

Shamrock

By Ted Sherwin, from his memoirs, "The Sherwins of Northfork," 1993.

Dad prided himself on his horse sense, and with good reason. He had ridden and worked with horses all his life, and was a good judge of horses. He knew how to break and train them, and never let a horse buck with him, if he could help it. But there was one horse Dad owned that almost did him in, and was a source of great displeasure and embarrassment to him.

With a name like "Shamrock" you would expect him to be tame and gentle, and at times he was, but at other times he was an outlaw who could have been the son of Widow Maker, Midnight, or any of the other great bucking horses of rodeo fame. Dad got him in some kind of a trade from a renegade horse trader named Jimmy Tuff, who specialized in green-broke horses—just the kind Dad didn't like. Jimmy would round up a bunch of strays and unbranded colts, and have his hired hands "break" them.

This was done by roping and blindfolding the horse, putting a saddle on him, while someone "eared him down," and then, when the rider was set, turning the horse loose to let him buck until he got tired and stood still. That was a "green-broke" horse.

Although he should have known better, as he knew Jimmy's unsavory reputation, Dad was struck by the appearance of the big, bay gelding, and thought he could make a good hunting horse out of Shamrock. Wrong! Dad taught him manners: to stand quietly while being saddled, to stand still while Dad got on, neck rein, back up, etc. But every once in a while, for no reason at all, Shamrock would begin to buck furiously, and would keep it up long after he had dumped his rider. Don and Carl Huntington were both younger than Dad, and experienced with horses, and they tried everything they knew to break him of the spontaneous bucking sprees, but never could. One time Carl was on him when he came unglued and bucked right over a big pile of peeled house logs, sending them flying in all directions.

Eventually, Dad thought he had Shamrock trained well enough to take him on a hunting trip. It was elk season and Dad hired on as a guide with Cecil Huntington, who had some dudes lined up for a trip into the Thorofare, south of Yellowstone Park. Shamrock worked alright until they were through hunting and were packing out of the Thorofare to the Northfork. Dad was riding "drag," making sure that the dudes and the pack horses stayed bunched up, and starting down a steep trail on Eagle Creek he decided to get off and walk, leading his horse. The other horses got out of sight around a bend in the trail as Dad started walking, and suddenly, for no reason Dad could figure out, Shamrock snorted loudly and jumped right over Dad's head on the steep trail, kicking him in the chest with both hind feet as he plunged down the trail. The force of the kick flipped Dad back up the trail and knocked the wind out of him. He lay there gasping for breath and trying to figure out if any ribs were broken, wondering if he would ever catch up with the pack

string. He didn't feel much like walking, and he figured that someone would see the loose horse and come back to see what had happened, and he was right.

One of the party came back, leading Shamrock, and found Dad sitting beside the trail. After trying his wobbly legs, Dad decided he could get on and ride. Then he noticed that one of his spurs was missing, and a search was started, up and down the trail from the spot where Shamrock had jumped over him. Finally, as Dad shoved his hat back and scratched his head in wonder, he glanced up to see the sun glinting off a bright object above his head. It was the missing spur, dangling from a branch high enough to require getting back on the horse before he could reach it.

“It only hurt when I laughed,” Dad recalled later, but he had the imprint of two horse shoes on his chest to show anyone who doubted his story. Shamrock was sold to another horse dealer soon after that. The spurs served Dad well until he quit riding and gave them to me. I still have them, and I wear them whenever I ride my horse, Buddy. They are of great sentimental value, as well as being almost antique, now. They are at least 70 years old. Dad had a fine Hamley saddle that Clifford used, and the saddle was stolen from a cabin his family had in the forest near Spokane. The spurs, and a pair of Justin boots, are the only remaining items of riding gear Dad used .

The End