

Hi! I'm John Collett, "Cowboy John."

You're probably wondering where this name "Cowboy John" came from. Well, when I was a young boy living in Elko, Nevada, I'd bring my horse from the ranch into town at summer's end, and give children along the street, rides on the back of my horse. I'd see them watching, longing for a ride. I remember sitting on a curb, wishing someone would give *me* a ride. So, I'd put them on my horse. They called me "Cowboy John."

At the end of the summer when I rode in the Fair parade, the kids all knew me, "There's Cowboy John." That's how I got the name. When we started this touring business I thought it would be a good name to keep. Just call me, "Cowboy John," because that's what I've been called for a long time.

For eight years, from age 7, I spent summers on a secluded cattle ranch in northern Nevada. I rounded up wild horses, mustangs, on the Diamond A desert, drove 30 miles with Golden to pick up our mail once a week, and cut wild hay with horse teams in meadows along the Bruneau River. We rarely had visitors at this ranch since it was so remote. When the generator and the lights went off at night, it was quiet.

My Dad was a doctor in Elko, in northeastern Nevada. He helped a rancher from remote northern Elko County. That rancher offered to take my Dad's young son, ME! to live with his family on the ranch for the summer.

We'd moved to Elko from Indiana when I was young. As a small boy I was fascinated with horses, and Cowboys and Indians. I'd read, and read again, Commanche, Sea Star: Orphan of Chincoteague, and Big Red. I was *crazy* over cowboys, so my Dad and Mom figured a ranch summer would be a good thing. They loaded the car one summer day, and we drove for *hours* on narrow dirt roads, afraid we'd missed the turnoff. We *finally* arrived at the ranch. They thought it was in the middle of nowhere! After introductions my parents kissed me goodbye and headed back to town. I was seven, and that one summer was all it took. I was hooked.

I returned to that same ranch for the next eight summers. They treated me like a member of their family.

Many days after work was done we kids walked to the stream to go swimming. Some days Bertie baited a hook for me, and she and I walked down the dusty road to McDonald Creek to fish for brook trout. (They're still there, by the way!) Living in such a remote place as Rowland we had to fend for ourselves, and we kids, after chores were finished made our own fun in the country.

I had chores and they included feeding the chickens and leppie calves, milking the cow, collecting eggs, running and cleaning the milk separator, churning butter, and wrangling horses in the morning. What a growing up I had on that ranch!

One of my favorite ranch stories is how a *squeak* saved my life! In this story, "Saved By A Squeak!" I was 7 or 8 years old. It was early in spring when water from melting snow in the mountains rushes down canyons tearing at trees and gouging banks. Golden decided we needed to go up McDonald Creek to break up a beaver dam, flooding the road. Water was running down the road rather than the creek. We were to set a dynamite charge to blow a hole in the dam. He asked me to come along. Golden rode his big horse, Banner, and I was on Tramp, the little black mustang that came off the desert. Up the canyon we went early one morning. It was a beautiful day.

When we got to the river water was roaring down the canyon so loud you couldn't hear anything. Golden told me, "You stay on this side of the river while I set the charge on the other side. I'll be back."

I didn't hear him.

Tramp and I waited on the bank while Golden rode across to prepare the charge. I began to wonder, “Was I supposed to help Golden?” Being uncertain, impatient, and very young I decided he needed my help, so I nudged Tramp, and my little horse stepped into the swirling water.

Once in the water strong current shoved him downstream toward the tangled pile of branches and logs. Tramp fought, but he was a little horse, and the water was soon up to his neck. We swept down stream, nearing the dam. A big log jutted toward us. Tramp swam under the log and fought for the opposite shore. Instead of holding onto the saddle horn I grabbed for the snag thinking I could climb out of the water.

I struggled to climb the log. Right then, two cow dogs that had followed us, panicked, and started to crawl up my back. Every move shoved me farther toward the bottom of the dam.

In the meantime, Tramp, my saddle still on, swam across the river to where Golden was setting the charge. The saddle was a Christmas present and we discovered one annoying quality—it squeaked. I was teased unmercifully on the ranch about my squeaking saddle. They laughed, “There’s Johnny Coe with the squeaky saddle.”

So, when Tramp made the riverbank Golden heard a squeak. He turned and there was Tramp, but no Johnny Coe. (That was my nickname at the ranch, "Johnny Coe.") A glance down river, and he saw my hand locked on that jutting snag. Without a thought Golden jumped the river to the dam. He grabbed my arm and jerked a sogged little boy out of the water. That squeak, and Golden, saved my life.

We had some time, after that, figuring how to get back to the bank so we could cross the river again.

That's my squeaky saddle story. I do still have that saddle. All my nieces and nephews rode with that saddle. Later on, my niece and nephew's children rode the saddle. I go to schools now in Elko County in the wintertime to give ranch stories to the children. I bring the saddle and lift the kids right up onto that little squeaky saddle. I stick my big white hat on their heads. They giggle, thinking they're real cowboys.