

# Mighty things happen in the FOG!

Once again it happened.... Once again in the mail I received an invitation. I had gotten the invitation before, for the past 5 or 6 years I guess. I always open it, usually read it through, then for one reason or another never really did anything more, the dead line to respond would pass and it would be another year before I thought about it again.

This year, January 2008 was different. I had recently sold my hunting operation in Saskatchewan and I promised myself after guiding international hunting clients for 27 years I was going to take some of my new found time and spend it on one of my life long passions, competition team roping. Learning the basics from my Dad at the age of twelve, I began competing in local jackpots. All through high school I roped off and on. Roping cost money and money I was accustomed to being short of.

Ranching and riding horses pretty much kept me broke and broken. Add a little saddle bronc and some bull riding and you could add to the column of broken. I won my first trophy buckle team roping as a winter series high money winner at the then new, Glacier Horse Ranch in Columbia Falls/Kalispell Montana area. I was a junior in high school living with the Scott Lynch family in Ronan, MT. Scott and I braved the many times slick and always treacherous highway 93 each week to compete in roping, always with each other and other partners as well.

Getting married right out of high school we moved over to Bozeman MT. I had no horse, I had sold my horse, my roping saddle, which I had worked one whole summer for, and even my 2 horse trailer, to be able to go to college. I borrowed a good little sorrel heel horse (named Gravy) from Dan Figgins and roped with the Bozeman fairgrounds roping club. One of my favorite partners was Earl Horseford. We usually did well together and our personalities just kind of clicked.

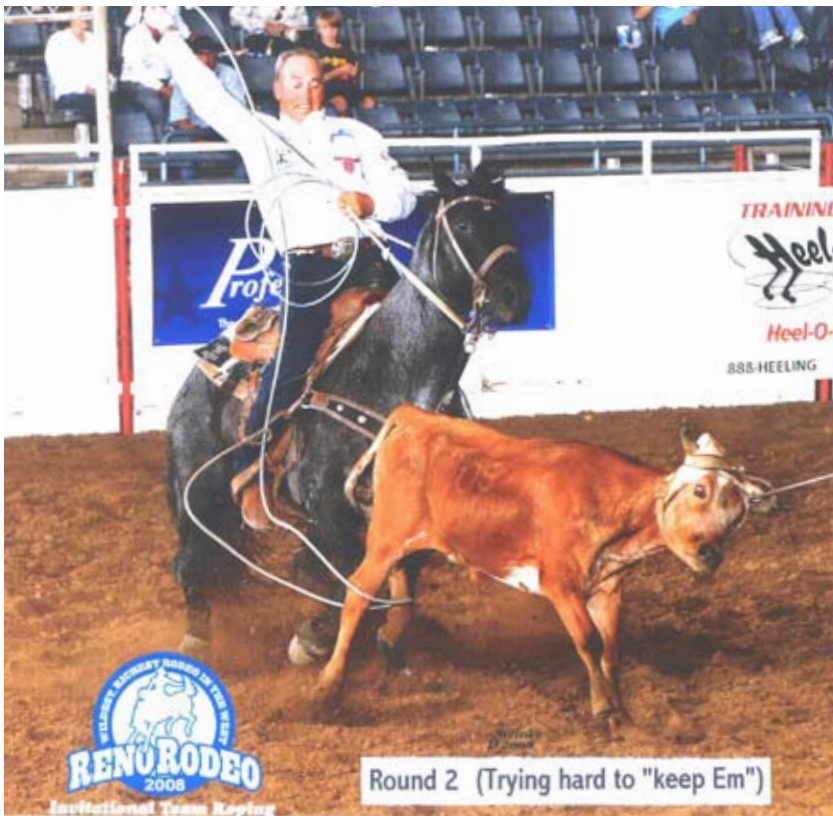
Sadly, not long after that, Earl suffered a stroke and was never able to rope again. He came and watched us occasionally, but I think the pain of denial was too great and we didn't see him much any more.

We moved several more times and finally ended up just north of Gardiner, MT, just north of Yellowstone Park. I started a career of Outfitting and building log homes. I thought of roping often, especially when helping a neighbor brand calves or roping a rouge range bull for someone. But I promised myself I would not competition team rope again until I could afford to lose my entry fees and not suffer my family. For nearly 10 years I did not rope in an arena for that reason.

I met Mel Anzik a practicing Veterinary in Livingston MT and he invited me out to a practice session in his arena. I was hooked again and purchased a good, solid built, brown heel horse and began practicing and roping locally. Bozeman and Livingston were my main areas of competition and eventually I wound up driving over to the Billings area to rope. They roped a lot over there, and the atmosphere was friendly. The first time over Tom Gauger came up and asked me to rope.

That was the beginning of a long friendship as we, Tom and I and our boys Charles, Chase and my son Luke grew up together and competed together. We really did have a lot of fun and we watched each other win State championships, USTRC events, and jackpots. Chase excelled and went on to win high school rodeos, college rodeo titles, NRA rodeos and Montana circuit finals championships.





Luke, my son, at the age of 12 and myself won a couple shootouts to the USTRC National championships in Guthrie Oklahoma. The year was 1996, the last year the championships were held in the famous Lazy E arena. We roped ourselves to a 6th place finish in the world and I thought my biggest day of Roping had just happened. \$15,000 in prize money and 2 extra fancy buckles for Luke and I .... We were proud. Luke eventually turned to girls, cars and sports which led him to knee injuries, wrecked cars, unaffordable insurance and marriage (at least one good thing came of it all). Grandkids!!

Chase Gauger out grew us, moved away, got busy with business and life. With Chase gone, Tom's desire to go drifted off and eventually stalled out.

I was left alone, but I had been there before. I found partners at the odd jackpot and occasional USTRC events.

So here in my hand was an invitation to the wildest and richest roping in the world. It advertised a cool million dollars would be given

away in total prize money in one day! The winners alone would receive \$100,000 each! Plus prizes! WOW! The entry fee was sobering as well, \$2500 per man, \$5,000 per team. Enter only once. Talk about having all your eggs in one basket! I am more into multiple entries, "stuffing the ballot box" type entering, not this "one and you are done" thing.

I found a partner in Courtney Higgins from over by Broadus MT. We entered, myself heading and Courtney as the heeler. I prefer to heel but I was compelled to enter, so off went the entry and the \$5,000.

Months went by, no word from Reno. You see, this is a true invitational; they normally attempt to keep the entries close to 200 teams. Typically some 400 teams are turned down, so getting accepted seemed to be the next hurdle to get over.

A friend of mine, Heath Myers from Boyd MT, SW of Laurel had been participating in this Reno Invitational for 5 years running. In those years he had gotten to know the drill and also the entry personnel. He called down to the entry office after being denied this 2008 event. They did not like his entry with the partner he had entered with for some reason and denied his entry.

While on the phone he asked if Levi Britton had been accepted, they replied no, because of his partner as well. Heath and I discussed the idea and Heath called back with a question: could Heath and Levi rope together as a team because our entry partners were denied? They checked out that scenario, called back and said we were in!

Heath was a great choice. I describe Heath as a misplaced cowboy, trapped in an urban job and environment, he would prefer to run a little bunch of cows at the end of a gumbo road. He was born and raised in Northern Montana, an area we locally refer to as the highline. He grew up ranching and farming and fixing fence and I think a part of his heart is still out there somewhere. Fellow ropers he grew up with were Shane Swanke and Larry Steel.

Heath got transplanted down near Billings and to date still runs a local farm at Boyd and helps run his in laws furniture and flooring store in Laurel. He married a real nice lady in Marlena and sports a family of 3 children, Kade, Bailey and Cotton. He is a good solid roper, a good horseman, rides a good horse and has enough "cowboy" in him to give him a competitive spirit. We should make a good solid team together.

The roping draws near... check this out, this year, 2008 due to popular demand they allowed 276 teams, the most ever. Five teams scratched due to injuries and health reasons leaving 271 official teams. We were team #271!!! The last to go each round! I do not believe in coincidences, but a lot of stars were “mysteriously” “lining up”!

June 19, 2008 we struck off for Reno NV, just Heath and I. One bay head horse (“Jet”) and one blue roan heel horse (“Doc”), two suitcases, 6 bales of hay, a road map, two cell phones, two heads full of dreams, and enough “desire” for any 10 ropers. We drove to Jackpot NV overnights and pulled into Reno early afternoon of Friday June 20th. We had an invitation to stay at a private place known as Rogers Arena. Gary Rogers, his wife Cherry, and son Ty were our hosts. We fed and watered our ponies, met Ty at his new Tack Store in Sparks, got our room at the Silver Legacy and met up with our good friend Steve Miller, who lives in Billings and is the traveling representative for Montana Silversmiths in Columbus MT.

We had 3 days before the big roping and we were craving to get in some practice together. Another private arena just across the road from Rogers Arena had some cattle and was offering a practice session. Gary Dixon and Shirley Little from Billings were going over there and invited us along, we jumped at the chance. The gracious owner of the arena was Scott McVay. He not only let us practice, but apologized for the dirt being dusty, welcomed us back over for another practice on Monday the day before the event and promised he would make sure a water truck was ordered for dust control and refused payment. What a host!

Our practice session went alright and Heath and I got a feel for each other. The next day, Sunday, the Rogers had a local jackpot roping at their arena. Heath and I roped in a couple of ropings and placed second in one of them. We were starting to feel more comfortable with the whole deal.

Monday morning, the day before the Reno Invitational Roping, we got up early and went back to the McVays arena for our last practice together. We were focused, we were serious. We sorted the cattle and roped only Scott’s fastest steers, because we knew the fresh steers at the roping the next day would run hard. We decided to rope 2 sets of 4 steers just like the next day. Our practice only consisted of 8 steers roped and several others scored to keep the horses honest in the box. We caught all 8 steers by horns and two feet! Our horses were working, we were catching, and our confidence was built up. Little did we know how much we would rely on that confidence the following day!



We rinsed the horses off and sped back to the Reno Event Center to watch a very special event which was under way when we got there. You guessed it, nothing other than the B.F.I (the Bob Fiest Invitational) was underway, as the very best ropers of the world are compiled in a head to head competition for some big cash \$72,000 each to the winners, plus prizes and the prestige of winning one of the top roping events produced each year.

My good friends Clay and Travis Tryan from Billings were there competing. With 3 full rounds still to go Travis and his partner had some bad luck, but Clay and his partner, Walt Woodard were still sitting good in the average. Much to our delight we were privileged to watch Clay and Walt win the event with a solid 7 second run on their last steer.

We hopped the fence and stood near Clay as he and Walt were awarded their prizes. We would compete in the same arena, using the same cattle the next morning... the tension began to mount!

Later that night we had to check in, which consisted of personally showing up, getting our white shirts with logos, some beautiful leather jackets with the emblem of the Reno Invitational on it, a grab bag of certificates and our all important contestant team numbers to be safety pinned on our backs. With our red and white team #271 contestant decals we attended the banquet put on by our host the Perry Dilereto and his family.

A first class banquet I will say, with no end to large sautéed shrimp and carved roast beef until you could eat no more. Steve Miller invited us to eat with himself at his Montana Silversmiths donor table right up front next to Perry and his family, that was an honor as well.

The prizes for the next days roping were on display at the banquet. Gorgeous fully tooled, Cactus trophy saddles, “knock you over” Gold Gist Buckles, beautiful winning rope display boards all carved, stamped and silvered and other top of the line bits and spurs, tack and the list went on. Just looking at those saddles and buckles would give you the shivers. Did I mention the mounting tension? You could feel it in the air!

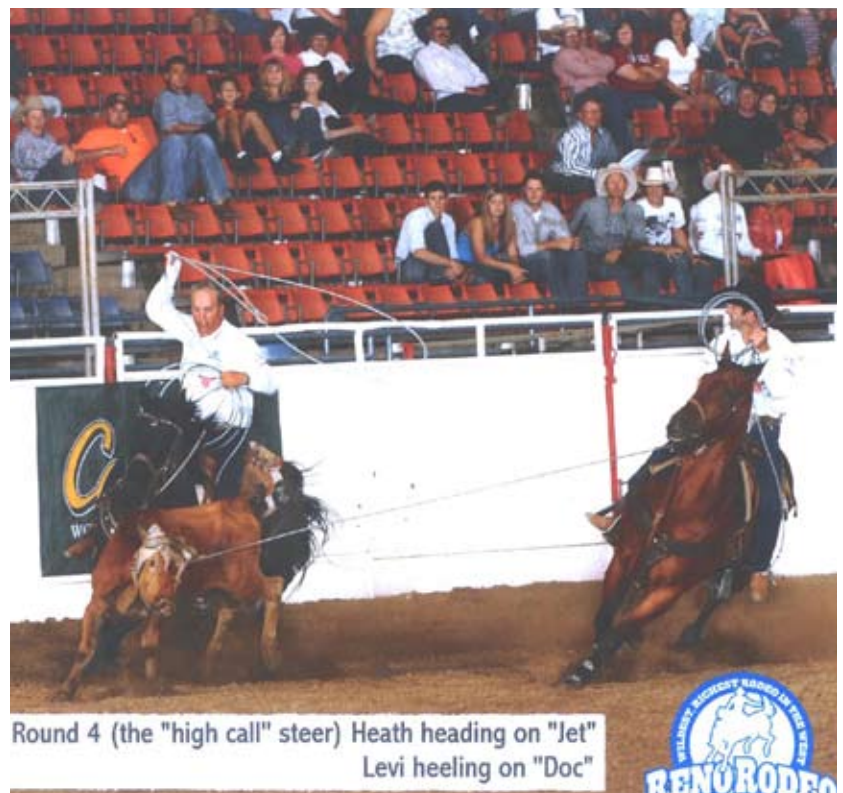
Standing out among the prizes were two gorgeous bronzes, perfectly sculptured by none other than our greatly talented friend Steve Miller. These bronze horse heads were to be given by the American quarter horse association for the winning papered heading and heeling horse.

Perry, our host, gave a presentation of how he and others have graciously donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to some fantastic facilities for young children of homeless status while in a foster care type program. Some beautiful and functional recreation facilities have been constructed. Many children are and will benefit from their efforts and generous donations. Some proceeds from our roping event would be used to help fund the work in progress. It was an emotionally moving presentation and Perry, and his family, the Reno Rodeo foundation and all the other private and corporate volunteers and sponsors should be applauded for their overwhelming support and donation of time, talent and money. My hat goes off to them all.

As the banquet room swelled with the next day’s contestants and their invited guests, I began to realize the volume and size of the event. 271 teams when you can only enter once makes 542 contestants. My mind started to imagine the next mornings special event, known and referred to as the “ride in”.

Perry has always supplied every roper with identical long sleeved, western shirts, complete with embroidered and stamped logos of sponsors. He dictates that each team, starting at number 1 and going up, will ride into the arena as their team number and names are announced. Each team will sit in the arena on their horses in rows and rows as all the teams are brought in. Like a primeval mounted army all 542 riders will fill the giant arena from one end to the other. All those white shirts, all those people and horses, it is impressive to say the least and adds to the “drama effect” of this being a special event. The wildest, richest roping in the world!

As I sat in the banquet hall and my mind began to grasp the idea of the magnitude of the next days “ride in” a thought was placed in my mind. You see my friend Don Proue from Roundup MT was laying in a coma back in Billings, then 45 days since he suffered a tragic horse accident while competing in a team roping competition. I was his heeling



partner on the run when his horse stumbled and eventually fell, throwing Don face first into the arena dirt, then rolling over him, knocking him unconscious. Don still lay in a coma as I sat in that banquet room.

Myself and others assisted to get Don's face out of the arena dirt, paramedics hauled him to an emergency room and later to ICU, the doctors could do no more except wait for him to come out of his coma. Prayer, was all we could do. We laid hands on him and prayed over him even before the ambulance arrived. We prayed for him at the roping, during the invocation and even during the roping even as it went on. Prayers from all over the state and country have been stated on his behalf.

Two days before Heath and I left for Reno I had the privilege of being a part of a youth bible rodeo camp in Polson Mt. I watched as 14 young people asked Jesus into their hearts Hallelujah! Even with them I led and asked them to join me in cowboy prayer for Don.



As I sat in this banquet room waiting for the Calcutta to start, I thought, wow; What if I could get all these contestants and their guests to join with me in prayer for Don? Wouldn't that be cool! And all that cowboy prayer for one of our own, I had to try!

I approached our Host Perry DiLereto, I introduced myself and asked if he normally gave an invocation during the ride in. He said he did. I asked if I might be able to give that invocation and briefly explained my hearts burden for Don. To my delight he instructed me to clear it with Reed the announcer who would normally do the prayer. Reed graciously agreed and I was bursting at the seams with excitement to be able to join all that cowboy prayer for Don the next morning.

It was now game day. It was now Tuesday morning June 24, 2008. "Ride In" was scheduled for 7 AM sharp. We had to leave the down town motel, go north of town 20 minutes, get our horses, get back through traffic, find a parking place, get saddled and get in line at the very end as we anxiously waited our turn for 270 other teams to go before us.

Before we knew it, we were riding in at a gallop, head long into and in front of our army of white shirts and mounted cowboys. We rode into the line up facing back the way we came in, all the other 540 riders behind us, all looking to the front where Perry and Gerald Camarillo the arena director sat on their horses.

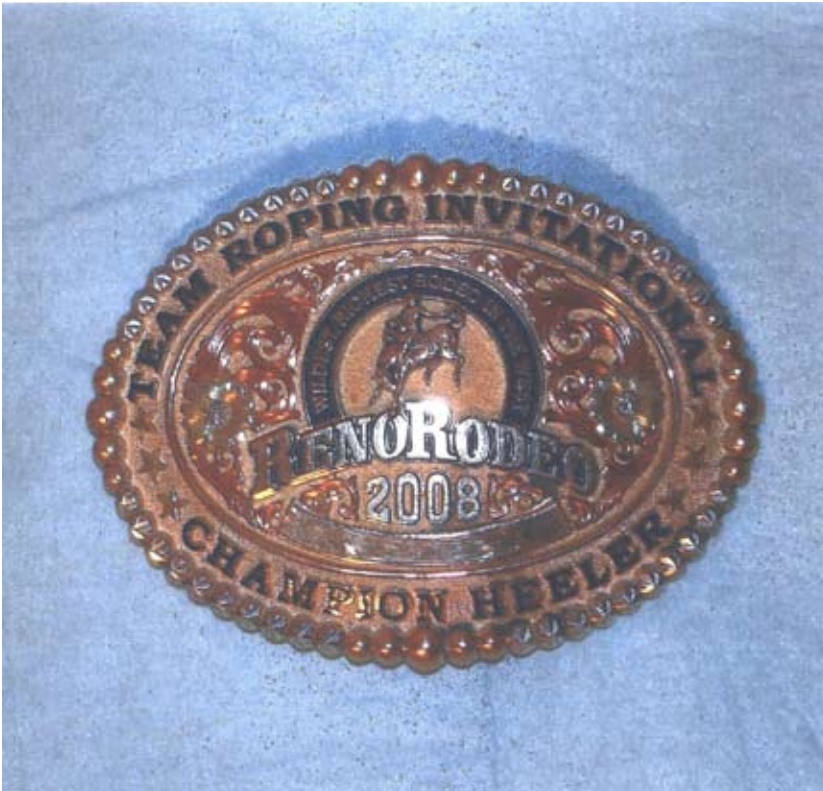
I bailed off my horse "Doc" handed over the reins to Heath and ran through the horse line over to the side of the arena where the announcer was. Upon my arrival Reed introduced myself and handed me the microphone as I prepared so anxiously to present the invocation. You could of heard a pin drop in that big Reno Events Center as we prayed together this invocation:

*Invocation to the Reno Rodeo Invitational Roping  
June 24, 2008*

*Join your hearts with mine as we have the privilege to go to the Lord in prayer.*

*Dear Heavenly Father,*

*With our heads bowed in reverence to you... we do invite and long for your presence here with us this day. We humbly ask for your hedge of protection over all the contestants, the staff, and the livestock as well. We give thanks to you this morning. We are thankful for all the freedoms we enjoy here in the United States of America, the most blessed nation in*



*the world. Freedoms that have come with a cost...  
a cost of service, injury and even life.*

*Lord we hold up to you a personal request. Don Proue a Montana rancher, a fellow team roper, a spur maker, a husband, father, grandfather, a Christian, a child of yours. Following a team roping accident (45 days ago) in Billings MT Don still lies in and out of a coma, with family clinging to his side. Lord you know Don, you created him... and blessed his parents with his birth 58 years ago. You know his health issues, the doctors can not do any thing more, you and only you can heal Don. Lord, if it be your will, we know without a doubt you are able! If it be your will, our desire is to bring Don completely out of his coma and back to his family and friends, for a longer time... back to the people and the activities he loves to do.*

*To all our requests, we promise to give you, all the Praise, honor and glory for you alone are worthy.*

*Bless this roping event now, may each competitor ride and rope to the best of their ability. Bless our hosts, the entire Perry DiLoreto family. Thank*

*you for loving us. Thank you for salvation through Christ. We ask all this in the Precious name of Jesus Christ. And all God's people said? Amen.*

As everyone in that event center simultaneously said Amen, I am telling you it was a moving, stirring moment, there were more than a few teary eyes from men and women alike. I could feel a powerful force go up and rush out of that Coliseum as that prayer was finished, like a sudden rush of air... exciting and almost spooky at the same time.

By the time I got back to and on my horse Lacy Jay Dalton was singing the national anthem and we were all headed for the long dirt ramp up and out the door. Round #1, starting at team #1 here we go! It is going to be a long day!

Right at 3 hours after team #1 round #1 began we rode into the box for our first steer. We were focused, it was serious business. We had watched all the other 270 teams and witnessed many quality runs. It was evident we were needing to be on our "A" game to be competitive.

The gate popped, the steer bolted, then slipped and came to a complete stop! He was then off again, but Heath was coming dangerously close to that barrier. No buzzer! I couldn't believe it! In every roping you normally have to get "past" some obstacle, hopefully this was ours, as we charged full speed down the arena to a clean 8 second run.

We did not place in that round but were probably in the top 12 posted times for round #1. A sigh of relief and add some more tension, a little more pressure.

Another 3 hours went by, as they raked the arena and roped the other 270 teams through round #2. My personal "problem" steer is normally steer #2. I like the other rounds, love to rope the last cow, but truly dread the second steer for some reason.

Our second steer was a runner. When Heath caught up and roped him by the horns, we were moving. Heath sets cattle real good, turns them smooth, but keeps them moving. I roped the steer by 2 feet but just with the tip of my loop. I had a lot of slack to take out to keep those precious feet. Photographs later revealed a most intense expression on my face as I was doing my best to come tight with that in my loop. 9:02 seconds!

17 on two head, the best time on two head that we had heard. My dreaded second steer was in the book! Turn up

the tension dial, raise the heart rate, our nerves, especially those in the pit of your stomach were working full time.

We were half way there, but it seems all up hill, as we waited 3 more long hours for our chance at our round #3 steer. It seems to take forever, then all at once it is upon you.

We rode in the box for our third steer. Many teams have not been able to get 3 in a row down, nor alone penalty free. Another clean run could really put us in a good position for the last round.

As with the previous two steers, this one took off like a shot... us in hot pursuit. During this run, like the others, our focus just zoomed in on the steer. I explained it later to Heath and he agreed, it was like we were roping in a heavy FOG...you could not see in front, nor either side very far... the crowd, the other contestants, the announcer, even the flagger were cut off. It was just my horses' neck and ears flattened out in full speed, the steer being caught by the horns and even Heath disappeared out of view as he led the steer away.

Just as before, I threw, I caught and I hustled to get dallied off with two precious legs coming back as Heath spun around, stopping the clock with another 8 second run. It was officially announced as we rode out of the arena, we were 26 seconds on three and we were HIGH CALL, fastest on three head, which meant for our final steer we would again go dead last, as they arranged all 51 teams who caught all three steers by time starting at the slowest and going to us, the high call team, fastest on 3 head!

Did I mention the tension, pressure, drama, excitement and emotions? Just like a volcano preparing to blow, it was all there, even the steam coming out the top! I remember saying to Heath as we rode around the arena to tie our horses, "buddy, we have just put ourselves in a very enviable position."

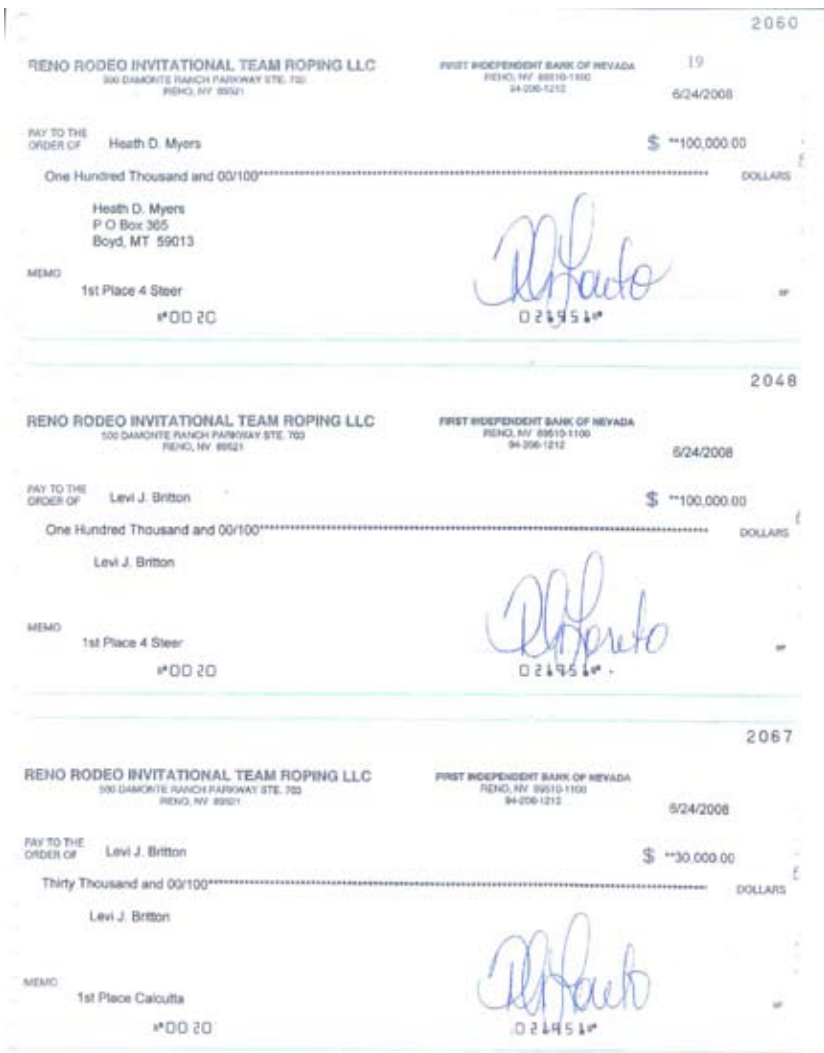
Over the next hour and a half I questioned the use of the word enviable. Your mind is a funny thing and given enough jammed up information and pressure it can really take you on some dirt roads.

Heath and myself would go our separate ways after each steer. Each of us would arm ourselves with our cell phones, and call back to our wives, Bobbie and Marlena. We would go off and vent some tension, eating something or getting something to drink. We would wander around the event center, look at booths, watch some teams rope, go watch some Reno Rodeo slack just outside the event center, or just sit by ourselves somewhere. Heath admitted sitting all by himself in the empty Reno Rodeo grandstands for over an hour.

Sometimes if you try hard enough, you can even find "yourself", the "true" you, the person, whom many times, only you and your maker know. There was some serious soul searching going on between runs... it was great!

One place each of us stopped by for advice and support was Clay Tryan, sitting in the stands watching us, just because he was excited for us. He was suppose to be meeting his Dad, Dennis for dinner, but with each of our catches he was staying. That is pretty remarkable for a PRCA World Champion, a two time Bob Fiest Invitational winner to sit that long and watch a bunch of amateurs for as long as he did. He was genuinely excited for us and both Heath and myself at different times sat and talked with Clay for





advice. That was pretty cool!

I will never know exactly what Heath was thinking. Three years prior, Heath roped himself into a very similar situation in this same roping. He was 3rd high call by just fractions of a second. On their last steer Heath caught the horns turned the cow and his heeler missed. Heath knew full well the pain of disappointment. He knew what it felt like to have a \$100,000 slip through his fingers. I think he was still a bit guarded. I couldn't blame him.

Confidence is the one thing you can draw on, confidence in your horse, confidence in your practice, confidence in your partner. How important was our good flawless practice the day before, it was huge! Thanks again Scott McVay for your steers and arena!

By now the 3 steer average, for any teams who had missed any of their steers in rounds 1, 2 or 3, but had a time on 2 head was under way. We watched some, but not really paying attention. None of it affected us and our minds were "full" and then some. 40 odd teams roped off the 3 steer, then they worked the arena in preparation for the main event.

51 teams had times on 3 steers. We would all get a fourth, final steer. They read off all the teams and times starting at the slowest to the

fastest. A knot the size of a drinking glass came on in my throat when I heard our names being called as the number 1, high call team. You know it, but to hear it announced, really brings it home. We would rope the very last steer of the event... we would be the champs or the chumps.. I was ready, bring it on, lets find out how the story ends!

We knew we were going to win something. They pay real money clear to the 40th place. That sounds good, but all you can think about is winning first, any placing in that roping is an honor, but first with all the prize money, the prizes, the title, the drama, it was hard to wrap your mind around it all, and yet there was that confidence that I kept coming back to, the only thing that helped settle the nerves.

I had no doubt that we would draw a good steer, no doubt Heath would do just as he had done on every other run,... be comfortably off the barrier, run his good bay horse up to the steer, rope a set of horns, set the steer a little and roll out of there with him in tow. I rehearsed my swing and my position a thousand times, I was confident and I was ready.

I knew in my mind that my loop, good or bad was going to dictate our success. I prayed to God, not for us to win, but first for safety and I prayed that we would each rope to the best of our ability. I thanked God for even having the opportunity to go do what we were about to do. It was a privilege to even have the chance, a thrill very few will ever get to experience and we were about to give it our best shot.... Lets go!

We were high call at 26 on three, right below us was a 27, a 29, a 30, a 31 and a 33 the rest did not seem to matter. The drama continued to mount as the announcer got down to the final 5 teams. The end of the short round suddenly got soft, to our amazement each of the last teams up to us either penalized or missed. When we were announced,

they declared we had 14 seconds to catch our last steer! Could you believe it! We had told ourselves over and over and over that we would not soften up or safety up, we wanted to stay aggressive.

The team just before us, the second high call team, the team we only led by a second ran their steer, the header caught the steer and the heeler unfortunately missed. The entire crowd felt for them and a resounding “ahhh” was heard. The team kind of pouted in disappointment, a real let down. We watched as the header then chased the steer out of the arena and out of sight into the stripping chute. It was our turn... the steer .. the run... Heath nor I would never forget.

Whether we caught or missed, whether we would be the champs or the chumps, it was our turn. The last words I heard anyone say was Reed the announcer when he stated “ and then there was one!” We, the very last team, was about to go.

Heath and I rode into the boxes and then a most ridiculous thing happened. The heeler for the previous team, who had missed moments ago, was still in the arena, and refused to leave. I don't know his name, I have referred many times since as him being the stupidest man in Reno. He is sitting on his horse in the arena staring back at us in the heading and heeling boxes and he would not leave. In a terrible display of non sportsmanship he was attempting to “ice” us, break up our concentration, mess with our minds! And why? We can not hurt him or his placing, he is out of the running with the miss just prior.

The flagger waved us off and had to ride over and demand the man to leave the arena. Amazingly as the man finally rode off he intentionally held his horse back to taking only very, very, short, slow steps to affect us all he could. The crowd was about to BOO the bugger.

I have referred to him as the stupidest man in Reno solely because this is an invitational roping, by invite only do you have the privilege to compete. The man obviously was a good roper or he would not have been sitting 2nd high call. Up till then, he had an invite to come back again and again to compete in the very best roping in the world. By his outrageous behavior I feel certain Perry DiLoreto , the producer, will never allow him to return. Perry is a class act guy, produces a class act event and does not tolerate such ridiculousness.

I looked over the chute to Heath and said to him “don't worry about it, if it takes us an hour, we will get to rope our steer.”

The arena was cleared, the flagger was in position, it was our moment. As we backed into our corners the FOG came in again... the sounds went away like a switch was turned off... the flagger was gone, covered up by the FOG... I could barely see Heath as he nodded for the gate to be opened... my horse “Doc” surged ahead with all his power... I could see the steer but not past him or on either side, the FOG was like watching the run through a key hole, only what is in the center could you see.

I repeated to myself, swing and position, swing and position, swing and position!!! Heath's head loop slammed shut and the steer's head, then body was pulled to the left... we rounded the corner and was in position behind the steer just to the left of center. The steers back feet came back once, then twice... my loop was launched and it felt good! The loop came all the way through to the left side (always a good sign)... it was time to gather up what I had and



get to the horn with it.

When “Doc” stops, he is solid, he does not lead by the saddle horn, the dally is unforgiving and I got it latched off. To my surprise, as the rope came tight I only had the left leg. It didn’t matter, with our lead going in we had 14 seconds to catch the last steer, we were 7 seconds plus 5 with a full 1 and a 1/2 seconds to spare we just won the Biggest, Richest Roping in the World!

Poor Heath, he faced his head horse, saw the leg and drew a blank. He did not know our time, the math wasn’t adding up fast enough, the announcer needed to be accurate before announcing anything, creating a few seconds delay. I gave a finger up jester to Heath that we were #1 and yet he wanted to hear something more official. His mind had hit overload and the expression on his face I will never forget. Someone was going to have to tell him to take a breath or he was going to pass out! And then, came the welcome words from Reed. “Lady’s and gentlemen there you have your winners”.

A flood of emotion just drops on you like a bomb, you want to shout but you feel more like crying. The anticipation of that moment is so great that the realization is hard to handle. A powerful sense of accomplishment just floods your system... yes, you are happy, but relieved is a closer description. Overwhelmed!

Heath took off following the steer out with our ropes dragging. I actually got off “Doc” petted him on the neck and began leading him towards Heath at the back end. Reed, The announcer yelled for us to come for a victory lap and that kind of broke the trance I was in. Heath rode back to me, we shook hands, I mounted up and we took off at a gallop around the arena.



I couldn’t stand it any more, I had to vent somehow. I clicked my heels and “Doc” who could feel the excitement kicked into high gear, we smoked around the arena in record time, he wanted to go and I just let him run. Heath and I then rode into the stripping chute area and retrieved our ropes, and then Reed was calling us back into the arena.

We rode back in, grinning from ear to ear, Reed met us in the arena in front of the crowd and was armed with a portable microphone. As if we could speak, he prompted us with some victory and strategy questions. Heath went first, I sat back, listened and soaked up the feelings of the moment. I had told Reed part way through the day that I had gotten an update report from Jenny, Don Proue’s daughter.

Upon my turn to speak, Reed announced that I had some good news from back home. I was happy to report to everyone there, that Jenny had called to tell me some good news. I related that in fact everyone present in the mornings “ride in” had prayed for Don. That was at 8:30 Montana time, at 10:30 Montana time Jenny got to watch her Dad, Don take his first 2 steps since his horse accident 45 days earlier. Praise the Lord! I thanked Perry for producing such a class act production, and I meant it.

The first person in the crowd to jump over the fence, to congratulate us both and shake our hands was PRCA World Champion team roper Clay Tryan. That to me was an honor, and personally meant a lot. NFR qualifier Shane Swanke was there as well, he and Heath grew up together near Malta, that really meant a lot to Heath especially. Thank you Clay and Shane!

Time switched gears on us about then, from seemingly time standing still, to now suddenly flooding by at an unbelievable rate. Congratulations were expressed to us both now from every angle, from Steve Miller, Judy Wagner and folks we knew to total strangers we did not know at all.

An example of how fast the news spread was not more apparent than this: we had no more gave our talks in the arena, met for a few minute in the arena with friends and the arena was getting ready for a high dollar horse sale. The prizes were to be awarded at an awards dinner in about 45minutes from then in another part of the Events center. I wanted to get "Doc" to the trailer, get him unsaddled and fed as he had been saddled for more that 12 hours straight. Before I got to the trailer with Doc, my cell phone rang; it was Scott Camper from the Bitterroot valley in Montana. I grew up with Scott and as kids we used to rope the dummy together, pretending to be different people we knew by mimicking how they swung their rope. Scott had just been scanning some USTRC website when the results of our roping flashed on his screen. Scott, who I had not talked to in 35years, recognized my name, somehow googled my previous home phone number, got my new home number off a message, called my wife, got my cell phone number and called me to express congratulations before I could lead my horse out of the Events center and across the parking lot to the trailer. It was crazy!

Heath, myself and Steve Miller met up again at the awards dinner. The food was good but I don't even remember what it was. The excitement was so intense, yet now a force of realization was coming hard.

To hear our names announced and to be officially awarded the saddles, buckles, rope savers and custom pads was proof it was real. Then came those first place checks for \$100,000 each, with our names in fresh print, that was still almost unbelievable.

My proudest moment of the awards evening came when I was given the custom bronze awarded and selected by the American Quarter Horse Association for my Champion heel horse "Doc". This was his award and he deserved it! "Doc", is a beautiful blue roan, 12 year old, gelding. Originally raised by the Harrington Ranch at Dillon MT. he is a Doc O Dynamite/Peppy San bred horse registered under the name of "Dynamite Blue Bar".

I had purchased "Doc" 5 years earlier from a good friend of mine Bill Wacker, who lives and ranches east of Roundup, MT. When Bill owned him he called him "grasshopper" (I am not sure why) but Bill mostly headed on him. His son Jody and the Griemsmens of Wyoming had been calf roping quite a lot on him. He was fast, powerful and could stop! Even before the Reno Event "Doc" had earned my respect and I have a soft spot in my heart for that horse. Thank you Bill Wacker, for selling me a special animal.

Picture below: Don Proue having a snuggle with his granddaughter Molly.



The bronze awarded had special meaning also, as the talented sculptor was none other than my friend Steve Miller. It was an honor to receive the bronze for my horse "Doc" and be presented it from it's creator Steve Miller. Thank you Steve, it means more than a lot to me.

As if our fairy tale could not get any grander, then the word started leaking out that yes in fact, I had stayed up late the night before, after the dinner and yes, I did buy our team in the Calcutta. I paid \$1,400 for our team and now they just passed out the Calcutta Checks of which we won first place, for an additional \$30,000. Talk about icing on the cake! As agreed, I would split this 50/50 with Heath, it was great! \$230,000 plus prizes for a couple of local jackpot team ropers from Montana, sounds like a fairy tale, but down deep it felt real and it felt real good.

Now, check this out! How much attention to details do World Champions pay. Clay Tryan told us that remarkably out of 250 steers, to randomly pick from, our high call steer was the same steer as their high call steer from the day before in the BFI. What are the odds of that?

