

**Y**ou want to be a cowboy, huh? Well, that's not as easy as you might think. If you grew up in town and not on a ranch I advise you not to try and be one. You should just stay with being a wannabe and I'm going to tell you why.

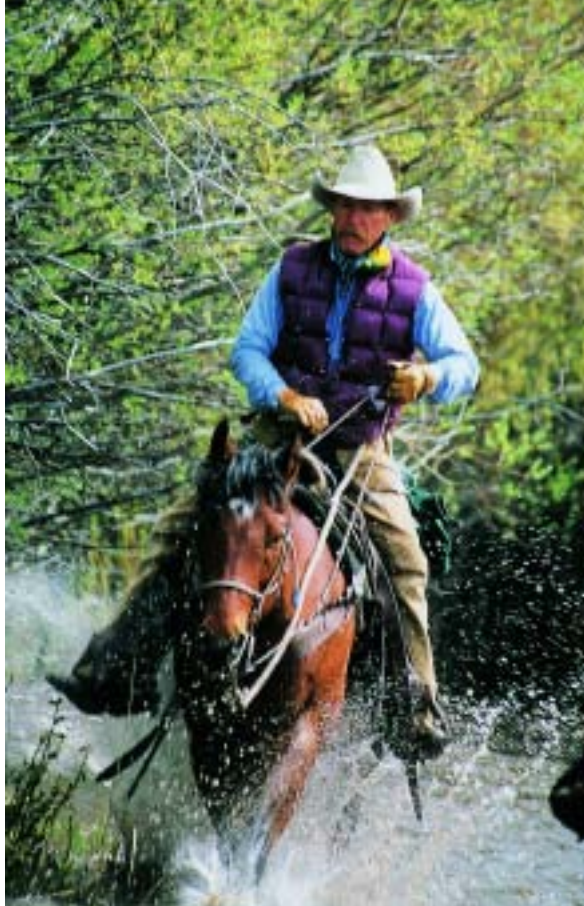
Actually, if you want to be called something, you should be an accountant or a lawyer or doctor or something like that. You don't even have to be good at any of that. You just have to go to school and get a diploma and whatever that diploma says, well, that's what you are. Heck, if you just want a title you can go rob a bank and I promise you will be called thief forever. Or tell a lie and guess what? Sure enough, you're a liar. But go ahead and tell someone you're a cowboy and unless you were born on a ranch they're just going to snicker. And I'm telling you the truth.

I know because I wasn't born on a ranch, but I lived on the edge of town about 150 yards from a ranch and I hung out at a dairy farm from the time I was about five years old till I got to high school. I rode horses, drove horse-pulled hay wagons and did all manner of ranch work that a grammar school boy could do, and still no one ever called me a cowboy.

In high school, I worked for the old man who was a foreman on a big ranch. I built fence, fed cows, irrigated huge fields, branded and cut and doctored cows, and got on a horse now and then. But yeah, you're right; no cowboy title.

Why, my best friend in high school, Gene Thacker, won the first-ever high school rodeo. He was the bareback bronc champ and he and I rode together all the time. I chased mustangs with him and his dad (well, actually, I opened and closed gates for them and pulled the horse trailer around, but I was there and somebody had to do it), and still...yeah...you know what.

I raised two daughters and kept them horseback till they quit me for boys, and I



## Wannabe

*Even after working for decades with horses, dogs and cows, I'm still just "the guy from town." By Terry Sullivan*



*ABOVE: Sullivan and best buddy Dub, a very fine border collie. "Dub was perfect working cattle and amazing pointing pheasants in Kansas," Sullivan says. Dub's famous in the hunters'-favorite Pinky's Bar in Manketo, Kan., "because he was better than the bird dogs." After Dub's celebrity, Sullivan was figured as "the kid from town" even in Kansas. TOP OF PAGE: Sullivan and Gibson go after a wayward cow that's hiding in the willows on the Cottonwood Ranch in northeastern Nevada.*

don't know that I ever heard them utter the word cowboy to me.

So then I thought, "Well, maybe I just don't look like one." So I bought boots from John Weinkauff, the finest boot maker in America; used an Eddie Brooks saddle most cowboys would give five years' wages for; rode

a horse trained by Tom Marvel, one of the greatest horsemen around; and guided that steed with an engraved silver bit by Mark Dahl and world-class handmade rawhide reins by Nevada buckaroo Doug Groves.

I've been working the same ranch for 19 years now and I'm horseback nearly every day I'm there, but I still hear them say, "Oh, he's the guy from town."

I even learned two languages—proper English and cowboy talk. Why, just the other day I corrected a city slicker who asked me the name of a certain creek. I said, "Ma'am, that's not a creek, that's a crick. A creek is what a rockin' chair does. It creaks. A crick is what you step across or drink from. Oh...and don't ever refer to a crick in the West as a brook. Brooks don't exist in the West. I think those dime novel writers call cricks 'brooks' because it sounds more romantic.

Maybe they think it's more romantic to get kissed next to a brook than a crick."

Anyway, several old cowboys listened to me make that correction but not one of them said I spoke pretty good cowboy talk.

Listen, I know kids born on ranches who get called cowboy all the time simply because they were born on ranches. Heck, I've got more time getting on and off horses than some of these guys got riding them but, for whatever reason, they're cowboys and I'm still the guy from town.

So you want the moral of this story? I don't really have one. I'm just telling you that if you want to be a cowboy you better be born on a ranch. And if you're not, I guess you just go on blaming your parents for the rest of your life because you are a town kid.

Hey, get a life. Not everybody can be a cowboy. n

*Terry Sullivan was born and raised in Lovelock, Nev. He worked for several governors as General Services Director to earn enough money to keep on cowboying. He has worked on the Cottonwood Ranch in northeastern Nevada for 19 years, doing what he likes best.*