

HIGH-HO COWBOY BOB REED

By Megan Trotter

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COOKEVILLE – “in the early days of the western United States, a masked man and an Indian rode the plains, searching for truth and justice. Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear, when from out of the past come the thundering hoofbeats of the great horse Silver! The Long Ranger rides again – High-ho Silver! Away!”



Cookeville resident Cowboy Bob Reed read those famous words many times over the years while he was a radio announcer. He would later go on to have parts in several old westerns and meet many of the famous cowboys and cowgirls like Bob Nolan, Roy Rodgers and Patsy Montana.

(Pictured: Cowboy Bob Reed shows off some of his cowboy memorabilia that he has collected over the years).

Now at the age of 83, he can watch pretty much any western and pick out the names of each character – heroes, heroines, side kicks, villains and even horses – tell their real names, interesting facts about their careers, explain how all the stunts were done, and even summarize the plots of each episode or movie, acting out his favorite parts.

When he met John Wayne, he surprised the cowboy by calling him by his real name, Marion, and by knowing exactly how John Wayne got his name.

“When he made the movie, ‘The Stage Coach,’ John Ford directed the movie. So John Ford is talking to Marion at the time, and said, ‘We need to make arrangements to get your name on the marquee. What’s your name?’ And John Wayne said, ‘Marion.’ John Ford, said, ‘Did Pappy hear you right? That’s never gonna fly on the doggone marquee,’” laughed Reed.

Instead, Reed says, the cowboy took the first name of the director, John, then took Wayne from the company producing the movie: Wayne Productions. That was how John Wayne got this name.

But Reed doesn’t just know cowboy trivia. In addition to being a Vietnam veteran and a former actor, he’s also ridden in a real rodeo.

“I’m not a ‘reel’ cowboy, I’m a real cowboy,” Reed said with a laugh.

He enjoys telling the tale of how, at the age of 21, he rode a bull for the first and last time. While working at the KHAT radio station in Phoenix, AZ, he got a call from a friend who insisted he come down to a benefit rodeo. Thinking he was simply wanted to do the announcing. Reed agreed and drove his family to the rodeo. When he pulled up, three rather tattered cowboys greeted him at the entrance.

“Two of them chimed in together and said, ‘Good luck!’ I said, ‘Good luck for what?’”

He let his wife and children out to go find a seat and followed instructions to drive on down. When he parked and got out, he saw he was at a series of pens full of bulls. He saw a list posted and went over to read it – it was a list of those riding the bulls that day.

“When I got down to the last number, number 13, I looked up on that thing and it said, ‘Cowboy Bob: Chute 13 on Cyclone,’” he said.

The men helping the cowboys prepare for the rodeo approached and led him to chute 13 where he came face-to-face with Cyclone; a thrashing, snorting bull that had been bred from a water buffalo.

“I bet he weighed 900 pounds. That was the biggest bull I’d ever seen in my life,” Reed said. “I looked down and that bull didn’t have any white in his eyes at all – they were black. And I said, ‘Lord have mercy, what have I gotten myself into?’”

As soon as the gates were opened, Cyclone shot out of the gate, ran into the center of the arena and came to a dead stop.

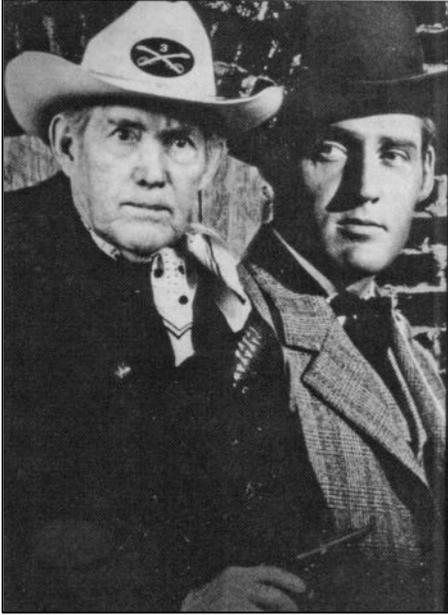
“His front hooves went into the ground, his back hooves came up and I’m looking up and can see his hind feet over my head,” Reed said.

Reed pressed his body against the bull’s back until Cyclone went down on all fours again and held on for dear life as the beast lived up to its name, thrashing and twisting like an angry force of nature. The bull’s jerking threw Reed’s mouth-guard right out of his mouth and his teeth jarred together with every buck. He had a heart-stopping ride, but the bull was finally corralled and Reed was able to get off – a little roughed up, but still in one piece. He still has the pair of blood-flecked gloves that he wore that day.

“I have never done it again,” he said. “I still like to go to rodeos. I like to watch those guys ride, but if they ever think I’d be part of the action again – not in this lifetime or any other lifetime!”

Reed found he preferred the much safer role of being an on-screen cowboy rather than a real bull-rider. He acted in the western series, “Gunsmoke” as a man in a handlebar mustache behind the bar in an apron, he had a few guest appearances on “Bonanza” and even played the key role of the preacher in a little known film, “The Preacher Man.”

Reed's now late cousin, Marshal Reed, was featured in the old westerns as well. He was almost cast as Red Ryder in "The Adventures of Red Ryder," but the part was given to Don "Red" Barry. Marshal was instead asked to take on various background roles on the show, which actually turned out better for the actor – he was given \$5,000 for each appearance.



"He was making more money than Don "Red" Barry," said Reed. "The people who were just in the background, so to speak, they sometimes made more money than the stars."

(Pictured: Cowboy Bob Reed, left, poses with an image of his late cousin, Marshal Reed. Both men played parts in multiple cowboy movies over the years).

These days Reed enjoys looking through his extensive collection of cowboy memorabilia that contains everything from books to VHS tapes and DVDs to posters and signed photos. He loves nothing more than finding someone who shares his love of cowboys or sharing his stories with excited children. And at the end of each story-telling session, he delights in "signing off" the way he did on the radio many years ago: "In the words of my good friend Roy Rogers: Goodbye, good luck, and may the good Lord take a liking to you. That's the cowboy way!"

*Read more about the people of Putnam Co., TN at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>