

WHAT I LEARNED AS A COWBOY

BY DAVID WALL

The fun and adventure we sought gave way to a somber lesson.

I was raised on a small farm near the town of Cleveland, a rural area in southeastern Utah. In the region there were many stories of Butch Cassidy, a cowboy outlaw, that remained in the conversations of the older generation. As a 12-year-old boy, I, along with seven of my buddies, became intrigued by the stories and planned an adventure. We wanted to ride the trail of Butch Cassidy and explore his hiding places in Cedar Mountain.

After much persuasion, we talked our parents into letting us ride our horses to Cedar Mountain. Two adults would join us—one to ride with us, the other to drive a truck to a designated camping area carrying our bed rolls, food, and hay for the horses.

We arrived at our campsite at dusk and started to prepare for the night. I remembered the instructions given to me by my parents. They had taught me how to tie up my horse to a strong live tree; how to leave the rope just loose enough for him to feed from the ground, but not so loose that the horse might step over the rope. I also remembered them telling me, “Never eat your dinner until your animals have been fed.”

Everyone took care of his own horse before turning his attention to his own needs—everyone, that is, except one. In haste to fix his dinner, my friend Billy tied his horse to a small dead tree and hurried off to the campfire. By the time we finished our duties, it was dark. Billy finished his dinner and then turned his attention to his horse. When he approached his horse in the dark, the horse spooked. Billy then made the fatal mistake of striking a match too close to the horse’s face. The horse reared back and pulled the dead tree from the ground. The tree, attached to the rope, hit the horse, which sent him off on a dead run. I will never forget the sound of that horse running into the darkness and the crashing of the tree he dragged behind him. The noise continued for 10 to 15 seconds, and then there was silence . . . followed by a loud crash.



All those things I had been taught while growing up suddenly began to make sense. I had come to a point in my life where I was responsible for my actions. The decisions I was making now not only affected me but those around me.

One of the adults had run after the horse and was first to reach him. We grabbed our flashlights and followed. After searching in the dark, we found the horse at the bottom of a 50-foot cliff. As long as I live, I will clearly remember watching that horse die.

We were a group of solemn boys as we worked our way up the cliff and returned to camp that night. Each one quickly and quietly bedded down. All that could be heard throughout the night was Billy's sobbing and the rustling of nervous horses that seemed to sense what had happened. It was a very long night.

That experience became a life-changing moment. As I lay in my bed gazing at the millions of stars in the heavens, the events of the day passed through my mind. I began thinking about the advice my parents had given me as I was growing up. Suddenly it all began to make sense. I had come to a point in my life where I was responsible for my actions. The decisions I was making now not only affected me but those around me. I began to see that the results of my disobedience could be disastrous, especially to

those who depended on me. My mother had entrusted me with her treasured horse. How grateful I was that I had been obedient to her instructions.

As each of us experiences life-altering events, such as my experience as a young cowboy, we need to not only learn to be obedient to God's laws but also to obey the teachings of inspired and caring parents, teachers, and Church leaders. How obedient we become will determine not only the degree of freedom, happiness, and peace

we enjoy in this life but also the attainment of the promises of eternal life in the world to come. **NE**

