there was no chance it could be reattached and that they were preparing a surgical team to repair my fingers and close the wound where my thumb was detached.

I called my wife and being the very capable person that she is, she had already been in contact with one of the finest hand specialists in Southern California and they were preparing to receive me at Cedars Sinai Hospital in Beverly Hills. I told the emergency room doctor that I needed an ambulance as soon as possible because I needed to get to Cedars Sinai. He tried to convince me that he could do as good a job as the doctor waiting for me at Cedars Sinai and that I shouldn’t put myself through the stress of transferring to another hospital because there was no way anyone was going to be able to reattach my thumb. I told him to get me the ambulance and he said he would have his

staff make the call. I waited another twenty minutes and there was still no ambulance and I had seen three empty ambulances in front of the hospital when I arrived so I came to the conclusion that they were stalling me in hopes that I would decide to have the surgery at their hospital. I got up out of the bed they had put me in and started walking around the emergency room area to try and find someone to call me an ambulance. A nurse stopped me and told me I should not be walking around with all the morphine in my system and to get back to bed. I told her that if they did not provide me with an ambulance within the next ten minutes, I was going to call a taxi. A few minutes later the doctor came back to try and convince me yet again to stay at his hospital. He also said if would be at least an hour until they would have an available ambulance. I told him he better call me a taxi and he said they could not release me to a taxi because of the drugs they had given me. I replied that if there was not a taxi at the front door of the hospital in ten minutes I would call one myself and sue the hospital for malpractice. This doctor was used to giving orders not taking them but he knew my mind was made up and he did not relish the thought of having to get involved in a law suit so he called a taxi.

I told the cab driver that I would give him a hundred dollar tip if he would exceed the speed limit on the drive to Cedars and he gladly hit speeds of ninety miles on hour all the way down the freeway. When I arrived at the hospital I was met by my wife and an entire surgical team and immediately rushed into surgery.

In most cases it is not possible to reattach a thumb that is lost while team roping however the doctor agreed to make the attempt but only gave me a 40% chance of success. I was lucky, I spent four hours in surgery to reattach my thumb and repair my damaged fingers, a week in the hospital and four months of physical therapy. I also experienced countless ribbing from the doctors and nurses at Cedars Sinai who thought the idea of a middle aged Beverly Hills Rodeo cowboy was the funniest thing they ever heard. I felt that I owed something to the Doctor who had successfully sown my thumb back on my hand so I told him that I would always carry his business card and that I would refer other cowboys who injured their hands while roping to his office. He replied that he would appreciate it if I would forgo recommending his services to the cowboys and instead pass his name on to all the flat chested cowgirls; it turned out that he is also one of the best breast implant surgeons in Beverly Hills and it's more profitable and a whole lot easier to install implants than reattach thumbs.

Within days of getting out of the hospital and with my hand wrapped in bandages I was back riding my horses so they would stay in shape and be ready for my return to roping as soon as my hand was ready. My friends and family urged me to quit this ridicules quest and told me to take up a safe hobby like golf. Sure, after my injury I could have given up a lifestyle that had shaped my entire life and given up the adrenaline rush of partnering with my horse to chase down a hard running steer while swinging a rope; or I could dress up in funny looking striped pants and hit a stationary ball and then get in a little cart and try and find the ball I just hit. No thank you; I'll play golf when I'm eighty years old and can't do anything else, until then I'll choose to live my life by participating in more exciting activities. I sure was getting tired of everyone telling me that I would never be a successful rodeo cowboy and that I should quit before I killed myself.

After a year of intense training my skills had developed to a point where I could start competing in local roping contests that catered to amateur ropers. Local roping contests, called “jackpots” are held every weekend in different arenas within an hours drive from the Los Angeles area. Although I aspired to advance my skill to a level where I could attract professional partners and compete in pro-am events I knew I needed to spend at least a year competing in the minor leagues before I would be ready for the majors.

The competition can be pretty tough as these local ropings usually attract between two and three hundred teams. I won some money by placing in the top 10 teams at four of the first eight ropings I entered but was unable to win the first place belt buckle. I was so close to my goal that I bought a western styled leather belt without a buckle and placed it where I would see it every day to remind me to train harder and win the buckle that would signify the completion of my quest.

I trained hard to get ready for the next roping competition that was two weeks away. I took extra lessons and roped my backyard practice dummy until my arm felt like it was going to fall off. I was ready, my horses were ready and I was telling myself that come Saturday I was going to be wearing a shiny new belt buckle, but then at practice the Tuesday evening before the Saturday jackpot, I caught my left hand in one of my rope coils just as the steer hit the end of the rope. I felt the bone in my hand snap and immediately turned loose of the rope. I knew I had broken my hand and was very depressed at the thought of having to take time off just when I was ready to achieve my goal.

The following morning I called the hand specialist that had reattached my thumb; he remembered me and told me to come right over as he was eager to catch up on the exploits of his only rodeo cowboy patient. The x-ray confirmed a break running the length of my left hand and the doctor said I would need surgery to repair the broken bone. I was feeling devastated as they prepped me for surgery, I had been so close to achieving my goal and now it would be months until I was ready to start training again. The doctor placed two permanent pins in my hand to keep the bone stabilized while it healed and then placed the hand in a cast.

Although my hand hurt like hell after the pain medication given to me during the surgery wore off; I was surprised by how secure the hand felt in the cast. The doctor warned me to stay off horses for a few weeks to give the mended bone time to heal. I asked him what would happen if my hand were to experience a hard bump or two and he stated that with the pins holding the bone together and the cast stabilizing my hand, it would take a lot of force to damage the repair he had completed.

Cowboy Up!

Cowboys have a few sayings like “cowboy up”, “cowboy tough” and “when you fall off the horse you get right back on”. Well I started thinking that maybe just maybe I could still enter Saturday’s jackpot so when I got home from the doctor I grabbed my rope and moseyed out to the backyard to see if I could still hold my coiled rope with my left hand in a cast. I threw three loops before the pain got to be unbearable but said to myself that

it is only Wednesday and I don't have to compete until Saturday so let's see how the next few days go and make a final decision on Friday night.

Friday evening I was not in too much pain and I figured that if I was going to compete on Saturday morning I better find out if my injured hand would prevent me from being able to ride and rope. I very carefully saddled up my horse protecting my hand as much as possible, and then I warmed my horse up for ten minutes by running him in circles around the arena. So far so good; I was ready to run my first steer of the evening. Holding my horses rein's in the swollen fingers of my broken left hand along with the coils of my rope, I chased the steer down the arena and roped him well enough for my partner to catch both legs. We successfully ran two more steers when I thought that I had better quit while I was ahead. The cast on my hand as well as the pain restricted my ability to perform to about eighty percent of my capability, however, I felt I could still give the competition a run for their money and decided I would enter the next day's event. I had difficulty sleeping that night as I lay in bed mentally rehearsing the perfect rodeo runs I was going to make the following day.

The jackpot was in Pomona, California, a little more than a one hour drive from the ranch where I boarded my horses. As I arrived at the roping arena a Garth Brooks song called "Rodeo" started to play on my trucks sound system. The song is about how a rodeo cowboy will sell his soul just to stay in the game and injuries, debt or women will not deter him from his rodeo life. The part of the song about overcoming injuries and competing in pain motivated me and I knew today was going to be my day.

I am usually one of the first people to arrive at a competition because I believe that preparation is a very important part of success. I was already saddled and warming up my horses when most of the other cowboys arrived. That day's prizes were displayed near the entry office. I ignored the other prizes and stared long and hard at the first place buckle that I wanted so badly. There were over 200 teams entered that day and I was feeling a little apprehensive about my broken hand as I paid my entry fees at the entry office, but that rodeo song kept playing in my head and I was dammed if I was going to let anything get in the way of me winning that buckle.

All day long I had drawn cattle that a guy could win on, my horses had worked well, and my partners and I were roping almost every steer we ran. By the final round over 190 teams had been eliminated and one of my partners and I had the fastest average time on two steers of the twenty teams left in the roping. It would all come down to that last run.

As the header (the one who ropes the steer by the horns) I am the quarterback of the run. I have to gauge the proper head start I have to give the steer; if I start too soon I would get a 10 second penalty added to our time, if I start too late then the steer might outrun me to the back of the arena and I might not even get a chance to throw my rope. Assuming I get the start right, I have to ride my horse at a dead run into a position that gives me the highest percentage shot at roping the steer, once I rope the steer I have to dally the rope around my saddle horn and slow the steer enough so I can create a good shot for my partner who then ropes the heels. If the heeler ropes only one foot we get a 5 second penalty. When both horses are facing the steer and the ropes are tight the "flagger" (referee) drops the flag and the clock stops.

In the final round they start with the 20th fastest team on two steers and finish with the 1st fastest team. As the first fastest team on two steers my partner and I had to sit around and watch as the other 19 teams in the final round tried to rope their steers and move into the top 8 places in the average that would earn money and prizes. I was determined to keep my focus as I nervously watched the other cowboys make their runs. Most of the 19 teams ended up missing their steers or getting penalty seconds added to their times so all we had to do to place in the top eight places and get a check was to catch our steer regardless of how long our time was. However, several of the teams had pretty fast times so we would have to make a somewhat quick run if we were to win the top spot. After roping all day my broken hand had been knocked around pretty good and although I was popping a lot of pain pills it was still swelling and throbbing like it was about to break through the cast. Pain or no pain, I knew I could hold it together for one more run.

“Lets go have some fun”

I did not want to put any additional pressure on my partner so I had not told him how important winning the 1st place belt buckle was to me. My partner knew I was fairly new to the sport, he was a seasoned cowboy who had been competing for over 25 years and he could sense how tense I was as we backed our horses into the starting position. Normally, you don't want to break your partners concentration when your about to start your run, however he looked over to me as I was about to nod to the chute help to release the steer into the arena and he said five simple words “let's go have some fun”. This is one of the biggest moments in my life and my partner had just screwed up my concentration by telling me to go “have some fun”. I looked at him sitting tall and calm on his horse and it dawned on me that this experienced cowboy had seen how tense I was and he knew a man doesn't perform his best if he is all wound up. All he was trying to say was relax and have a good time and that it was not going to be the end of the world if we did not win.

I could feel a smile come to my face and a feeling came over me that reminded me of my days on the Beverly High School Tennis Team. That feeling I would get when I was serving for match point against a player from another school and I felt like I owned that player, that no matter what I had to do I was going to win that match point. I had that same kind of confidence as I called for our steer, we owned that steer and we were going to get him roped and take the win. The steer was medium fast and ran straight down the center of the arena. I got a good start and took off after him, I roped him about half way down the arena and my horse and I handled the steer just the way my partner liked them and he quickly roped both feet for the win.

Being the proper stoic cowboy I was, I took the win in stride and just smiled as they presented my partner and me with our buckles and first place checks. Then they took our photograph that would later be published in a publication that catered to the rodeo community. I calmly unsaddled my horses, loaded them in the trailer and started down the road to take my horses back to the stable. As soon as my truck cleared the parking lot of the roping arena I exploded into a cowboy yell as thirty years of desire, pain and frustration boiled out of me. I was so happy and yelling so loud that I'm surprised I didn't bust a lung. I put the Rodeo song on and turned the volume all the way up and

sang and shouted for fifteen minutes before I could calm down enough to call my wife and tell her the good news. To this day I don't remember how much money I had won for my first place finish, but I will never forget what it felt like to hold my first championship belt buckle in my hands.

My wife was excited for me as she knew how hard I had worked to achieve my goal. She had been and continues to be very patient with me and my rodeo life. My wife gets much more excited about going shopping on Rodeo Drive than going to a rodeo so I figured a big part of this win should be hers for supporting me through all my injuries and forgiving me for time spent on the road competing. I tried to look at it through her Rodeo Drive eyes and thought that since I had won something shiny and I was not about to share it by cutting it in half, I would buy her a nice piece of jewelry as a way of saying thank you for her support.

Always finish what you start

It had taken me the better part of thirty years to achieve the goal I had set as a fifteen year old kid. I had finally won a buckle and it was a damn nice buckle that I would wear proudly for a long time to come. Since that time I have gone on to win a drawer full of buckles, some fine looking championship saddles, a horse trailer and many thousands of dollars. In 2004 I jumped up in class and started competing on the national circuit of the United States Team Roping Championship Series. I roped well enough in my rookie year to qualify to rope at the National Finals in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma where I competed against the top cowboys in the country for a piece of the four million dollars in prize money that was awarded.

I continue to compete out of town for one 4-day weekend a month and I also compete at local jackpots a couple of times a month. Keeping my three horses in competitive shape is a very time consuming affair and requires that I practice two or three times a week as my busy schedule allows.

Every goal has its price

Sometimes I regret some of the things I did while seeking to fulfill the goal I had set as a teenager but I have never regretted setting the goal itself. If I had it to do over again I would have abstained from the bronc and bull riding I did in my youth as the injuries incurred while I was young continue to plague me as I grow older. I have already had part of my spine surgically fused together and I'll eventually need additional surgery on the other problem areas of my back. Both my shoulders are so badly damaged from the falls I took in my youth that three years ago my doctor said, while looking at my x-rays and MRI, "I have good news and bad news, The bad news is that both your shoulders need surgery and you'll have to refrain from riding for 6 months after each surgery for a total of a year off. The good news is that your shoulders are so badly damaged that you can't make them any worse by postponing the surgery until you can no longer stand the pain." Thanks to a disciplined exercise program and over the counter pain killers I have managed to continue to keep my body functioning at a level that will allow me to postpone these surgeries for sometime to come.

Life has its share of conflicts

Going back and forth between being a Beverly Hills gentleman and a cowboy has its share of difficulties; one must remember not to speak with a western drawl and bore my Westside friends with rodeo tales and certainly not discuss things like private schools, Three Star Michelin restaurants and Westside real estate prices with most of my fellow cowboys. The average city raised person can't possibly understand the attraction of a western lifestyle and some western people look down their noses at "weekend cowboys" who live a well to do life in the city. The major differences between living in the city or living western is not about one's income; many people that live and work in rural areas have become very wealthy in their own right, it's mostly a difference between western and city cultures and philosophies that can lead to misunderstandings and conflict.

When in doubt, mount up!

I may be tuning 50 years old but don't think for a minute that my life will be any less adventurous. I hope to live through many more chapters of the Life and Times of a Beverly Hills Cowboy and I intend to keep competing in roping events as long as I can still climb on a horse. Charity will continue to be one of my life's passions and I hope I will live to see researchers eliminate or develop lifesaving treatments for most forms of cancer. My first 50 years have been great but my next 50 years are going to be outstanding!