

## How Far Can a Horse Run?

*By Marilyn Reeves*

For Irv Sternberg's Novel Writing Class (an extra 'perk' for members of the Windsor Gardens Writers Group), I dragged out the Western novella I started a couple of years ago. I never thought I'd see the day when I would actually write a novel – let alone a Western – but it's been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

It all began the day I was sitting in my easy chair, eyes closed, and for some unfathomable reason the description of a handsome Western lawman started running through my head. The words seemed to come out of nowhere – unbidden – drifting up out of my subconscious like a waking dream.

So I went into my office and started writing down the words. They just kept coming and coming, until pretty soon I had an actual story going. And eventually it developed into a novella.

But a couple of weeks ago, I got a real surprise when I decided to look on line to see how many words constitute a full-length novel. A novel is defined as being 40,000 words or more. I've written over 76,000 words and counting. So, completely unaware, I have written a novel!

The reason for the 'and counting' reference is that I've been reviewing, revising, and adding to each chapter to present to the others for critiquing during Irv's bi-weekly class. And I've incorporated many of their suggestions, which also adds to the word count.

During our last class session, I was hung up on how many miles a posse could travel between midnight and daybreak. My original concept was 33 miles, but the guys said something along the line of, "There's no way a horse can cover 33 miles in six hours!" So I had to do some research, as well as some dreaded Arithmetic.

I found that a healthy horse can walk thirty miles, at roughly four miles per hour, in a day's time, so long as he's given short breaks along the way. And theoretically, one could trot a hundred miles in twenty-four hours, but he'd probably expire after having won an all-time endurance contest!

So I've had to revise my manuscript. Rather than having my fictional town of Willow River, Wyoming be thirty miles south of the Grand Tetons, I have now changed the distance between the two places to fifteen miles. And I have added an extra hour till sunup. (It takes place during the winter months, so I could stretch the time to seven hours.)

I've had to go back through my entire manuscript and search for any reference to miles traveled by a horse. I sure hope I've got my math right this time, because Arithmetic is my very worst subject! Writing, on the other hand, is my very favorite thing to do!