

Amarillo Ann

Before I met Ann I was as refined and had as much culture as a rotting coyote carcass. And what culture I had been exposed to I didn't like very much.

Ann called me out of the blue one day and said she'd written a book about her husband and wanted me to edit and publish it. Normally I would have said I wasn't interested because everyone has a book they've written that they feel the world is dying to read, yet 99 percent of the time it turns out like the Snoopy cartoon where Charlie Brown reads Snoopy a letter from his publisher: "They printed one copy of your novel. They haven't been able to sell it. They say sorry but your book is now out of print."

But this was different because Ann had written a book about her late, great, husband, Jack Harris, a legend in the West, huge farmer, cattle feeder and originator of Harris Fed Beef, the West's best name in beef. So I told Ann that perhaps we should talk, and that's how I came to be invited to her house for lunch.

Our relationship almost died before it began because she served me cold soup, limp asparagus, raw beef and a Mint Julep. "I can't eat this," I told her. (I did try try the Mint Julep which which I proceeded to spew. YUCK!)

So she cooked the beef, and we published her book. I like to think I helped Ann by editing stuff out of the book that would have gotten her in trouble, and together we sold over 10,000 copies of her hardback book.

That's how we became the oddest pair of friends. Ann was Texas aristocracy, owned a panhandle ranch, had been a stage and television star, owned opera houses in Santa Fe and Scottsdale, and had traveled the world. I, on the other hand, only owned the soil on the bottoms of my boots, had never been to an opera, and the only exotic locales I'd ever traveled to were ones that had bull sales.

Ann also opened four classy restaurants in her life including steakhouses in San Francisco and Scottsdale that were the first ones I'd ever been in that had quail's eggs and caviar on the menu and real leather on all the seats. They even had a pianist playing classical music in the bar who'd never been shot at. I was just glad I never had to pick up a check in one of her restaurants or I'd have had to cash in my 401K.

Ann was one of beef's best promoters, and you could order anything you wanted at her place, just as long as it was beef. One time she invited me to speak at an event to promote beef that dozens of the world's greatest chefs attended. I got to meet them and I even liked the fancy food that one or two of them cooked up.

Always trying to add a little culture to my life, Ann called up one day to inform me that she was taking my wife and I to the opera. I thought she was talking about the one down the street from her restaurant in San Francisco, but it was one in Rome, Italy, for gosh sakes!

I really had to talk fast to get out of that one.

Knowing that I'm a huge fan of western art, when Ann passed away she left me her art collection. I like modern art and impressionism about as well as I like cold soup and raw beef, and I'm not the kind of guy who sees things in paintings that look like someone threw a bunch of paint on a canvas and then walked on it.

Picasso leaves me as cold as Ann's asparagus did, which is a good thing because there were no Picasso's in Ann's collection. But there is one sculpture of hers that I simply cannot look at. It's a bunch of bronze metal brazed into what is supposed to be the head of a horse. And I guess it might faintly resemble one if you'd have consumed 12 Mint Juleps.

Being the unsophisticated hick that I am I thought that I might be missing something so I asked a respected cowboy artist friend of mine what he thought about the sculpture. He took a good hard look, studied it for several minutes from all angles and then proclaimed, "I guess it would keep a boat in one place."

It's the Pitts

Written by Lee Pitts

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