

Knuckles vs. Nevada's Skull

I was sixteen. It was summertime. In those days, it was my job to cut and rake hay ahead of the baling crew. I liked that because I could work alone. I would start as early as the hay was fit to cut and come home for dinner when I got low on fuel. Dinner was the midday meal. Supper was the evening meal before milking the cows.

While on my dinner break, I would take my horse Nevada for a run. I worked him hard to keep him in shape for Sunday afternoon runs. Many Sundays we would travel fifty miles or more visiting neighboring towns.

This particular day Nevada was in an ornery mood. He ran well but for some reason he wanted to run in the ditch. In hindsight, it may have been that his feet were sore and the pebbles on the gravel surface were painful. I was a proud and bullheaded young man. I would not have considered his comfort.

I had him at a full gallop but he was running at the bottom of the ditch. Both front legs hit a deep hole. The hole was a hidden washout to a culvert directly below. We rolled a complete somersault. I had a bridle on him but no saddle. I was lucky that I did not break his legs or my neck, but that did not occur to me at the time. I was strong and fast. I came up first with the reins in my hand. I was mad as hell. As he staggered to his feet, I hit him a powerful blow between the eyes with my right fist. He was a big horse but he fell back down and rolled his head.

I realized immediately that I had made a mistake. He got back to his feet in a few seconds. I had broken most of the bones of my hand. The hand swelled up like a football and was black for weeks. I doubt that horse remembered the hit even one day later. My broken knuckles never did heal just right. It is now fifty years later and my right hand has hurt every day of my life. It has been helpful, I guess. It helps me remember to control my temper.

In case you are wondering, I never did mention it to my Pa. He would have just shaken his head to let me know I was foolish and had it coming.