

Chapter 1 The Homecoming

“Hi Babe! This is Bob. How you doin gal? Sorry for calling so late , but we just got in. ” says Bob to the voice on the other end. For a moment there was deathly silence and then a voice answered in surprise saying, “ Oh Bob! Bob, Hackberry, I’m sorry, I didn’t recognize your voice. This is Nancy, Ella’s Mom. She’s not here right now. She wasn’t expecting you just yet ; none of us were. We thought you’d be in a hospital for awhile. Where are you staying?” Bob was a little confused, thinking , “ What’s going on? I expected Ella to come pick me up. The Army messaged her as to when I would get in . She knew that I planned on sacking out with them for a couple of days. Damn , I’ve never heard Ella’s Mom sound so cold and distant to me.” A sickening thought began to kill all the joy of a homecoming for Bob. “As a handicapped man, was he not welcome, now?”He said, “Mrs Holmes, I’ll call back

**later. I'm calling from a pay phone right now .
I don't have a number just yet."**

Bob stood in a trance in the phone booth, just thinking and staring at the headpiece. " This couldn't be real. He and Ella were talking about getting married. What happened? No, there must be a mistake. She had been so happy that he was coming home from Korea. Her last letter was full of wonderful love words. That was a month ago while he was still in South Korea. I know that the Army notified her family when I'd be arriving." " But Bob. ", he said out loud to himself, "Remember, your last letter to her also informed her of the devastating news that you'd lost your right leg to a mortar shell explosion. On that hospital ship , there was no mail." A fear of what was to come, was not a pleasant thought. He'd heard unbelievable stories of other disabled vets that were considered burdensome and were rejected to a Rest Home when they returned.

Slowly Bob hung up the phone and maneuvered his crutches to leave the booth.

Wheel chairs had been provided for him and a number of others, but Bob was a fighter and the physical activity of working Crutches suited his desire to overcome his disability and really helped his depressed attitude . He forced himself to hustle along to a waiting bus that would take everyone to a hotel reserved by the Army .

Sadly Bob watched a large number of his fellow passengers joyfully reuniting with family and friends that had come to the dock landing. As an orphan, he had no known family. His Ella and her parents were his only family ties. Bitterly , disappointed , he tried to keep a good attitude, hoping he was wrong about Mrs Holmes and avoiding more of the self pity and depression he had been fighting.” Yeah, “ he was thinking, “ self pity won’t help a damn thing and it sure won’t grow my leg back. I’ve gotta make it with what I’ve got left. Thank God I didn’t lose both legs. A lotta guys are a whole lot worse off than me. I may hate it, but we’ll just have to

see what tomorrow brings.”Bob didn’t get much sleep that night.

The tomorrow he hated to see, brought him the bad news he feared. Once again calling for Ella, the phone was answered by Mrs Holmes, who said, “ Bob , I’m sorry ,but Ella is not here. She left for the Rodeo in Phoenix early this morning, she mentioned calling you but considering your condition, didn’t want to disturb your rest . If you could leave a number, when she gets back, I’ll have her call you.” Bob was giving her his phone number, when suddenly in the background Mr Holmes asked , “ Is that Bob Hackberry calling again. I’d like to speak to him.” He took the phone saying , “ Hello Bob. This is George. How you doin Boy? Sure tough about the leg. How’s it coming along?’ Bob replied , “ Hi Mr. Holmes, it’ll be awhile healing, and I can’t get around much , but I’m doin Ok considering. I was calling for Ella, but I guess she’s not around.”

George cleared his throat saying, “ You know Bob, we’ve been talking and maybe I’m

not the one that should tell you this, but there's something you should consider. You're outta the Rodeo business now with that leg problem and you know Ella, she's gonna want to be on the road with her horses every week that she can. You know as well as me that she's gonna need help and she was counting on you to be there for her to help with the training and exercise. Without some one to help ,she'll never be able to go for that National Championship she dreams of. All of the driving and care for her horses is just too much .” Bob replied, “ You know Mr. Holmes, I was looking to quit Rodeo before I lost this leg ; settle down, get some kind of a regular job and raise a family. My Rodeo days were gonna be over. I loved to compete in all of the events, but I thought Ella was ready to hang it up too.”

George exclaimed, “ No Bob. You sure read her wrong. She lives and breathes her horses and running those Barrels! There's no way she'll give that up. Somewhere I think you got your wires crossed. She's very

disappointed that you lost a leg, broken hearted and really disturbed about it. She knows what it might entail caring for a disabled vet and lose any chance she'll ever have to go for the big money on the Barrels. Bob, I know it's a hard thing, but look at it from Ella's view point, you know she's right. It's just a catastrophe for both of you."

Bob replied, " Mr Holmes, no one but the person that has to live with it can know the mental depression and physical catastrophe of losing a limb,. I'd gladly give up all Rodeo awards and money to have my leg back. I thought Ella was much stronger than that. Please believe me it's a whole lot easier to lose a Rodeo career than a leg. I gave Mrs Holmes my phone number. Please forward my number and have Ella call me . I'll be here at this number for three days". Bob hoped and even prayed that he was wrong. Depressed and scared now that he had absolutely no one to turn to for help; he anxiously waited for a call, but none came. The Army was shipping

**him to a VFW Rehab Center in Fort Worth
Texas.**

Chapter 2 VFW Rehab

Days later he had been introduced to the physical disability ward and met a large number of veterans there for adaptation to new prosthetic limbs and devices to help minimize disabilities. Most of these war vets would eventually be rehabilitated to a degree that would permit them to perform different jobs. The intent of the facility program was to bring independence and self sufficiency to all of the Vets. Bob entered the program eagerly and looked forward to each new day of effort.

Two months had gone by and though he'd written and mailed Ella his new phone number and address, he never heard from her. He just couldn't convince himself that she was outta his life Finally accepting the bitterness of rejection, he was thinking, "Well, it's like my leg I guess, it's over and

she's gone. It is what it is. Deal with it!" He cleared his mind of all the anger and self pity. Quit looking back and concentrate on the future. He was finally able to walk with his new BK (below the knee)leg and foot. Fortunately , he still had a knee and this made his ability to walk a lot easier than a lot of his fellow patients. Every day was a training day of some degree and Bob looked forward to being released. Unfortunately he had no training or skills that would enable him to take a job. His work since graduating from the High school orphanage was all Rodeo. He had joined the Army, hoping for training and a career. It was his only family. "Yes" , he was thinking , " I know horses and cattle. I earned good money competing especially in tie down calf roping, but those days are gone forever. I'll have to ask around and see if some of these vets can give me an idea for what I should look for."

As his progress improved, he spent less and less time in a wheel chair and more on his feet. During one of his turns between the

walking rails, he over heard a lady cursing one of the assistants saying “ Damn you! How would you know what it feels like, trying to get work missing an arm.” The assistant replied, “Ma’am, I do know. If you hadn’t noticed, I’m missing half of mine.” The lady immediately apologized, saying, “ Miss, I’m sure sorry, I never realized, you seem so natural , I never noticed . I’m sure sorry for my terrible comment ,but you of all people know how I feel . I haven’t learned to deal with a catastrophe like this. I wish that I had your attitude. How do you do it? All I feel is anger, self pity and hopelessness.” Bob looked and saw a pair of ladies; both missing part of their right arm. One, that he recognized; was working as an assistant, helping the other to learn to maneuver her prosthetic arm and hook like device of a hand.

The assistant said, “ Joan, you have to accept the fact that this is all you have left and regardless of how angry you get, it won’t change things one bit. At least try to

maneuver your arm to open that hook. It'll work to help you pick up things. Go ahead, try it." Joan cursed when she couldn't move it correctly. Shaking her arm , she said, ' Ok , the damn thing didn't work. Now what?" The assistant replied, " You've got to bend the elbow, now try it again." Joan did as she was instructed and was rewarded with success. Bob watched as the ladies worked together and felt a pleasure of accomplishment for the young lady assistant. She seemed to be so friendly and considerate for such a pretty young woman. He had observed her working there before, and wanted to meet her. Going around the outside , he introduced himself.

He asked her about her job there and told her he was really impressed with her attitude and ability to train others. She replied , " Thanks, Kristy Pierce USMC, sorta retired . Lost my lower arm in Korea, bomb shrapnel . Yeah, it took me awhile and I can't say I'm any better than you or anyone else here when it comes to losing a limb. You'll never get over it, but life goes on and you can

make it easier on yourself by using what you've got and accept it. I've been able to pass my experience on to other patients. I've been here for six months as an assistant, but in a few weeks , I have to move on and get back to my civilian life. The government has finally finished with the reorganization of this facility's staff and I'm gonna be out of a job."

Bob, traded his story with her and asked what her plans were. Kristy explained that partial disability retirement wouldn't fully cover her living expenses and she would have to find work that was suitable. She also explained to Bob that he would be in the same boat, when he was released. The training programs were all overcrowded with disabled veterans and the government was pushing for as many early releases as possible. Looking at his walking progress, she said, "Bob, they'll be calling you for interview, pretty soon. You're getting around much better than most. Do you have family or friends that you can stay with until you find a job?" Bob couldn't hide a reply that reflected

some of his bitterness and the hopelessness he had for finding a job.

He said, “ No, I thought I had, but, let’s just say it’s a whole lot easier to lose a fair weather fiancée, than a leg.” Kristy answered, “Oh, I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to be nosy. Unfortunately I’ve heard a lot of similar stories. Some folks find it too hard to accept and turn their backs on family or former friends. Personally, I lost my husband, but considering everything , I counted it as no loss. I have learned to carry on and need to row my own boat. I don’t like the bad memories and try to stay away from them.”

Bob said, “ You are an exceptional lady. I hope that I can reach your degree of acceptance. I’m trying to do just that, but the future for me looks mighty scary. I don’t have any, but rodeo skills and they aren’t in much demand considering everything. I have to find some kind of work that I’m suited for. You , on the other hand, seem to have a future in assisting disabled vets.” Kristy replied, “ I wish that were true Bob, but without a

college degree, I'm not eligible for a Civil Service position in Rehab. Right now I've been pressed into helping because of the huge demand"

"Normally, with my education, I could only qualify for assistant nursing and I don't intend to spend my life changing sheets and emptying bed pans. I've applied for and been accepted for a job with the Texas Border Patrol . My ex Marine status plus the fact that I'm a good horseback rider, qualified me. They need riding patrols in some of the rough remote areas that have become easy access for illegal's. They don't think my handicap will be an issue. You being rodeo, and horse savvy, I'm sure they'd be interested in you also. I've got their number if you'd like to give it a try." Bob replied, " Kristy, you're a life saver! I've been worried sick about what to do about work. If they'll accept me, this could be a job that's right up my alley. God, I can't wait to give them a call!"

Two days later Bob received a return call and made arrangements to send in an

application. This was great news because he was referred to a lady operating the hiring office for the Eagle Pass Border Patrol station in Del Rio. She assured him that his horse handling experience was urgently needed for that area. Bob immediately put his stock handling experience on paper, but had to qualify his application with the fact that he was a handicapped veteran missing the lower part of his right leg. Having done that, he almost didn't send it, thinking, " It's probably a waste of time. They probably need someone to train and handle unbroken stock. I'm not sure that I can handle that." He said as much to Kristy, but she replied, " Bob don't belittle yourself. You're doing great and if I know anything about Rodeo, anyone that can ride a Saddle Bronc like you have, can surely handle any horses they may have. You're a wonderful guy and I'm thrilled with your progress. "

Other events at home, changed Kristy's plans and she had to leave immediately. Bob was disappointed because he was just getting to know and enjoy talking with her.

She assured him that she valued his friendship and really enjoyed their short time together. She promised him that she would stay in contact . This was not to be . Bob was transferred to another Rehab Center in Austin for outpatient processing and had no means of contacting her. Bob was thinking, “ Another bad break, but maybe someday we’ll run into each other again. I guess I should be getting accustomed to bad luck, but I have to look at it like one door closing and another opens. Maybe tomorrow will be a better day.”

A month down the road and Bob was scheduled for release. He had made a number of applications, but light menial labor was all that he had found. Fortunately, his application response for that Border Patrol job had been forwarded through to Austin. He was overjoyed with the prospects for a job with horses. Yes! They wanted a personal interview in Del Rio at the Eagle Station. Soon , everyone at the Station knew he had a possible job offer with the Border Patrol.

Bob was now an ol'hand at walking with his new leg. He had to be careful though of too much walking and causing soreness. He figured a little soreness was something he could easily live with. Any thing to get out and on his own was what he wanted. Following his Out Patient orientation, he was released.

Chapter 3 Del Rio Border Patrol

He was going to wait for a bus, but a knock down shocker awaited him in the parking lot. It was Kristy Pierce, in a car waiting to take him to the train Station! Bob couldn't get over the surprise, he was overjoyed; his ten questions came tumbling out and finally Kristy laughed and said, " Bob, one at a time, please. I guess that I took a liking to you and decided to track you down. I was told you might get on the Border Patrol and I thought you might could use a little help with getting to Del Rio. I know all of the office girls at Fort Worth. It was easy to corral you; especially since you have a bum leg." Bob Laughed and said, " Gal you don't know how pleased I am to hook up with you again. I've been kicking myself for weeks because I didn't get your home address or a phone

number . God! It's good to see you again!"
Kristy said, " I wasn't sure, Bob; and I don't
give that information to everyone. In your
case , I liked your fighting attitude and I
enjoyed the little time we were together. You
kinda wore on my mind , so when I heard
about your release and appointment for
interview in Del Rio, I thought I'd give you a
hand. So, like it or not, here I am. Throw your
suitcase in the back seat and let's go. The
train leaves in two hours for Del Rio and I'm
still learning to drive with this new arm."

Questioning her about her job and the
other suitcase in the car, she said, " I'm going
to Del Rio also. My job is waiting. I've already
been down there and had to go back home for
an emergency. I just took a chance that I was
right about you and rented this car. Feller, I
was sure hoping that I didn't waste my time
and money chasing after some Rodeo Bum."
Bob reached out pulling her to him in a hug
and said, " Lady , I don't know where we're
headed, but you're the answer to a prayer.
You have no idea what you've done for me

just being here. I've suffered through some really bad times, but right now I couldn't be happier."

Kristy patted Bob's cheek, winked at him and said, "Ok , we've jawed long enough. Time to git on down the road." Bob wasn't sure how she meant that.

That evening in Del Rio, Bob got a Motel room and Kristy showed him a bus stop where he could get a ride to the Eagle Station for his interview. Kristy said, " Bob, I'd offer you my couch , but I'm afraid my Landlord wouldn't like it. He really frowns on single ladies anyway. Next week I'm scheduled to move into a room at the Agents Quarters and I'll get out of my hotel room. If you are hired, they'll offer you a room there also. I may not see you tomorrow, I'm scheduled for training. I'll catch up with you maybe tomorrow night." Bob had nothing but warm heart felt thanks for Kristy and promised himself that someday he'd get a chance to repay her for her friendship.

The interview went well and little mention was made concerning his disabled condition. More emphasis was placed on his understanding of horses and their illnesses, disposition, conformation and training. He had never considered his knowledge to be exceptional in those areas, but the interviewing Agent, John Colton, seemed to think well of all of his answers. It was obvious to Bob that he would not be a riding Agent, but some way involved with procurement and training.

Following the interview Colton said, “Bob, I’m gonna recommend you for the job, but we have a 90 day trial period for all employees. Please understand that during that period , you can be terminated for any violation of our rules and regulations. I want you to thoroughly go over and understand these before you accept employment, they are very strict. The reason I emphasize this is because we are under investigation right now for improper conduct by some of our Agents. Bob was thrilled to get the recommendation

and read through all of the common sense rules and eagerly signed the document. Two more Office stops and Bob was hired as an L3 Livestock Handler .

That evening was a grand celebration for him and Kristy. Bob had nailed down his job and Kristy had completed her training. Things were really looking good for both of them. Bob's training and indoctrination would begin immediately. In the meantime he and Kristy spent every evening visiting in the Quarters library. It was during their family and war stories that Bob was surprised to learn that Kristy was a member of the Rodeo Women's Association and a former winner of the Wyoming State All around Championship competing in gymkhana events and professional Barrel racing. A very surprised Bob exclaimed, " My God Kristy! How long ago was that? I rode broncs in Wyoming just two years ago. You mighta been on the same Barrel Racing card with Ella Holmes. Do you recognize that name? " Kristy said, " No Bob . Is she the girl you were telling me about?"

Bob replied , “ Yeah, but I’m sorry I brought her up. Let’s talk about you. Have you got a competition horse at home?” Kristy rubbed her eyes and said, “ No, not anymore. My Gypsy Girl was the reason I had to go home sudden like. She developed a bad colic and died. Yeah, my old bedroom is full of ribbons and trophies. I was competing when I met up with my ex Don Winters a pretty good Bronc rider. Shoulda known better, but I was a naive seventeen and got too involved. Finally married him. I joined the Army against his wishes. Things weren’t going well between us and I needed to get my High School diploma in order to get a job. They offered me two years of free College, to boot.
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“ I had finished my high schooling when the Korean War broke out and everything changed. All promises were off. He dumped me when I came back with shrapnel damage. What you see of my arm , Bob is only part of it . I carry a lotta scars under my sweater from internal injuries. I guess it’s my fault, but

things were going down hill with Don and his drinking before I joined the Army". She wiped tears from her eyes, saying, "Hey, I agree with you. Let's talk about something else. Old painful memories are just something to forget. What have they got in mind for you?"

