

62. BARN DANCES

The Dance – June 24, 1983: As she fine-tuned her pitch, Siri said she'd take care of all the details – I wouldn't have to worry about a thing.¹ She knew a band and everything...

The ranch hands we'd inherited from Clarence (Allen and Dale – Chapter 22) lived at what is now called the *Waterfall Ranch*, where there was a nice big barn. Siri had her heart set on a barn dance.

My sister, Becky, was going to be married at the ranch on a Saturday in June, so why not have a dance the night before? Well of course, Siri had her way,² and she did handle everything. The band that night, and for years to come, was the *Bluegrass Patriots*.

The Wedding – June 25, 1983: When it comes to their own weddings, professional wedding gals can go way over the top. My sister was no exception. Everything was planned down to a gnat's eyebrow. Prominent among numerous wacko details was the buggy. Since the turn of the century, three generations of the groom's forefathers had 'sparked' in the buggy. The groom's father had the buggy refitted³ by Amish wagonwrights and hauled it all the way from Pennsylvania for Dave and Becky's wedding.

All dressed up in tuxedo, top hat and spats (bearing an uncanny resemblance to *Jiminy Cricket*), I was to be the buggy driver, designated to deliver the bride to the wedding party. An experienced pony (by the name of *Tipsy Witch*) was arranged to pull the buggy. All I had to do was provide minor direction via the reins and say "Hup!" and "Whoa!"

The first difficulty presented itself late Friday afternoon: *Tipsy Witch* was experienced – on pavement – in parades and such, but when hauled to the ranch and presented with a dirt road, she laid her ears back and went on strike, not to be budged by her owner, who had to load up *Tipsy Witch* and head back to pavement. What to do about this problem was still unresolved the evening of the dance.

"No'nt ya worry, Becky!" reassured a glassy eyed Dale, gallantly – apparently, he had a pony that was broke to harness over at the Ferree barn...Becky and I grasped the straw.

Substantially debilitated upon retiring (earlier that morning), mid-morning Saturday found Dale in the Ferree hay meadow with his pony harnessed to the buggy. Perhaps a bit under the weather from the previous evening's excess, Dale was not flushed and dripping sweat as a guy might be in the sticky heat of the waist-deep bromegrass, but rather he was pale as a sheet and trembling slightly.

Dale's pony had only ever pulled a hillbilly sleigh.⁴ The big black buggy behind him was just too much. Blinders didn't help either. The pony would not start without Dale tugging at the headstall and breaking into a trot alongside. Dale kept at it into the afternoon, but the horse didn't get any smarter.

While Dale takes a well-earned breather, let's check the stage: The wedding was to be set against the evening light falling on the majestic cottonwood grove on the Ferree Place (Barlow tree claim – Chapter 24). The emerging debate about whether to cut the horse and buggy scene was interrupted when a passing thunderstorm dumped about an inch of rain, rendering the cottonwood grove more or less inaccessible for automobiles.

We frantically regrouped to switch the wedding location to our orchard, move the tent and port-a-potties through the mud and redirect traffic.

At the last minute, Dale, restored by the shower, was pretty sure once he got the pony started, it might keep going. Bubbling over with misgivings, Becky and I climbed up, Dale handed me the reins, tugged on the headstall, trotted alongside for a hundred yards or so, let go and the pony kept going. We had about a half mile to go. It involved a winding, alternately muddy and rocky ranch road, crossing the top of a dam, with a bumpy left turn onto the County Road to cross Stonewall Creek, followed by a sharp right

turn into our lane, across the ditch and into our orchard filled with an expectant, unruly throng with wet feet.

Doomed to certain failure – the pony was bound to stop for something – off we went...without a hitch. Everybody was impressed with the dramatic entrance. My muddy spats weren't even noticed...neither, apparently, was the Stonewall Ditch running along the edge of our orchard. As the evening passed, several departing revelers drove, backed or otherwise got into the ditch. I spent a good part of the evening hooking chains to cars to pull them out with the tractor. I do not know if the rental place objected to the abject condition of my tuxedo, top hat or spats upon their return. If so, the happy couple did not say.

The Tradition: Siri's suggestion went on to become a yearly event, taken up after our time by the Seidel family in connection with their spring branding. My most vivid memory from those dances is of Richard Borgmann (1949-2018)⁵ with his jeans tucked into his buckaroo boots, weaving around the dance floor (more gracefully than you might have thought) with a bottle of tequila tucked under his arm – the level descending steadily with each passing hour.

Memorial for George Seidel: The untimely death of George Seidel (1943-2021 – Chapter 55)⁶ occasioned the recent memorial, held at the Waterfall Ranch with a potluck set up in the barn, triggered my memories for this chapter.

Thanks to Becky Judson and Dave Ball for their assistance with this chapter.

¹ "Except money" I grumbled.

² Siri could sell sand to a Saudi.

³ Successive generational 'sparking' takes a toll.

⁴ An old car hood, pulled upside down through the snow.

⁵ (more about Richard later)

⁶ (more about George later)



The Buggy

Query: Does anyone out there have pictures of a 'Waterfall' barn dance?