

## School

*by Suzy Hopkins*

Six year old Joey rode one of his dad's horses the five mile round trip to school in Fallon, Nevada. Even in the snow and rain. He loved school and would stay as late as the teacher would allow him, reading every book in the one room school house.

When he turned eight his father finally allowed him to ride one of the horses he had tamed, to school. During the day the horse grazed on the school grounds but couldn't run away because two of his feet were loosely tied together. His teacher found books at tag sales and brought them for his enjoyment.

When he was ten he sold his first mustang that he had carefully, skillfully tamed. Over the next six years he saved his money in an old coffee can from the more than a dozen mustangs he sold. On his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday he quit school, bought a truck and a saddle and joined the rodeo circuit as a bull rider. You follow the rodeos - never staying in one place more than a week. His constant companions were his books. He picked up new ones and re-read the old ones. He was still going to school, just by himself on his own terms.

By now he wanted to be called Joe. There is good money in bull riding but it does horrendous things to your body. Joe had been laid up with a broken shoulder so he spent the time reading and thinking.

A racetrack is part of the fairgrounds where the rodeos are held. He inquired about horses for sale that could no longer race due to injury or slowness. He found two mares and proceeded to teach them to turn on a dime, stop instantly and obey commands. He found a book at the library about polo ponies. He read it and re-read it learning about a new career that was kinder to his body. He trained the mares for exactly what polo players wanted and then sought out polo grounds in California. Polo matches travel like rodeos. He followed that circuit, buying and selling and training horses in his competent, thoughtful way. But, Joe always had his books. He told me once that he felt like Thomas Jefferson who was quoted as saying, "I cannot live without books." Both these men knew learning doesn't just happen in school.