



Up Front

A paragon of chivalry.

By C.J. Hadley

Paragon Foundation's G.B. Oliver invited me to Alamogordo, N.M., last fall to present their Paladin Award to my friend and hero J. Zane Walley. I couldn't say no. The magnificent silver chess piece by New Mexico artists (sculptor Wes Smith and cabinet-maker Joe Switzer) has an inscription that reads: "The Paladin: A paragon of chivalry, a hero of sterling character and courage, a strong supporter or defender of a cause, one who rights wrongs and defends the weak and oppressed, the white knight."

Paragon honored me with their first Paladin Award in 2004. It was a treat to pass another superb work of art and Paragon's \$10,000 check to someone more deserving.

Jay, a Vietnam veteran, former marine, ex-private eye, and handsome, articulate son of the soil from Alabama suffered a terrible stroke late in 2003. It was after 11 years of tough, yeoman's work for ranchers on agricultural issues. He started "Writing for the Brand," *RANGE* magazine, in 1996 and for Paragon in 1998.

Here's an excerpt from Jay's "The Wasting of Catron County," *RANGE*, Summer 2000:

Catron County Commissioner Auggie Shellhorn is a big man, rugged, callused and tough from years of ranching high country and fighting forest fires with "hot shot" teams. He faces a task equal to his size and spunk in rescuing his economically ravaged New Mexico county.

Auggie stops his aging pickup truck on a slight rise overlooking a large abandoned and rusting sawmill, the ruins of the industry that was the very lifeblood of his community. He sighs heavily. "When the mill was running, everyone who wanted to work had a job. People could afford to raise their families here and our county could afford to provide a decent education for the children. But that is all gone—gone thanks to the spotted owl and the Endangered Species Act."

Shellhorn is silent for a few moments then perks up. "Someday, and we pray it is soon, America is going to need our timber again and so the county bought the mill. It's our investment in the future. We gotta believe in it. ..."

From "Just a Good Old Boy," Summer '99:

Actor Wilford Brimley sits in the hot New Mexico sun on a stocky cow pony. He is shaking out a worn lariat and waiting his turn at the Lincoln County Cowboy Symposium Celebrity Team Roping contest. A fan of equal girth and age hesitantly approaches him and says, "Mr. Brimley, I'd like to tell you, for the last few years folks have been mistaking me fer you."

Wilford squints down at the fellow, pushes his hat back on his familiar face and chuckles, "Why I would have cuffed 'em. I wouldn't wish this face on nobody."

And from "They're Still Stealing Our Land," Fall 1998.

Alabama farmers were dirt poor in the late 1920s, but my grandpa, Wad Walley, had a few acres of rich bottomland and scrub mountainside alongside the mighty Tennessee River. With a couple of old mules and a brood of hardworking sons he managed to scratch out a fair living by raising corn, sugar cane and shipping a few cows up the river to auction at Chattanooga by sternwheeler riverboat. Nothing fancy, just enough to keep the family fed and buy everyone a set of clothes and a pair of brogans each year.

They were getting by, that is until agents from the federal Tennessee Valley Authority

knocked on the door and told Grandpa that his land had been condemned because of the new lake they were building...

It is said that a Paladin possesses "the spirit of purpose, the dedication of labor, the oath of loyalty, the word of honor, the rock of friendship, the shield of honesty, and the sword of right." Jay Walley is the epitome of Paladin.

Even though Jay understands every word we say, his gorgeous voice is mostly silent. Paragon Foundation is trying to get a hyper-varick machine to help Jay get his voice back because it's obvious he is raring to go. He can read e-mails, understands the issues, but he's unable to fight because he cannot respond—at least for the moment. And we are patient.

Jay has already shocked his doctors by throwing away his walking cane. Right now he's probably planting his vegetable garden and some pretty flowers for his beautiful and attentive wife Sara. He will be stalked by his constant companion, a chihuahua named Sewsy that can usually be found sitting in his hand.

Suffering a stroke makes things pretty lonely so send Jay an e-mail to frc@pvtnetworks.net or a note c/o RCF, P.O.Box 1595, Carson City, NV 89702. Our hero will be pleased. ■



Jay Walley, "The White Knight," and *RANGE* editor C.J. Hadley, Sept. 2005.

