

CONFESSIONS OF RED MEAT SURVIVORS

Some of ranching's old-timers admit to ignoring the problems of cholesterol and other unnamed and often unsubstantiated handicaps. They believe that red meat is good, which is proven here, simply by age and attitude.

NEW MEXICO

Wayne & Annie Withers, 94 & 89

Together forever.

It was 1933 and Wayne Withers had just ridden nine miles from the ranch to get to a country dance in Bingham, N.M. It was there he met a pretty redhead, Annie Glover, and on May 19, 1934, she became his bride.

Annie, one of 12 children, came from a farming and dairy family that had moved to New Mexico from West Texas.

"They were timid nesters," laughs Wayne.

"My brother and I would get up early and milk 20 cows by hand, clean up the barn and be to school on time," Annie recalls. "I have milked cows and driven a team since I was nine."

Wayne was raised in what he calls a "sand pile" in southeast New Mexico. "Dad sold that sandy ranch just before they started finding oil and bought a pile of rocks in the Oscuro Mountains in 1923, but the government took even that away."

In that one sentence, Wayne

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summarizes a lifetime of hard living. He and his two brothers were left to tend the 700 head of cattle while their father looked for better country to buy a ranch.

When they moved to the Oscuro Mountains, the Withers crew built dirt tanks to catch runoff for the cattle to drink. They used fresnos hooked to a team of horses.

"It took a lot of time," recalls Wayne. They stocked the ranch with cattle they bought for eight dollars a head and didn't sell any until 1937 because of the Depression. The five- to six-year-old maverick steers weighing 800 to 1,600 pounds sold for six cents a pound.

Wayne and his brother Pat broke and rode horses. They also earned a few extra dollars by rodeoing. "Pat rode bucking horses, and I rode bulls so we weren't competing against each other."

Annie has her own rodeo memories. Once, dressed in a pair of borrowed boots and bib overalls, she entered the bull riding on a dare and made it to the whistle.

After three years on the Oscuro homestead, Wayne and Annie had a daughter, Dorothy Ann. With Wayne away from home following the cattle, Annie was left with the baby to tend, all the chores and

drilled two wells, cleaned the place back up, and then they ran us off again. We were a little more contrary this time. It took them three years to get us off." The Withers ranch became part of what is known today as the White Sands Missile Range, home to the testing of the atomic bomb.

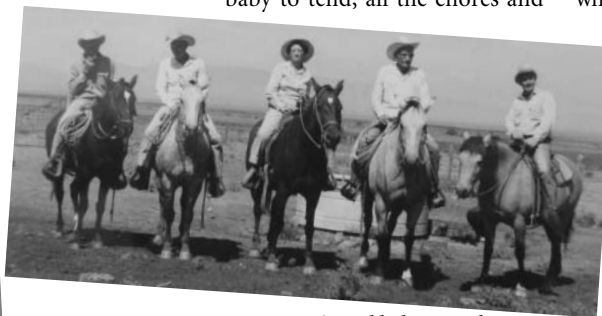
For 20 years they fought to get their land back, but a federal mandate called the land "condemned to lease." By 1984 the missile range had expanded its boundaries and engulfed a second ranch they had purchased. The Withers had sacrificed two ranches and a lifetime of work to the government.

"There wasn't enough left to buy another place, so we just moved to town," Annie says.

This year the Withers will mark their 72nd wedding anniversary. Wayne teases Annie throughout the conversation: "I was only seven when she married me. She took me to raise."

Wayne is a great storyteller. If Annie is nodding, it's a true story. If she shakes her head no, it is not—but her blue eyes, focused on her husband, continue to twinkle. Their love for each other is obviously as solid as the life they have led.—Julie Carter

PHOTOS COURTESY WITHERS FAMILY



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Wayne, Annie and baby Dorothy Ann on the homestead in the Oscuro Mountains. ▶ The cowboy crew on the Withers ranch (L to R) Pat, Wayne, Annie, Jess Withers and an unidentified helper. ▶ Wayne and Annie dancing at their 60th anniversary celebration.



only one horse. Later two more daughters, Margaret and Waynette, were born.

"Those girls were the best cowboys in the country," says Wayne proudly. "I rarely had to hire any help as long as those girls were around."

In 1942 the Withers returned from a trip to find the U.S. government had served notice to vacate the ranch. They were given 30 days to move because the area was to be used to test bombs for World War II. "We had a good contract," says Wayne. "They appraised all the improvements and told us we'd get it all back. In 1950 they turned it back to us. We