



Up Front

Harry's call.

By C.J. Hadley

Buffalo Bill. The name conjures up images of pale buckskins, a white goatee, and flash. It was Buffalo Bill who brought me an unforgettable gift. It was Buffalo Bill who nurtured the son of a Welsh coal miner, plucked him off a dirt street in Wyoming, and took him to New York City to become a star in his Wild West Show.

Harry Webb wasn't hired because of his good looks. He was hired because of his talent. The story starts when Harry and his friend Gaspape arrived in Cody horseback for a bath and a drink. Harry's bronc got tied up in some loose barbed wire and took to bucking—and then bucked right through the window of Campbell's Drug Store. When the bronc and Harry came out, Harry got tossed in the dirt and Buffalo Bill strode up and asked the bleeding cowboy to "Come to New York and ride in my show."

Harry used to be a mucker and driller for his miner dad in Colorado. He had worked since his early teens and what kept him going was the dream of becoming a cowboy. In 1909, Buffalo Bill figured he was a good one.

I was introduced to Harry Webb by Bud (Wayne) Hage. What a brain Bud had! And what a fighter! His close-to-20-year lawsuit against the federal government for the taking of his private property ended up in a multi-million-dollar award against the Forest Service. For enjoyment, Bud liked to write. He liked the history of the Great Basin and his family—teamsters, prospectors, ranchers—was part of that history.

In 1978, I was publishing Nevada Magazine and Bud offered a story called "Pine Mountain Storyteller." It was about his friend Harry Webb, who was a trapper, horse trainer, cowboy and Nevada rancher. The story was terrific and I said, "I'd like to have met that old cowboy." Bud lifted my office phone and dialed a number in Los Angeles. "Harry," he said, "I want you to meet a good friend..."

Lord have mercy! I'd thought the guy, born in 1887, was long dead, but what I heard at the end of the line was a joyous, vigorous, charming bronc buster. Then Harry

invited me to come visit.

I like old men, particularly old men who ride horses. Their wisdom and calm inspires. They don't mess around with politically correct bullcrap. What you see is what you get. What you hear is what they think. What they show is how they feel.

I rode a motorcycle to L.A. to meet Harry and his wife Jane in Tujunga. "Drive anything, ride anything, even a grizzly," he said that first day, "except that bloody, bloomin' motorcycle!"

I learned that Harry had written more than a hundred short stories of his life in the West. He had sold many to magazines including *Westerner*, *Old Trails* and *True West*. He showed me dozens of clips. Each experience dished up another amazing true story, and Jane typed them for him.

Shortly after I met the Webbs, Jane had a stroke, and Harry continued writing his stories on yellow paper in a scratchy hand. I included many of them in Nevada Magazine. After Jane died, Harry came to my house for Christmas. At 94, he rode my 32-year-old mustang Sweetpea wearing a stingy-brimmed silverbelly Stetson. I was riding a big sorrel named Slick and wearing a cheap black Resistol. "You can't wear a black hat," Harry said. "Those are worn by bad guys!"

In 1983, Harry was honored "for a lifetime's contribution to the western heritage" by the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City. Also in 1983, he was asked to appear in Cody for a celebration of the 100th anniversary of Buffalo Bill's first show. Harry was the last surviving bronc rider, from the show of 1910, and Ben Marrowbone was the last surviving Indian, from the show of 1911. When those old men walked with canes into the arena, 20,000 people looked for something to wipe away tears.

In 1981, Harry asked me to help get his stories published in a book. It's taken me 20 years, and you're the first to know about it.

Harry died in 1984 at age 96 but he lives on in "Call of the Cow Country." I used the title of a story he wrote about leaving Colorado and mining for the cowboy world of Wyoming in 1902, one week past his 15th birthday. He won "The Gold Spur for Western Literature" for that piece in 1972, and there are plenty more just as brilliant.

Harry would like his book and I know you'll like his stories (p. 5). This book can be your unforgettable gift, too, so I hope you'll buy a few. "Call of the Cow Country" is sheer delight. It's raw and real. And it's all Harry.

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