

Western Christmas: 'The Kid and the Cowboys'

Every Christmas when I open the boxes of ornaments, decorations, pine cones, red ribbon — and all the other things that I get reacquainted with every year — I find that white envelope that says “Mrs. Garber” on the front of it.

It always brings back a smile, for when the envelope was given to me I was only 25, and no one had ever called me Mrs. Garber before. Except for Charley Hendren, that is.

Many of you probably still remember Charley. To me, he was a true gentleman and a cowboy poet first and foremost. He was also Sheridan's chief of police for a while, and he was definitely also a man of God.

It was only my second Christmas in Wyoming, and I had gone to one of his cowboy poetry readings. Not being that well acquainted with the essence of cowboy culture, the following poem written by Charley touched me deeply.

It expresses a perfect blend of who Charley was, of Western tradition, and of a biblical story that obviously resonates with many this time of year.

I realize it may not resonate with everyone, but Charley even leaves the door open to ponder this great story in whichever way you wish to. I hope you enjoy.

The Kid and the Cowboys

They rode into town on a used-up old mare;

all tired and wore out from tryin' to make it to there.

It was a hard trail for sure with Joe's wife nearly due,

but the notice said “come,” so 'twas their duty to do.

They had trailed into town to be counted among

the settlers around, for a tally to run. Joe thought it was crazy; his cows shore didn't care

if the ranchers all left and there was nobody there.

It was comin' on sunset when they turned in at the rail,

with the mare gone near lame and draggin' her tail.

Folks was millin' on sidewalks and fillin' the street, and standin' around like new gathered beef.

Mary said, “Joe, where will we stay?

It appears we're the last ones to get here today.

I'm sure the hotel has filled every room,

and Mrs. Thornton's place is prob'ly full, too.”

“Don't worry now, hon,” Joe quickly replied,

with more hope in his voice than his feelin's inside.

“We'll find us a spot; why, you're comin' due.

Someone will help out and give us a room.”

Well they scouted the place one end to the other,

but there just weren't no bed for an expectant mother.

These census doin's had filled up the town,

and there wasn't no rooms or bunks to be found.

Finally, when Joe was about out of try

he made out a light from a shanty nearby.

The sign on the place said, “Beds for a Quarter,”

so he knocked on the door to make'em an offer.

The feller that answered weren't much no account;

hadn't shaved in a week and smelled plenty stout,

but he looked past old Joe to his woman and said,

“Shore sorry, ma'am, but I'm fresh out of beds.”

They started to leave when the feller said, “Say,

I shore hate to see you folks get



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turned away.

I got me this stall 'round back of the place;

it ain't much, I'll admit, but you're welcome to stay

and get some rest. There's blankets and hay

to make you a bed for the missus

to lay.

I won't charge you nothin' with the lady and all.

You folks shore look tuckered, so put up in the stall.”

Joe thanked him kindly and they headed out back,

put up the mare, forked hay from the stack,

and set up a pallet for Mary to rest there in that stall with the North Star overhead.

It was there in that stall that Mary give birth

to a fine little colt of a kid — 'twas their first.

Now, nobody knew how the word got around

but soon there was cowboys gatherin' around,

come to pay their respects to the mom and the boy,

and noddin' to Joe 'fore they drifted away.

With hats held in hands and mighty few words,

they pondered this miracle of life and new birth.

They left gifts in the stall, things mighty precious to them;

an old letter from home, a silk kerchief, an old pen.

A few double eagles found their way to the stack

as they looked on the kid in that stall in the back.

Not one puncher knew why he gave what he did;

offerin' gifts to this snip of a kid.

But that kid, he made out to be sorta special,

like he was fresh sent from heaven and the great high celestial.

It was downright uncanny, that night in the stall,

the kid and the cowboys and the presents and all.

I've heard it be said that none of it's true,

that it's just a windy, a yarn, a story to do.

But on cold winter nights 'round the stove at their bunks,

there's punchers who still tell about those events.

It's been passed down through time from one hand to another,

from the calvin' in spring to the latest fall gather,

that that kid held the look of pure hope in his eyes,

a look that promised of rest by and by.

That the kid on the hay, with his shy little grin

seemed to circle each cowboy and gather him in.

Well, all of that happened when the West was still new,

when the range was still free and the mountains were, too.

But it ain't been forgotten and still is recalled;

the kid and the cowboys that night in the stall.

© Charley Hendren, December 1993

Finally, let me just briefly convey a thank-you from everyone at the Senior Center for those of you in our community who contribute to our work with your time, talents and financial gifts. Happy Holidays.

Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.

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