

Died Laughing

By Marilyn Reeves

On a jeep tour through Southern Arizona our guide Dave stopped at an old cemetery surrounded by a broken down fence. Dave pointed out some of the old wooden markers, their hand carved inscriptions barely legible. But there was one black granite gravestone at the back of the cemetery that clearly displayed the following words: 'Here lies Chester A. Scraggs/1824-1892/Died Laughing.'

"Died laughing?" I said.

"Yes, ma'am. It's quite a story. Apparently, old Chester here was a driver for one of the wealthy ranchers in the vicinity. One day he was told to drive over to Tucson and pick up Senator Watson who was due to arrive on the two o'clock train.

"So Chester left early in the morning in order to meet the train on time. When he arrived, he held up a sign saying 'Buford Ranch' so the Senator could easily identify his ride. Chester loaded Watson's luggage into the back of the wagon and helped him climb up and get situated in the shotgun seat.

"Along the dusty road back to the ranch, they happened to pass by a sign for a little settlement called Dinwitty. But as with most of these grave markers here, the letters were blurred and the senator asked Chester what it said.

"'Oh, that's the little town of Dinwitty, sir,' replied Chester.

'Dimwitted?' said the senator.

'No, sir. Dinwitty. Although I reckon some of the folks who live here might be a touch dimwitted.'

"'Oh, I see,' said the senator.

"But for some reason that tickled old Chester's funny bone and he started to chuckle. And pretty soon he started to giggle. Then he started laughing out loud. His laugh reminded the senator of a braying donkey. 'Dimwitted!' Chester kept saying, as he slapped his knee and gasped for breath between guffaws.

"Eventually, the senator became annoyed and asked him to please calm down. Well, Chester somehow managed to contain his mirth, emitting only the most inconspicuous snort now and then, until they finally made it back to the ranch.

"But that evening, when his wife asked him how his day went, Chester could hardly get the words out between all the hees and haws to tell her what happened.

"Elsa chuckled a bit, but when Chester couldn't stop laughing she finally said, 'Alright, Chester, that's enough. It's really not all that funny.'

"Chester managed to quiet down until he got into bed. Then the giggling and chuckling started up all over again. This went on for several hours until finally Elsa shouted, 'Chester, if you don't

stop that confounded giggling I'm gonna shoot you with that there shotgun. You keep shaking the bed and waking me up!

"Well, sad to say, Chester simply couldn't stop his giggling and jiggling, so Elsa followed through on her promise. She shot poor Chester right through the head. And then she rolled over and went back to sleep.

"That's her gravestone over yonder. Her final request was that they wouldn't bury her anywhere near old Chester. Maybe she was afraid he'd wake her from her eternal rest and he'd get the last laugh after all."