

Mammas, let your babies grow up to be cowboys

You can take the girl out of Oklahoma, but you can't take Oklahoma out of the girl. Even though I left Oklahoma in 1964 when I was eight years old, I still join in at every opportunity for a rousing chorus of "Oklahoma!"

I guess I came at a good time in my Grandfather Earl's life. I was the first child of his youngest son, and the first grandchild in seven years. By the time I was five, six and seven I was his captive (and quite happy) audience as we passed summer or fall evenings on the front porch, radio in the background, shelling pecans, and telling stories.

Sometimes granddad's buddies from the oil fields would come by for a glass of iced tea or lemonade and stories of their younger days would start to roll. Most of these older gentlemen had been cowboys and had personal incidents to tell about Oklahoma legends such as Will Rogers, Wiley Post and Red Adair. Their stories told of heroes with cowboy virtues, and I was always eager to hear how Will Rogers lassoed a friend in the audience, how Wiley Post landed in a thunderstorm at their ranch, or how Red Adair squelched a fire at their oilfield. Oh, and they'd throw in a story about Amelia Earhart every

once and a while.

A psychological characteristic of children from about six to twelve years is that they are in a period of hero-worship. Children want to hear stories of people they can emulate, people who have character strengths that will help them be as skilled, verbally and physically, as Will Rogers; as daring as Wiley Post, as keen a fire fighter as Red Adair, or as revered as Amelia Earhart. Children need to imagine the possibilities through story.

The cowboy stories of my grandfather and his friends encompassed the values that old cowhands and oilmen hold dear:

Individualism: Nobody did nothin' by committee. It was one man out there against the odds. The names of their ranches personified that individuality; Sky Ranch, The Lazy L, The Rocking R, the Flying M.

Independence: They were doing it their way before the

song was written or Frank Sinatra was born, dadgumit.

Freedom: I'll pay my money and take my chances.

Love of the land: My, but that wheat field was a purty sight.

Modest: After saving someone's life: "Ah, it weren't nuthin'."

Courage: Either git some backbone or sit on your tailbone.

Loyalty: Course we went after him in that blizzard.

Integrity: His word was as good as law. And everyone knew it.

Generosity: We passed around the hat when he lost his job.

Respect for women: We just told him there was no room in this town for someone who'd treat a lady like that. And that was the last time we seen him.

Kindness to children: Cowboys could pull quarters out of my ears, and that's when a quarter was a silver quarter. A stick of gum or a peppermint ap-



Maren Schmidt

Kids Talk™

peared with a grin.

Fairness: We dun it fair and square, all on the up and up.

Nicknames: My grandpa's name was Skinny, and apparently at one time he was. Smiley, Trouble, Red, Tex, Shorty, Scottie earned their names somehow, someway. Earned is the key word.

Our children are looking for heroes. Heroes are all around us. We need to take the time to tell stories of our heroes, along with the strengths that we admire.

As a cowpoke might say, "We don't want to put the bull in the wrong corral."

Kids Talk™ is an award-winning column dealing with childhood development issues written by Maren Stark Schmidt, M.Ed. She has more than 25 years experience working with young children and is the author of Understanding Montessori: A Guide for Parents. Contact her via e-mail at maren@kidstalknews.

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