

[from: *Riding the White Horse Home, A Western Family Album*
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This excerpt is taken from the section, "Walking the Hogbacks." jt]



At Laguna, when someone dies, you don't "get over it" by forgetting; you "get over it" by remembering.

—Leslie Marmon Silko

It is hot August, high noon under an airless sky, and my father and a hired hand have brought in a sick bull for doctoring. I am four years old, maybe five, and I sit on a corral rail to watch. I smell horse sweat and the black, watery manure that the bull swipes with his tail in an arc across his ass. Dust cakes in my nostrils and around the edges of my mouth. I want to go back to the coolness of the house, but I also want to watch. I rub my mouth with the back of my hand and stay.

The bull is on the fight and he paws the ground. His eyes are dull and green with sickness, and when he throws his head and bellers, long strands of snot stream from his

mouth and fly back across his shoulders, raising a few of the flies that blanket his rump.

When my father rides into the corral, the bull tries to take him. My father pivots his horse out of the way and ropes the bull, pulls him up short to the snubbing post and dallies around. He passes the end of the rope to the hired man, who has come into the corral on foot. Once the bull is secure, my father dismounts, ties his horse to a fence post, and returns with boluses and a syringe full of antibiotic.

The bull grumbles, fights the rope, snorts. But he is sick and he grows calmer with fatigue. My father jabs the needle into the animal's thigh. The bull rears back against the rope. The wraps on the post slip. The bull breaks loose, snot flying in an arc, his beller blue and loud.

From the fence I watch as he takes my daddy down. The world erupts in dust and blood. The bull is roaring, groaning, grinding, someone is yelling, my father is a tiny spider of flailing arms and legs.

I hear the hired hand crying over and over, "Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God." He tries to snub the bull again but he might as well attempt to drag a mountain from its plain. Finally, he gains a wrap of rope and my father rolls free. I watch as he crawls across the corral, climbs the fence hand over hand, his heavy legs dangling uselessly beneath him. He casts himself over the top rail, crashes in a grunt of dust on the other side. The bull bellers and falls silent. The dust settles. Everything is perfectly still.

My father was loaded onto a door and taken to town in the back of a pickup. A few weeks later he came back, and though he walked with a limp, he took up his regular

chores. The bull, too, recovered. He was a quality bull and we kept him until he was too old to service cows. Then we shipped him to the packers.

We. A few weeks ago, I learned that this happened before I was born. I have carried it like a memory, but it's not a memory; it's a story I've heard, fleshed out by details told down through the years. I'm amazed. I cannot imagine this event without also imagining myself within it, watching.