

Growing Up Cowboy

Gene Peach spent seven years creating "Making a Hand." As a commercial photographer, his work on tourism projects sometimes called for rodeo photos. When he saw a newspaper notice for a rodeo in a nearby small town, he went to look.

"A big pickup truck rolled in," Peach says. "And a lot of little cowboy kids piled out. It reminded me that these kids were still growing up on ranches, relating to an immediate world of meaningful work and daily care for animals."

With his own agricultural roots going back many generations, Peach feels keenly the rural-urban divide, which he labels "a modern tragedy."

"No one has a farmer grandfather anymore. People are disassociated with agriculture."

Peach set out to tell the story of these New Mexico ranch kids through his photography.

"Music is the greatest communicator," he says, "but photography is second. I love to see how people respond to photos. I wanted to tell the world about these amazing ranch children and their deep heritage and connection with the land. I wanted to express the continuity of their culture."

As he got to know the ranch families over the years, Peach says he was affected by what he saw in the children: strength of character, focus, self-reliance, a sense of responsibility, even old-fashioned good manners.

"It's a vital, timeless story I was born to tell," Peach says. "I hope my photos can help to heal the gap between town and country." ■



Bryce Howe, 10, Howe Ranch, Lea County. Bryce, a fifth-generation New Mexico cowboy, climbs onto his horse, Poco. Bryce and his older brother, Hadley, have been riding with their father on daily ranch rounds since they could sit in a saddle. The historic Chisum and Goodnight-Loving cattle trails crossed Lea County in the 1800s.



ABOVE: Arlita Long, 16, completes the pole-bending event at the Smith Lake Chapter Rodeo. Arlita is a Navajo cowgirl from Yah-Tah-Hey, N.M.

LEFT: Navajo cowboy Cody Bitsie, 13, trains his new horse, Pinto, at his home near Tohatchi, N.M.

BELOW: Anna Marie Gallegos, 14, grooms her horse, Dixie, in San Miguel County.





Stacey Taul, 16, and Bonnie Gore, 15, Bernalillo County. The only teenage girl bull riders on the central New Mexico rodeo circuits, Stacey and Bonnie have competed in rodeo events since they were young and began riding bulls for excitement and a great way to meet boys. Stacey's family came to New Mexico from Colorado. Her father became a saddle bronc and bull rider when he was in the U.S. Marine Corps in California. Bonnie is a fourth-generation New Mexican. Her younger brother, Brooks, is also a bull rider. Flashy chaps, no two pair alike, have been popular in rodeo since the 1960s.



ABOVE: Clay Geronimo, 13, Chiricahua Apache, Mescalero Apache Reservation, Otero County. Clay is a great-great-grandson of the Chiricahua Apache war leader Geronimo, the last American Indian leader to wage war against the United States. Clay's family members help work the tribe's cattle herd and have been rodeo cowboys for several generations.

LEFT: Steer rider Dexter Huber, 10, observes the opening prayer at a 4-H rodeo. Rodeos begin with grand entry, Pledge of Allegiance, and opening prayer ceremonies. Dexter began competing in rodeos at age 4 and has ridden steers since age 8. He rides in about 40 rodeos in a season.

BELOW: Bob, 5, and Garrett Muncy, 8, Scott Ranch, Socorro County. Tired at the end of a long day, Bob and Garrett live on an isolated ranch 30 miles from the nearest town. Their family runs 400 mother cows on 73,000 acres of rugged ranch land. They are descended from Oklahoma cowboys who homesteaded near the first atomic bombsite in Socorro, N.M. On the morning of the test in 1945, their grandparents reported seeing two sunrises.



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