

Ella with the Cowboy Poet, Waddie Mitchell



Granddaughter Ella traveled with us to Rapid City for the Dakota Territory Bison Conference. For reasons that are not entirely clear, Gail and I seem to meet wonderfully interesting people. By the time we arrived, most folks were seated. That is normal. We selected a table for eight that was occupied by only two. One of them was a bit overdressed. I had noticed him earlier in the afternoon. I did not recognize him as a bison rancher but I do not know everybody. Nearly everyone comes to dinner dressed in western clothes and most of us wear a cowboy hat. This guy was a little “too” cowboy dressed. We introduced ourselves.

He was a very pleasant and well spoken man.

It was our great good fortune to learn this man was the after dinner entertainment.

“Waddie” is a western term for “cowboy.”

Waddie was born on and still runs a 30,000 acre ranch in northern Nevada.

He told us that cowboys of his youth created and recited poems around the campfires. It was their evening entertainment when far out on the range. The poems were about their daily lives and experiences.

He came to excel in that.

His professional career as a poet got a jump start in the 1980s. It was then that he appeared on Johnny Carson’s Tonight show. He was on that show three times. He has spoken his poetry all over the world.

He says he is the only cowboy who makes his living as a poet.

Waddie met Buddy Hackett when performing on the Carson show. Buddy liked him so much he introduced Waddie to his daughter, who became his wife.

Several of his children ranch with him. He said he has five kids. All girls, except four. Waddie is a colorful conversationalist.

I had to admit I was personally not familiar with him. That is not a surprise. I never have had time for popular television. Waddie said he could understand that. When he was first asked to appear on the Johnny Carson show he turned it down. He had not heard of Johnny Carson. The ranch did not have a TV or electricity.

We had an incredibly interesting time chatting with him through dinner.

After desert was served, Waddie took the stage and did a delightful job of entertaining. His poetry flows easily. It seems he is just speaking normally, then he slips into a rhythmic cadence and a grand story.

We are always so lucky. Tom