



Penned by Lantern Light

This column will spotlight members of the Western Wordsmiths Chapter of the International 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.

When You've Hung Up All The Harness

Victor T. Anderson

*Have you ever stopped and listened to the horses chewing hay
when you've hung up all the harness after feeding cows that day?
Old Princess turns her head and she nuzzles at your coat.
And King, his nose is snuffling, searching for that final oat.*

*The cold of every breath you take makes nose hairs freeze and thaw
while you check the horses' shoulders, keeping watch for patches raw.
A tail lifts, the barn is filled with a strong, familiar smell.
A snort, King shakes and Princess stomps. You know they're feeling well.*

*There's hay out on the bobsled for tomorrow morning's feed.
It'll take a bit of work to give the cattle what they need.
You have the bobsled runners parked upon a chunk of wood
so they won't be frozen down and they'll slide just like they should.*

*Next morning, just at sunup, harness frozen, stiff and cold
when you take it off the tack hook, makes you feel a little old.
'Cause your hands are some arthritic and your back just aches away.
'Till you see a calf a sucklin' on the feed ground that cold day.*

*Morning's sun has warmed the landscape when you get the bobsled stopped.
As the horses blow a steamy breath, they cock a hind leg up.*

*You can smell the horses sweat while you're stacking on more bales.
They shift their weight and shake their bits, morning's breezes brush
their tails.*

*So, you load another rack full and you swing the team around
and you tie up both the ribbons when you're on the feeding ground.
On the river water hole the fog is wispy, gettin' thinner,
Spring is just around the corner, you c'n smell the end of winter.*

*While the horses make their circle as you're feeding off the hay
the jingling of the tug chains and the bobsleds swing and sway,
murmur songs and whisper rhythms that you've known for many years.
Muscles warmed, you shed your coat, lift the earflaps off your ears.*

*Then you point that sweating team toward the barnyard when you're done,
with a load of hay all ready for tomorrow mornin's run.
You park the sled, unhitch the team, and lead them to their stalls.
Then feed 'em hay and once again, you check their hides for galls.*

*Take quarter straps, the belly bands, the britchen and the hames,
sling 'em on the tack hook, 'long with collars, bits and chains
Then you stop. For just a moment, while the horses chew their hay.
When you've hung up all the harness after feeding cows that day.*



ABOUT VIC ANDERSON

Vic has been a rodeo contestant, farmer, cowboy, hay foreman and top hand on a large ranch in Montana, big game and fishing guide, outfitter, dude wrangler, livestock inspector, workers compensation claims investigator and examiner, respiratory therapist, sleep lab technician, singer/songwriter, columnist, author, poet, and western entertainer. He and Catherine still have their horses and they care for a couple more. Vic spends the rest of his time as a cowboy entertainer and writing short stories, songs, poems and novels.