



Penned by Lantern Light

This column will spotlight members of the Western Wordsmiths Chapter of the Western Music Association. It will highlight an invited poet guest with possible short biographical information of his/her works. If a member of the Western Wordsmiths Chapter and if interested in submitting one piece of original work for publication, please contact the Western Wordsmiths chapter president.

Good Hand

By Mark Munzert

Three days draggin' plains and ridges. Brung seventy down a muddy draw.
North winds blowin' cold and early. More 'an one calf we found raw.
Me an' Marly figure another thirty stranded up beyond dried up Kuske Lake.
Be a half day trudgin' ta get close. S'what you do for them cow's sake.
The grass was really nice up there. Rode through 'bout three weeks ago.
Gets cold so fast, falling leaves land as frozen snow.
We dug one out a drift clear about it's' head.
Nearly left another one, givin' her up for dead.
'Til her Momma went to ballin', tellin' us not to go.
We looped her neck, dalley'd tight, and drug' her through the snow.
Them cows knew right then we was there to head 'em home.
Not one of 'em slowed a piece or looked about to roam.
Didn't take much push, we kept the pace right brisk.
Short cuttin' from Widows Ridge was surely worth the risk.
Now, the stove wood is crackling, we're finally warming up.
Chance to sit a spell and down a hot bitters cup.
Cows are in-close, horses are chowing too.
"Boys, we'll eat, sleep, pack-up in the mornin', some jerky,
coffee, biscuits, an' some chew.
We'll let out at dawn, head south along the rail,
Turn up where she rises along ol' Hank's trail."
Dawn breaks bleak with a fresh white blanket on the ground.
Pony'n extra mounts, muffled hooves the only sound.
Daylight catches up as we cross into the pines.
Cold crisp air lends echo to distant battling tines.
Beyond the hoof drops on nature's layered compost debris
I listen further than my eyes can see.
I hear, beyond my geldings' breath and saddle squeak, not a sound,

But,...death's stench as the horses balk at crossing McMullen's creek.
Ice tinged banks line rushing waters of early snows and thaws.
Melting slush don't mask tracks of bloody lion's paws.
Horses ears alerted, their nostrils flared out wide.
It takes a trustin' bump to cross 'em to the other side.
Up the bank, drag marks, clearly a fresh kill.
Traversing pines, paw prints and blood spots stain the rising hill.
"What ya' figure it's got, a young cow or deer?"
'Reckon it don't matter now, but the horses sense it's near.'
Marly slides his 'chester from its' scabbard "just in case ya see."
'That cat's already got its' meal. We ought ride on an' let 'em be.'
A few more hours hoofin', 'cross the lake, they're hunkered in the trees.'
Some needs doctoring and tending in snow up past our knees.
We finally finish and high string the horses, set camp upwind of the cattle.
Too tired to be hungry, pine boughs for a bed, pillow is a saddle.
Nearly three full hours of shivering shut-eye,
Waking to fast fallin' flurries from the sky.
Fire up the coffee. Distant yelps tell coyotes found their prey.
Snow turns to pelting ice as we head out on our way.
We guide 'em past the lake bed and over rolling hills,
Crossing windy ridges where icy ground causes spills.
Nightfall finds flatter ground and bovine quicken pace.
They know the winter pasture as a more forgiving place.
The cows are safe. Horses watered and feedin'.
We lurch over to the bunk house for eatin' an' deep sleepin'.
Just cowboys, doin' the best we can do, for livestock and the brand.
Pride in what we do, being a good hand.



Mark Munzert considers himself a green-horn to the range of writin' and recitin' and says he's as big a fan and promoter as writer and performer. "I enjoy relating experiences that shaped me and I truly enjoy making folks smile, chuckle, tear-up and think. I consider it an honor to promote the positive values of cowboy life in doing so." Mark is the current Western Wordsmith's Secretary and also administrates a 'Cowboy Poetry' Facebook page which stands near 7,000 members. "My saddle is pretty dusty and my trails are usually paved" working as a territory director for an equine nutritional and care products manufacturer. Mark, and wife, western singer, Kimmy (Hudson), live and perform in the northeast with plans for a westward move in the future.