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After the second shot of morphine, I began to reflect on all the horse wrecks I had been in over the years....or maybe it was as I lay in bed for the next 10 days recovering from a broken scapula, broken ribs, seven sutures where I was kicked in the forehead and four staples that were put in to piece my scalp back together. Whenever it was that I was doing all this introspection, it did come to me that without exception ALL of the wrecks I had endured in 60 something years were my fault. And as I sit to write about it, I will probably leave out some really good ones that have just faded from memory. The vet called to check on me and to hear the story first hand and I told him if he wanted to give clinics on safety I could come along as the poster boy and testify. Seriously, there is, as my old cavalry boss at the National Training Center, BG West, used to say "inherent safety in doing things to standard. Horses should be handled in a certain manner and when you deviate THAT is when you get in harms way. More on this subject later. I can remember the first time in about 1960 that I was on a horse without instruction and went off cross country and the horse ran me under a low limb and swept me off. People get killed that way I am told. God looks after fools and little children so I survived thru many wrecks to "get my seat" and graduate to riding rank horses on Saturday afternoons to entertain grown men. It was a different world.

When I was 14, I remember crawling on a nice quarter horse in the pasture bareback with no bridle and he took off at a dead run to rejoin his twelve friends under a low roofed run in shed where they congregated at the feed bunk. It had a sharp edged tin roof situated just right for decapitation, so I bailed off and got my left arm broke. I hope it is clear to you as you read this what I did wrong. If it isn't evident, then you are either as stupid as I was or possibly are yourself 14 years old at this reading? About three weeks later I was stupid enough to not only be ridingbut roping on a horse that was not rope broke and to rope a 600 lb. steer, while tied hard and fast, get the rope over my right leg and under the horses tail, let the calf wrap me in there and let the horse flip over backwards in a "backfall" on top of me and then step on me four times in the torso with iron shod feet. That was pretty bad as blood came out all the orifices and scared everyone near to death and I spent a week in intensive care at Georgia Baptist Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia. "Momma, am I going to die?" "We hope not son."

So, let's review....riding with a broken arm on an untrained horse, roping on an untrained horse, roping a mature steer, being tied hard and fast with no sheath knife (that is why the Vaqueros of old and the Buckaroos in the Great Basin today carry a sheath knife at the waistband...and it is also why they were dally ropers...dar la vuelta). It is as a friend was fond of saying, "there is no cure for stupid."

Please allow me to also explain some western range language. A "backfall" is man-created by pulling the horse back over onto yourself. A "backthrow" is

when the horse deliberately does it and that is a very dangerous animal. And then there is the most dangerous creature that will “pinwheel” which is a forward summersault at a run. The horse just puts his head between his legs and summersaults. Claude Abercrombie had an Arab stud he rode across America in the “The Great American Horse Race” in 1976 that would do that. Claude said if there had not been all those people watching him coming down Pikes Peak he would have shot him right there.

Some of my wrecks were more humorous. I would ride anything that had four legs. There was Claude Abercrombie’s fast black horse that went into a dead run as soon as your foot was in the stirrup. I managed to stay with him and get aboard. The lesson with that is never assume anything about a horse you have not raised and trained as there is no telling what all has been written into his on board computer. And it is important to have a little flexion in the neck to the inside as you begin to mount so that you can bring the horse under you by direct rein if necessary. You want to be looking at that left eyeball and you want it to be soft and brown ...not white!

Mac Abercrombie www.mrmacsbar.com had me ride the hair off many a horse that he then sold and resold (some several times as pride made folks buy more horse than they could handle...it is hard on grown men to accept that a boy can ride what they can’t). One was a neat little blue grulla quarter type horse that had been owned by a man who plowed with him and rode him to and from the garden. Just gentle and kind. That horse took the “shipping fever” and it somehow affected his brain and Mac got him because he would thereafter buck like crazy. It did not matter what prep you did with that horse. When you got on him you had to make a serious 8 second ride. Max Lambert didn’t believe me and found out the hard way. But when you got through that every morning he was great....just a very handy little horse. I was keeping him down at the house when my Uncle Bill Mosely and my Cousin Ed Mosely were visiting. It was a Saturday morning and I was going to ride uptown to run the scales at the feed mill (at 16 yrs of age). They were sitting on the back steps when I stepped on and I said “ya’ll might want to go up a little further cause this horse is going to blow up”. They moved up three or four steps and I put my leg over and he went up like a top and made three jumps and then he saw the scuppernon arbor which was a trellis about six feet high covered in big vines that were some 60 years old. Tell me horses can’t improvise. On the next leap he went under the arbor and to my credit I was still on him when he came out the other side but I no longer had that nice shirt on. I noticed that my audience was now at the very top of the back steps.

Riding through a storm on a rank horse was common place so I don’t really remember all the times I did it but I do remember when it was a colorful wreck. I had a nice palomino quarter horse that had been on the track. I had him calmed down over the summer but that fall when I pulled an F in chemistry Dad sold the horse and they were pretty rough with him up at the barn and that spring when there was a parade I was supposed to ride him.

They had made him rank again. He blew up down by the cattle chutes and I was making the ride but wound up bull dogging him around the neck and he took me through the fences and I lost another nice shirt and never got to go to the parade.

Fast forward about 35 years and it was my own nice stud, Brio, that did me in. Two ladies wanted to see him for stud service. He had stood up for six months and not been ridden and they wanted to "see him under saddle" but were in a big hurry. I should have told them to take a hike and worked him an hour in the round pen but they irritated me so I just "cowboyed up" and made quite a ride. The trouble was that on one of those big landings my right hand drove into the fork of the saddle hard enough to spiral fracture the small bone in my hand.... It's called a "boxer fracture"....and it could not be set. Can you say general surgery, titanium plate and seven screws?? Those two ladies did not breed to the horse and I never let them know about my injury either. Don't ever let someone rush you with a horse.

I was starting a colt one fall and he was doing so well. I could do anything with him and had even ridden him to the sawmill with all that equipment working up there. But he began to get nervous and one afternoon when the spreader body truck rattled down the driveway and a helicopter flew over, it really got to him. He didn't blow then but waited until 10 minutes later when I was at the mailbox. I opened the box, got the mail out and let him walk off while I zipped a letter open. When I went to turn that letter over, he went into a dead run and bucked at the same time. Turning the page was the proverbial "straw that broke the camel's back". It took me more than a quarter mile to get him turned with one rein and there was the real possibility he was going to fall with me. But I got him turned. There was a trail of mail for 400 yards and I had to start over with the colt. It had all been too much, too soon. Slow down!

It was June, 2006, and I was on a cattle drive in the Sierra Nevadas. Jack Shannon was running his cattle on one of the last grazing leases left in the Golden Trout Wilderness. We moved them 54 miles and I got invited under the condition that I rode and schooled a green horse. She was bad buddy sour and when her mate went a different way at daylight she tried to ditch me. Then when we were on the public highway (which used to be the cattle trail....the state paved the cow trail) a greyhound bus load of tourists came up behind the herd and hit the air brakes and cattle, horse, dogs all scattered. The cattle squirted all over the road and the mare slipped and went down with me still on her and I stayed there and she got up unhurt. Then at noon I tied her to a big Sequoia (all of them are big) and she had a hissy and threw herself to the ground with my saddle on. Later she didn't like being separated from her buddy in a meadow and she decided to take me over a big downed Sequoia and she couldn't clear it and had one set of legs off the ground on one side and her other set of legs suspended on the other. I got off on the log and encouraged her to fall off it. She made a nice horse after seven days of hard riding and I was real proud of her.

I should title this one ""Two Blonds"". The outcome is in the first paragraph of this tale of woe so you know how it ends. It was 2004, I think....would have to look at the medical bills. But I had sold a nice stud colt, Motilla, I raised and part of the deal was I would start him (that is how they say "break" nowadays). He had five rides on him and he was real handy and quite a horse. Two nice ladies were coming to ride with me both were good riders. I got them up on two of my nice mares and was in a hurry to catch something and go ride the trails. Standing there handy was that colt who had not seen a mare since he was a weanling. I should have gone down in the pasture and gotten a mare but he was standing right there. What I should have done was take him to the round pen and work him for 20 minutes....but oh, no! I saddled up and stepped on and rode out of the dark of the barn into the daylight and the presence of two mares! Later one of the ladies said she did not know a horse could buck that high. He blew up like plastic explosive, slammed my testicles three licks on the horn and I got unseated, body slammed and kicked twice in the head. I got up on adrenaline and went down like a sack of rocks. They hauled me to the emergency room laying down in the back seat, unfortunately, on the side that was broken. Every speed bump was agony. Never try to ride a green horse without working him in a round pen and getting him settled first.

So, on balance, I would say that all those memorable wrecks were hands down my fault. And let me report that I broke another stud colt at age 62 for a friend in Vermont but did so mindful of all the occasions when I have done stupid things. I even wore a helmet. My friend Al Grandchamp broke his last colt at age 82. I'm not sure I will make it that far but would sure like to try.

At 64, I had two wrecks in one afternoon. I was in Valle Vidal above Cimmaron, New Mexico and had met a rancher with the grazing concession for the valley and he invited me up to where they were working cattle. I rode my nice mare and ponied a colt. I started through a narrow people gate. When you do that you want the lead rope to be completely free of the horse you are riding so you can just drop it if you get in a jam. I had taken half a dally and the colt came forward, got slack and the rope got up under my right leg. My mare went through, the colt set back and I was propelled up onto the neck of the horse I was riding and the two horses did their best to sever my leg by strangulation. A good hand got behind the colt and drove him forward and I got my horse to back up against the fence and was able to get back in the saddle and get free. Now I was sore but determined to see the valley. Two hours later my mare went down in a prairie dog hole and fell on my left leg pinning me. When she lurched up, I was thrown forward, my foot stayed in the stirrup and the shank of my spur hung in the stirrup leather. She regained her feet and I was set up just right to be drug face down. She is a gentle horse or I would not be able to report on what happened. In August 2012, at 65, I still had not learned very much as I got on a horse I did not know and had not done the ground work on (new

rule is if I don't train it, I don't get on it). It belonged to Jimmy Flores, well in his 80s. I was visiting Jimmy at his home in Paris, CA. Jimmy is in the National Reined Cow Horse Hall of Fame. I had bought a hackamore from him and used him to help other folks get a hackamore set up. I was out on the west coast for the Vaquero Heritage days and decided to drive down to Perris and visit. It was a QH filly. Jimmy said everybody on the place was afraid to get on her (that should have told me something). To make this mercifully short, when I finally stepped aboard she froze her feet and when I gave her slack to try to get her to break step one way or the other and move, she went straight up like a top and by the second lick, I was soaring above the earth and landed on my back side right on my kidney on top of a rock. A lady sitting there said the whole wreck looked like something from one of Ernie Morris's drawings. I spent the next two days sleeping on a bag of ice and then made a trans-continental flight in the middle seat where I hollered periodically until the guy on the aisle switched seats with me. Jimmy said "you cinched her up too tight."

Don't ever assume very much. It all happens fast when it happens.

The last line above was prophetic as I wrote it more than two years before I now write what follows.

Regrettably, I failed to show respect to my own nice Brio son, Vaquero. He had his head down in a corner feeder. I did not get his attention but reached and got his left front foot. (The fast farm dog had been running in his stall and torturing him and running out). He couldn't select "flight" as he was in a corner....so, he chose "fight" and whirled and kicked my left leg out from under me taking out the knee like a chicken bone. Then he backed out of the stall ...like John Wayne in a movie, outnumbered and unwilling to turn his back on the heavily armed bad guys. Emergency room, six weeks on crutches waiting for surgery, a new Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL) from a cadaver, months more of crutches and physical therapy, then a torn lateral and medial meniscus (by a young physical therapist who was too aggressive)... and back to surgery. The leg contracted and despite high end physical therapy, I became a contracted cripple. A year later, in this three year journey, I had a total knee replacement (11-8-19) and ahead lies a tough rehab of a contracted leg. As with most horse wrecks, it wasn't the fault of el caballo.

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