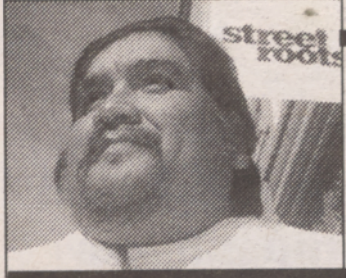


The Brahma Bull

BY LEO RHODES
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST



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THE WANDERER

Leo Rhodes

I was adopted at a young age, yet I still remember my adopted parents telling me they were my new parents. Then asking if it was OK, I answered, “yes.” They were pleased; next they told me I could change my name if I wanted to. They gave me some examples of other names I might

be interested in. When they finished I told them I didn’t want to change my name. They kept at it. This time I didn’t wait until they stopped. I interrupted them and sternly said, “No my name is Leo and that’s what it’s going to be.” My parents looked at me shocked, and then started laughing a little. Then my mom said, “OK, what about your middle name, Francis.” I quickly replied, “I wanted to change it.” Both parents looked at me deeply. My mom asked, “Why?” I said, “Francis is a girl’s name and I don’t want a girl’s name.” With a concerned look on her face my mom calmly explained that Francis was my grandfather’s name, and he was a cowboy and rodeo clown: a real tough guy.

My mom tried a few more times to change my mind, but I stuck to my guns and she finally gave in. “OK what do you want to change your name to?” she asked me. Without skipping a beat I replied, “Matthew.” Both parents started to think about it. My mom started mumbling, “Leo Matthew Rhodes.” She said it a few times then looked at my dad. “What do you think?” she asked him. He thought about it a little and said, “Sounds OK. Leo Matthew Rhodes. Yeah, sure.”

My mom turned to face me with a puzzled look, she asked, “Why Matthew?” I smiled at her then said, “That’s my best friend’s name. Matthew.” Of course, we had to tell Matthew’s parents. His mom screamed with delight then came to me and gave me a big hug and kissed me on the cheek. When she told Matthew, he looked very uncomfortable; he didn’t know what to do or say. It was kind of awkward. I mean, we were just kids; we were in preschool or kindergarten.

Growing up was very hard. Knowing I was adopted, it was like I was stuck between two worlds. So I told myself one day I would seek out my biological family and spend time with them. I knew that would answer some of my questions. Eventually, I found my father and grandfather, living together,

and I spent one summer with them.

When I moved in, the first thing I noticed in my father’s house was a big beautiful glass Brahma bull statue. I soon got two jobs and started meeting my biological family. Meeting them and my father answered a lot of my questions, even ones I hadn’t thought of before. During dinner and after, the three of us (grandfather, father, and me) would talk about my life. Sometimes my father would talk about family history. One night he started talking about how he and my grandfather were cowboys.

He talked about taking care of the cattle and camping under the stars. I sat there listening to his stories, and then started looking around. I focused on the oil lantern with its faint hissing sound and soft glow. My father didn’t make very much money, so he used the lanterns for light. I smiled to myself as I thought how fitting it was; it kind of set the mood for the stories my father was talking about. Soon my father started telling me about herding cattle. All of a sudden his eyes lit up, “When the cattle get spooked by a rattlesnake there’s no stopping the stampede and you have to ride it out.” He acted like he was on a horse, reins in hand, standing in stirrups, leaning forward, and whipping his horse, left, then right, back and forth. “YEE HAW!” he exclaimed loudly. I started laughing at him. Then I noticed my grandfather looking at the Brahma statue, like he was in a deep hypnotic state. I started to focus on the statue. My father’s voice started to fade. I felt a light touch on my arm. I turned to face my father and he stood there smiling proudly. I smiled back at him. I smiled was because my father, grandfather and I all have the same smile with dimples.

Calmly my father told me, he and his two sisters gave my grandfather that statue on his birthday. Then he said, “You know he was a rodeo clown?” I had forgotten what my mom had told me years before. My father told me my grandfather was famous. People came from all around to watch him.

I looked at my grandfather, he never moved, he just kept looking at the statue. My father went on to say, “What the crowd wanted to see was your grandfather’s trick, which was, as the bull was charging toward your grandfather, your grandfather would run toward the bull. The bull’s head would be down and just before the bull picked his head up your grandfather would jump on the back of the bull’s neck. Then he would run down the bull’s back and do a flip off the back of the bull. Just before he landed

on his feet, he would grab the bull’s tail. So when he landed on his feet the bull would be pulling him and he would be waving to the crowd. Your grandfather almost made the big circuit. He was real close when a white cowboy made the trick famous and claimed he started it.”

My father also told me that someone wrote a book about him. My grandfather’s nickname was “The Arizona Kid,” which was also the name of the book. To this day, I still haven’t found it. My father continued, “Then some time later your grandfather was on his favorite horse when a drunk ran into both of them with his car. Killed the horse and paralyzed your grandfather.” I didn’t know what to say. All of us just stared at the statue.

A few months later my father’s house was broken into. The first thing that I noticed was the Brahma bull statue was missing. Things were thrown all around. They really trashed the place. I went to my drawer where I had stashed some money. I was shocked it was all there. About that time my father came in, he asked, “What happened?” “Somebody broke in” I told him. He started taking inventory then asked about my stuff. I told him my stuff wasn’t touched. He looked at me real quick, stood there thinking about it then said, “OK.” My father called the cops and filled out the paperwork. A few weeks later my father and I were at a dump and saw the Brahma statue all broken up.

For years I’ve been talking about the hardships of homelessness, the struggle to survive in the weather, and getting one’s life together. Sometimes, they find work and others have to deal with emotional problems.

With those big struggles some seek shelter, and others find comfort in a tent, away from everybody and everything. Then all of a sudden their stuff is taken or trashed. Pissed, the homeless person has to start all over again. The homeless know they can’t call the cops, because it’s the cops or the Department of Transportation that either stored or threw their stuff in the dumpster. This happens all over, enabling homelessness. With not enough affordable housing or shelter, where is the justice for the homeless person?

Over the years a few of my friends’ houses have been broken into, and some of them got their stuff back. Watching the news, I see other peoples places being broken into. They call the cops. Some get their stuff back, others are still waiting, but all are grateful believing they’ll get justice.



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