

AN EDUCATED HORSE

Life pushing cattle on long drives to market could be dreary, dirty, and sometimes lonely. At the end of the day, when the temperature dropped, and the belly was full of the limited cuisine offered by the chuck wagon, the cowboy sometimes had a moment or two around the campfire to offer up his own brand of philosophical meanderings. On this one particular day on the trail, the Lone G Ranch's cowboys had a rare opportunity to interact with the people from a wagon train heading west.

Seeing as how only half the sun remained above the horizon, the two parties from the cattle drive and the wagon train who crossed paths on that lonely prairie trail mutually agreed to a joint camp for the night. After the drovers got the cattle settled down and after the wagons formed a circle, the womenfolk served a dandy feast to all. With their bellies full of a welcome change in grub, the cowboys just naturally gravitated to the campfire where they could exchange marginally believable stories. Of course, it was only proper to invite some of their

new friends to the roundtable discussion of a sort. A preacher man from the wagon train listened intently for a while and then added a few of his own stories to the session. The preacher man seemed like a real decent fellow, but his stories ... well, maybe it was his use of the King's English and all; it quickly became apparent to the boys that they had a greenhorn in front of them. The cowboys and professional storytellers then proceeded to milk the situation for everything they could get, all at the preacher's expense. The boys reveled so much in the moment that they failed to see the growing sparkle in the preacher's eyes. When it came around to his turn again, the Rev. Bartholomew Mattson commenced to tell about the time he ran into this man who claimed he had an educated horse.

And so, the preacher began his tale:

The man who is at the center of this story went by the name of Ezekiel Hanover Jones. Zeke, as his friends called him, pushed cows most of his life. One day, after completing a particularly hard drive, the ramrod told Zeke and the boys they could go into town for a little relaxation. As was frequently the case with cowboys in that situation, the

source of such relaxation resided in the local saloon.

Virginia Appleby, one of the barmaids at the Bottom of the Hill Saloon, happened to be looking out of the window when she saw a big cloud of dust coming over the hill.

“We’re about to have company,” shouted Virginia. “Get ready, everybody.”

Now, an observant sort of person, when walking by the front of the Bottom of the Hill Saloon, would notice a curious architectural feature over the swinging front doors to the saloon. There could be seen a shape somewhat resembling the silhouette of a human from about the shoulder level up. A thinking man or woman might question the history of this architectural oddity. For those thinking people sitting around this campfire, I will offer an explanation. You see, with the saloon sitting at the bottom of a hill and all ... well, when some of the cowboys came flying over the top of that hill, not all of them could stop in time to avoid a confrontation with the structural integrity of the building. After a year or so, the owner of the establishment decided he had to do something. All those

cowboys knocked out cold on his front walkway couldn't do any drinking, and that was bad for business. So, he came up with the idea of cutting out part of the wall in the shape of a man with his hat. That way those riders could go right on through the swinging doors with at least another fifty feet to get stopped.

Anyway, Zeke and all the boys made it safely into the Bottom of the Hill Saloon that day. Settling down at a table at the far end of the room, Zeke had a good view of the front door when he noticed a big man enter the bar. Within earshot of the big man, Zeke overheard him claim that he had an educated horse and that for any man willing to put up a wager, he would prove it. Well, Zeke and the boys laid out a few dollars and called the man's bluff. Everyone in the bar followed the big man outside. Whispering something into the horse's ear, the man then stooped down and drew a circle in the dirt.

"Gentlemen," announced the man. "My horse will now calculate the square footage area of this circle I have just drawn." The horse stomped down once, then again, and then a third time. The fourth time the horse's foot did not come fully down onto the ground, instead stopping at a funny angle. "As

you can see, boys, the angle of the horse's foot to the ground is approximately one-seventh to the horizontal. This means that the horse has calculated the area of this circle to be three and one-seventh square feet. Barkeeper, I suggest that you measure the diameter of the circle."

Joe, the barkeeper, went back into the bar to get a yardstick, and then did as the man asked. Joe replied, "She measures exactly two feet across."

"Now, gentlemen," said the big man. "I'm sure all of you are familiar with the simple law of mathematics that says to calculate the area of a circle, you square the radius and multiply it by the constant of π . So, if we use the measurement, as taken by this completely unbiased barkeeper, of two feet, divide it by two to get the radius, square the radius, and then multiply it by the constant of π , which is 3.14, we will then arrive at an answer of three and one-seventh square feet."

The boys just kind of looked at one another like this man had been speaking in tongues or something, when the barkeeper spoke up, "I had a third cousin who'd done some surveying once and

I vaguely recall him talking about that thing called *pi*.”

Naturally, the boys didn't want to have their ignorance on public display, so they all agreed the horse must be right. They all had a good laugh and paid their bets to the big man. It was then that old Zeke got him an idea. He figured if he could get that stranger to sell him that horse, he could make some pretty easy money. Remarkably, Zeke didn't have to do a whole lot of talking to convince the man to let go of his horse. Giving the big man every dollar he had, Zeke could hardly contain himself as he waited for a stranger to come into the bar. After a bit, a stranger did, in fact, come into the bar.

Zeke announced just loudly enough for the stranger to hear, “I got me an educated horse and for any man willing to put up a wager, I'll prove it.”

The stranger, apparently being a reckless bettor by nature, put up five-hundred dollars to call Zeke out. Several of the boys later commented that, except for the beard, the stranger had a vaguely familiar look about him. Everyone in the bar then followed Zeke outside. Zeke swallowed hard,

whispered into the horse's ear, and drew a circle in the dirt. The horse stomped three times and on the fourth time came down at an angle of approximately one-seventh to the horizontal. Zeke breathed a premature sigh of relief and repeated all the words he'd heard the big man say about mathematical calculations.

“Well now, son,” said the stranger. “That all sounds pretty convincing, but uh ...why don't we let the barkeep measure the diameter of that circle you drew on the dirt.”

“I reckon that's acceptable,” said Zeke, confidently.

The barkeeper took out his yardstick, measured across the circle and announced, “She measures four feet across.”

Now, everyone in the bar, having recently got an education in mathematics, knew that the correct answer differed slightly from what it was supposed to be. The horse was wrong; Zeke lost; he had no money to back up his bet; he lost his two horses; he lost his saddle; he lost his boots; he had to ride out of town on a borrowed mule.

On his way back to camp, old Zeke got lost and ended up in a ravine between two cliffs. He stopped for a moment to see if he could figure out where he was when this big old rattlesnake crossed the path right in front of him. It startled the mule so that he reared up on his hind legs, threw Zeke off, and took off running. Zeke got up and ran to the top of the cliff to see where the mule went. When he saw the mule down below, he got so mad that he grabbed the first thing he could get his hands on to throw at the mule. Unfortunately, the first thing he could get his hands on was his canteen. Zeke's throw put the canteen about three feet in front of the mule, who got spooked by it and took off running again. Sadly, the mule did not take the time to step around the canteen. As Zeke started back down from the cliff, he continued fuming about that mule and, consequently, he didn't pay attention to where he was walking. As it turns out, the prickly pear cactus in those parts had extra-long thorns. Sitting down on a flat rock, Zeke pulled out his bowie knife and began prying the thorns out of his feet. When he got the last of the thorns out, he heard a familiar sound. That big old rattlesnake didn't take kindly to Zeke occupying the rock that

was his favorite sunning spot. The man jumped up and ran. We don't know if he realized he was running toward the edge of the cliff or not. Poor Zeke lost his footing and fell off the cliff. At that point, Zeke received both good news and bad news. The good news consisted of the fact that he landed on his back, felt fine, and even started to get up. The bad news consisted of the fact that Zeke's big old bowie knife followed the same path off the cliff that Zeke did. They had a real nice funeral for Zeke. That big fella that sold him his horse even came to it.

An angel met Zeke at the pearly gates and asked him a question, "Ezekiel Hanover Jones, what's the key to getting into heaven?"

Sensing the seriousness of the question, Zeke decided he'd better think about it for a while lest he give the wrong answer. The angel soon grew impatient and decided to give Zeke a clue. The angel bent down and drew a circle on the ground. Now you have to understand that one of Zeke's more frequent sins was to use the good name of the Lord ... shall we say, rather loosely. When Zeke saw that circle, he buried his face in his hands and, in a loose manner of speaking, said "Jeeee-sus". In a moment

of panic, he did the only thing he could think of to do—he stomped his foot three times and on the fourth time stopped at an angle of one-seventh to the horizontal. In all the history of time, there probably hasn't been anyone more surprised than old Zeke when he saw the gates of heaven open up.

Needless to say, the cowboys around the campfire knew they couldn't top that story. They all laughed and, at best, figured they had another story to add to their vast repertoire of tales. Rev. Bart smiled and, knowing that the story would undoubtedly be repeated many times, merely considered it another opportunity to spread a little seed.