All About The Cowboy Life

MAKING A LIFELONG CAREER OUT OF DOING WHAT HE LOVED: STAR RODEO COWBOY JERRY HAWKS HAS LIVED THE ‘HAPPIEST LIFE EVER.’

By: GINA MARIE RODRIGUEZ
Photography: ROBIN JERKSTAD

Think back to when you were 6 years old. What did you dream of becoming when you grew up? Is that what you became?

Did your childhood dream so encompass your every thought that by age 7, you had already put those dreams into action? Did you start to do the work it took to make your dream come to fruition?

“All I ever wanted was to be a cowboy,” says Gerald Eckelstam, who is known in the cowboy realm as “Jerry Hawks.”

Hawks was born in the desert, 70 miles from Cedar City, Utah, in 1927. His desire to be a cowboy was so intense that at age 6, he ran away to follow his idol, Dick Truxt, who was in a rodeo not far from where he lived.

Truxt, who knew Hawks family, called his parents to let them know their son was OK. It was at this time that the little cowboy’s dream started to become a reality.

“In my mind, I could do anything, and if I could do it all over again, I would,” Hawks says.

He agreed that Hawks could stay with Dick and Juanita Truxt while not in school and rodeo. Hawks lived with his biological parents and two brothers, Leonard and Tom, in the spring to attend school.

Hawks recalls learning from the best and admiringly refers to Dick Truxt as “daddy.” His face lights up as he describes the amount of love and respect he has for his world champin daddy, who he proudly brags was called “Iron Man.”

“He was a strong man with huge arms,” Hawks says. “He didn’t get mad often, but you never wanted to be the one who did anger him.”

Truxt was inducted into the Rodeo Hall of Fame in 1948. Hawks attributes his popularity as a child with the older cowboys to Truxt. Hawks feels that the others treated him like a champion due to the level of respect and love they all had for his “daddy.”

Hawks started riding at age 7, and his ability to handle himself exemplified his own riding talents. By age 12, he was an amateur rodeo cowboy.

He joined the Rodeo Cowboys Association (RCA) and rode bulls and bucking horses. He eventually joined the PRCA, as it evolved into the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association.

He went through the ranks as he continued to win belts and titles. He proved to be a champion in his own right.

He knew the life of a rodeo cowboy was not an easy one.

“Being a cowboy, you just got to know that you are going to get hurt,” he says.

Every cowboy gets hurt.

His injuries have been as extensive as his amazing Hefeling career. He has broken his back twice, a leg five times and a hand twice, and he has broken every rib in his body.

At age 17, Hawks got drafted and fought in World War II. He also got drafted and fought in the Korean War. He was injured in the Korean War and hospitalized for five months.

He proudly recalls that the minute he returned from the wars and was able, he went right back to the rodeo. He is convinced that he was born to be exactly what he was: a cowboy.

The largest obstacle to rodeo life was money. At age 11, he was chasing wild mustangs, roping them and selling them. He bought dancing throughout his career, as he says he had an affinity for it. He never missed a dance, and says the ladies love cowboys.

“The song, ’Rodeo Romeo Cowboy,’ fit me to a T when I was younger,” he says.

Earning money was the only way to continue his dream of being a rodeo cowboy, so Hawks found what he loved and was good at, and he made money doing it. This included rodeos, teaching dance and working on ranches, roping the sick cattle and nursing them back to health.

“The more you win at rodeos, the more you make,” he says.

Hawks was able to support himself.

“When you travel, you need money,” he says. “So rodeos, you need to travel, so you have to have money for gas, tires, food, hotel, etc., so I did what I love.”

When discussing his jobs, he explains, “I did everything the cowboy way.”

In 1974, Hawks said goodbye to the rodeo.

“As much as I love the rodeo, you have to recognize when you are done and go find something else you love to do,” he says. “You cannot rodeo all your life. That is not how it works!”

He went on to ranching, which is what he did from then on. He traveled to every state going to rodeos with the exception of Maine, which did not have rodeos there. He even went to a rodeo in Australia. He ranched in California, Wyoming and Utah.

The greatest love of Hawks’ life is a woman named Lorie Callaway, who has cemented herself a place in Hawks’ heart.

“Lorie is my wonderful daughter, and nobody has ever been better to me than my girl,” he says. “She has stayed by my side for the entire life and loves me.”

His smile is even broader when her name rolls off his lips than when he discusses his “daddy.” He talks about what a great mother she is to his three children with such pride.

Watching Hawks reminisce about Callaway’s childhood makes the toughest cowboy look like an innocent child. His love and respect for his daughter is immeasurable. He boasts about how she went to nursing school in Hawaii, and how smart she is.

As he sings her praises, you can’t help but think of someone else’s determination and amazing work ethic. It appears the apple did not fall far from the tree.

Hawks doesn’t miss any opportunities to help up-coming rodeo cowboys. At the age of 64, this fierce cowboy got on a bull to teach them the “right way to do it.” He feels it is important to serve as a role model to the younger cowboys. If he can teach them to avoid possible injuries, he is happy to do it.

Hawks created the popular sport of mutton busting for children. The excitement children experience watching rodeos inspired him to create a way for them to experience it firsthand and get a true taste of the life – except they are on sheep.

Hawks is all about the cowboy life: teaching it, living it and living it. The cowboy world is a brighter place for the role he has played in it.

He is a true advocate of following your true passion. He describes his life as “the happiest life ever.” His secret: “Don’t give up on life; corner it, and do it. If you can’t do what you want, find something else that you love, and do that.”

Hawks lives at The Villages of Independence Hill, where he proudly displays his belts and pictures in an enclosed glass casing outside his window. He says he is “quite happy to live here” and share his cowboy stories with the other residents.

But you never wanted to be the one who did anger him.

“THE HAPPIEST LIFE EVER.”

COWBOY JERRY HAWKS HAS LIVED MAKING A LIFELONG CAREER OUT OF LIFE

COWBOY ABOUT ALL

LIFE

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And guess what: Independence Hill has dances, too! What a great life.

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Independence Hill is located at 20450 Huebner Road. To schedule a tour, or to learn more about Independence Hill, call 210-675-4000.