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Rodeo, gymkhana fill family weekend

Taking a Look Back

by John McVey Middagh

As I've noted before, rodeo is no new thing with the Middaghs. But one recent weekend the family had to split up. Jacki, my daughter-in-law, along with my grandchildren Jamee and Brewen took the semi-trailer with the gear and horses to the New Mexico 4H gathering in Truth or Consequences (92 miles north — they consider this a local rodeo). The next morning I picked up my son John Jr. after he got off the night shift with the railroad, giving him a ride to join the rest of the family.

Kourtne, the oldest granddaughter, has taken over the Las Cruces Horseman's Gymkhana at the fair-grounds. She and my wife, Cecilia, hauled horses and other livestock to that show, taking along our two great-grandchildren.

Again I was impressed driving to the rodeo grounds in T or C. The number of different rigs, trucks, trail-ers of every description. Many people milling around, all busy. There were 90-plus signed up in the events scheduled, making me think even further about what it takes to support a horse event: the time, equipment, fuel, food for people and animals. And why doesn't El Paso have a junior rodeo?

I had planned to slide off to visit the local museum. But I stayed to watch Jamee rope her calf in 3.4 sec-onds, winning first in breakaway roping. Then I watched Brewen catch his tie-down calf, which he did. The calf outweighed him so he couldn't throw it to tie, resulting in a no time.

I found some shade from the hot sun under someone else's cover. Two old friends walked up joking about me being there with a camera. I guess the aging great-grandfather was showing. That reunion sealed the rest of the day. We sat reminiscing until Jacki came to get me for lunch where we had Westly Kolter and Letti Cooper follow us to the trailer joining us for some Albertson's fried chicken. John Jr. and the children walked up and we all sat eating and visiting until John Jr. begged off to take a short nap, since he'd been up all night.

After lunch we all went back to the arena. Westly, Letti and I found a seat in the grandstands. Jamee and her team roping partner caught their steer but it stepped through the rope with a front leg, which disquali-fied the team. Well, things happen ... there will be a next

time.

Brewen was last up in bull riding. There were two girls before him. I noticed he was there helping them get tied on. The first girl came out, lasting half a jump before falling off. The second girl came out lasting about the same, but when she bucked off she didn't get up. The bullfighters jumped in and surrounded her, keeping the bull away. The bull ran to the far end of the arena where a cowboy roped it. Adults gathered around the fallen rider. The paramedics came to the scene, bring out the back-board and gently lifting her on and taking her to the ambulance. The announcer told everyone that she would be okay; she was just going to the hospital to be checked over. With all that excitement it came Brewen's turn.

Brewen has developed his own routine getting ready to ride behind the chutes. He wears a do-rag that his helmet fits over. Of course he has his protective vest and colorful chaps on. Before climbing over the rail to get on that beast, he pounds his chest with both fists, then jumps up with his knees, pulling them to his chest three times. That ceremony finished, he eases himself onto the bull.

Today's bull he had ridden be-fore, I was told, a gray animal weighting about 1,500 pounds with black markings floating all over its body. Brewen nods, the gate opens, the bull leaps high in the air, twisting before landing on its front feet, up twisting again before its back feet hit the ground, then runs to the center of the arena bucking bad when we hear the buzzer telling Brewen he'd made another ride. Brewen wins again.

Watching all my grandchildren I'm very proud. Their events are so different. All are winners, with count-less buckles and saddles to show for it. Brewen competes against maybe five to seven bull riders most of the time, where Jamee is up against as many as 57 competitors. Congratulations to both of them.

Great-grandmother and Kourtne and the children had fun, Dylan 5 and Justin 10 months participating at their gymkhana. I don't know if it is a blessing or a curse, but it is certainly a family affair.

John McVey Middagh is a former saddle shop owner and amateur local historian. You can reach him at jmiddagh@yahoo.com.

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