

# A COWBOY'S



MY RODEO  
RIVAL HELPED  
ME GET IN  
THE SADDLE.

By Cody Rountree

**W**hen I  
was in  
the eighth  
grade, I

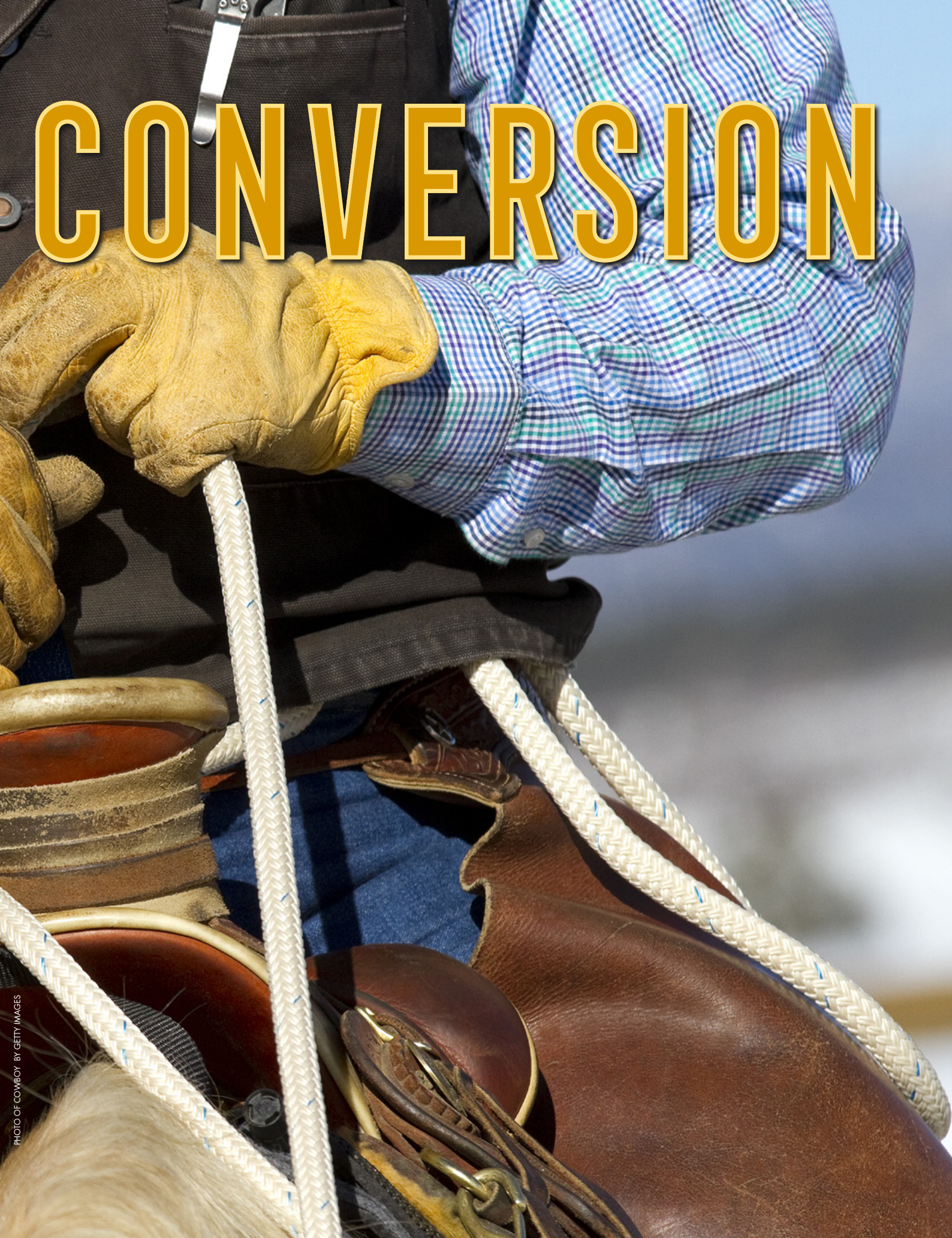
competed in miniature bull riding in the Idaho Junior Rodeo Association. The whole year, I battled back and forth for first place with a boy named Spencer. One week I would be in first place, and the next week he would be.

At the last rodeo of the year, Spencer pulled ahead of me—but just barely. To win, all I had to do was ride a little bit better. I came out of the chute and was riding great. Then, right before the buzzer, I got bucked off. That was it. Spencer was the new champion.

After the rodeo, I noticed him praying behind the chutes where he thought no one could see him. He was my greatest rival, but I wanted to be nice, so I went over and congratulated him, and he told me he appreciated the kind words. We started talking about our dreams of being world champions. I got to thinking he was a pretty cool guy. From that day on, we were best friends, and every summer after that, we always did things together.



# CONVERSION







Above: Cody competing at a rodeo. Below: With his brother and sister-in-law at his baptism. Bottom: On the day he was sealed in the Salt Lake Temple.



However, during my freshman and sophomore years of high school, I started hanging out with the wrong crowd. My new friends and I thought it was better to drink and fight instead of going to school, and I failed a lot of my classes. At the end of my sophomore year, the high school principal told me it would be best if I didn't come back to school.

I called Spencer and told him what had happened. Without missing a beat, he said to come to his high school. He lived in a town about 35 miles away. After talking it over with my mom, I accepted Spencer's family's invitation and moved in with them. That turned out great, because I was able to make up all the classes I had failed and graduate on time. And we were able to continue doing rodeo!

Spencer's family were also members of the Church. That made me nervous, because I had been taught my whole life that if I walked inside an LDS church, I would see fire and go straight to hell.

But Spencer and other Mormons were really nice to me, and I felt comfortable around them. So even though I was pretty scared of the Church, I went to church with them a few times and met a lot of other good people.

Their kindness helped soften my heart.

One of my new friends, Rick, was a member of the Church too. The night before he left on his mission, I told him I was feeling frustrated. I couldn't go into the military, I didn't want to go to college, and I didn't know what to do. He looked right at me and said, "You should go on a mission like me."

That statement hit me like a ton of bricks. I said, "All right, I'll go on a mission."

He laughed and said, "Well, you have to be a member of the Church first."

I met with the missionaries with Spencer's

family after Rick left for his mission. Six weeks later, Spencer baptized me. I was almost 19 years old.

Still, things weren't perfect after that. Most of my family was not happy that I joined the Church. My dad even offered me a brand-new pickup truck if I would just forget about it. But my brother Roger supported me. When I told him I wanted to serve a mission, he told me to give it 110%. Whether I was serving a mission

**WHEN I TOLD HIM I WANTED TO SERVE A MISSION, HE TOLD ME TO GIVE IT 110%.**

or not, he told me to always do my best.

I tried to prepare the best I could by studying the scriptures, praying, and going to a mission prep class. While I was on my mission in North Carolina, I lost myself in the work and did my best to follow Roger's advice to give it 110%.

Ten years later, I lost my dad to cancer. Even though he and I had hard times, I love him so much. As I leaned down to hug him and say "I love you" one last time, he said something I will never forget. He told me he was proud of me and that he was glad I served a mission. Two years later, Spencer got to baptize me for my father in the temple.

My family may not have approved of my joining the Church, but because of their unfailing love and the example of my friends and their families, I was able to serve a mission, be married in the temple, and help my dad after he passed on. I am grateful to be a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. **NE**

*The author lives in Idaho, USA.*