

CHAPTER 1

Tragic Beginning

“Damn you and your Rodeo riding, what am I supposed to do Jeff? The check account is empty and I’m overdrawn. That was my car loan payment you used for your entry fee for that Beat the Beast Bull riding thing. You’re busted all to hell and haven’t had a winning ride this year. Damn you! Are you listening Jeff? I haven’t been to a descent dinner in months and look at my dress. Half the girls I know wouldn’t be caught dead in this thing. Yeah, some kind of a Champion Bull Rider you are. A Has Been Jeff. You’re scared. That Brocious bull has got you shakin in your boots. You’re a Damn Has Been! I’ve had enough! No don’t beg me Jeff. It’s over. I’ve already packed and I’m outta here tonight. Charley’s gonna pick me up. I’ll be partying with the girls tonight. I would say Good Bye, but I’d be lying. Nothing has been Good for us. Shoulda said ‘Bye!, when I met you”

Tears came to his eyes in self pity as he watched Vicki, his beautiful girlfriend, walk out the door. Damn, he couldn’t even talk. He was Jeff Dunnigan, Champion Bull Rider for two years, but now busted . No money and broken up from that Dallas Rodeo Bull Ride. Ol” Brocious had really got to him this time. Busted jaw and a couple of broken ribs. He wished Vicki had at least given him time to reason with her. He couldn’t believe the girl he thought he loved would just walk out on him when he was so badly hurt . Thank God his medical Insurance was paid up for this year. Looked like he was surely gonna need it and this Motel room. He had to get out. No money and no where to go. Vivki had taken the car. He could have lived in it for a few days, but No, she’s gonna go with Charley. Yeah, he was gonna pick her up all right, but Jeff knew it would be the other way around.

Slowly, depressed, and feeling sorry for himself, he climbed outta bed. Damn ! he hurt all over. That left leg had really taken a hit. Lucky

it wasn't broken, but walking on it was plain murder and he almost passed out pulling his boot on. He had a cup of soup from the hospital. Had to eat it with a straw, no chewing. The hospital had released him , but that didn't help him walk. That wheel chair would feel good right now. Thinking about it, 'What do I do, once I get outta here? No where to go and Dad's ol'place south of Globe Arizona might as well be a thousand miles away. I've gotta get hold of someone and borrow a few bucks. Damn wish I hadn't blown it all these last couple of years with Vicki. High Roller, Yeah that's me Jeff Dunnigan Champion Bull Rider, Ride'em High, Wide and Handsome Look at me ! The very Best for two years! Yeah look at me , blew it all on the good times with Vicki and her crowd. Yeah, never figured it would end. Bright lights and pretty women and now looking for a loan to get eatin money. Damn that Bull Ol'Brocius, he started it all, busted me four times and now here I am really busted. Am I afraid of him? Did he bring out a White Feather in me? I hope it's not over for me. Damn, I'm still a good Bull rider, but has been cowboys don't earn money watchin somebody else win. I wonder if God takes pity on old busted Bull riders? I know Dad always wanted me to be a man of God."

Out on the street an hour later, Jeff was painfully walking to the local Pharmacy with his possibles in a hand bag .He needed to get Asprin when he saw in the distance the Emergency entrance for the Hospital. Thinking, " Hey maybe ,I can make that Insurance work for me. I need to get this leg x-rayed , must be something broken with it hurtin like it is." Jeff got his Insurance card out for the receptionist and right away they pointed him to a seat in the Admission waiting room. The place was full, and it looked like a long wait. He was thinking, "This wasn't such a bad idea. It's cold outside, I'll just hang out in here. Maybe they'll get around to me sooner or later , but I've gotta get that leg looked at. Something's wrong with it." Two hours he sat there waiting until they had a cubical open and when they finally took him in, he lay on their bed and napped until they could get around to x-ray. Finally some where after midnight, a Doctor came and

apologized for their delay, Couple of bad accidents had everyone tied up.

After X-ray, the doctor had him taken to a room. They let him take his hand bag with him. There was gonna be a wait until the following day to have the plate analyzed. There was no apparent break, but it could be a hairline fracture. Jeff was Ok with that. He needed a place to stay and now he had access to a telephone. He was thinking, ‘ I can call a few friends and hit’em up for a loan to get Bus fare to Globe. That old place of Dad’s ain’t much, but at least I’ll have a place to stay awhile. In the mean time I can milk my insurance for a couple of days. He felt a little guilty for what he was doing, but figured the high dollars he had paid for it cut the guilt .”

The x-ray showed no fracture but the doctor said it was probably just a bad bone bruise. Might take a couple of weeks to heal and it would be best if he didn’t walk too much. His stay at the hospital was for three days and allowed him to round up a couple of loans. This was a common thing with Rodeo folks ; he’d been hit up many times himself. Sometimes you got your money back and sometimes not. The ups and downs of Rodeo was a very common thing. Injuries were the worse and a lotta cowboys wouldn’t be coming back to compete. Maybe, he’d be one of them.

Vicki was told that he was in the Hospital, but he never heard from her. He was glad that she held the charge card in her name and the car he’d bought for her now carried a loan note on it in her name also. Looking Back, he was thinking, “ She wanted everything in her name and I never kept too close an eye on how she spent my money. My own fault. I don’t have anything now, but Dad’s old place. Reckon she’d have that too if we’d been married. Guess I just lucked out there. Too bad I didn’t stick with one of those girls I went to school with, but the money and bright lights took me away to the big cities. Hasn’t been worth it, but too late now , I’ve gotta put some kind of life together. I’m just thankful that I have some place to go. Dad said it

ain't in the Bible ,but God, I guess you do watch out for fools. Thank you."

Two weeks later Jeff was getting desperate, the Homeless Facility in Dallas was thankfully sponsored by a number of the local Churches and supported by the City. He had used the local YMCA as much as possible and hung out at the train and Bus station inside outta the cold until the folks there ran him off. Finally down to a hundred bucks, it looked like he'd wind up in that homeless place every night. When he'd given up trying to get work in Dallas with no place to live and no transportation; tickets to Globe took most of his money.

The Greyhound bus was crowded, but a whole lot better than trying to hitch hike. Most folks were afraid to pick you up, especially when you looked as rough as he was. Very few on the Bus even spoke to him. It seemed that everyone had their own problems and he looked around wondering what folks thought looking at him. He didn't want to push himself on anyone and spent most of the ride napping or reading magazines His busted mouth hurt when he said anything. That last ride was a vivid picture in his memory. Ol'Brocious had made two leaps to the left and he felt the rope slipping . His butt was a foot high and Brocious made another violent high dive it threw him forward, his jaw meeting the bone hard head of ol' Brocious. He couldn't remember for sure, but the Buzzer went off just as he hit the ground and received a parting shot in the ribs from a back foot. Yeah, he was thinking , " I better look for something else to do. I'm only twenty six, but feel like I'm fifty. Keep doing this and I'll never see fifty. Gotta admit it, I'm just washed up as a Bull rider."

When he arrived in Globe he was able to hitch hike down to his Dad's ol'place in Kearny . Folks in that area were very accommodating and Jeff had no trouble getting a ride almost right to the ol'desert adobe house he was raised in. His Dad's ol' farm hand, Estaban was overjoyed to see him. He and Maria still lived in the Farm Hands

quarters that once held a crew of nine. They had turned it into a comfortable place to spend their last days. Jeff could see his Dad's place was pretty dirty from the desert winds and inside critters had taken over, but Esta had kept it from becoming a hang out for squatters and Mexicans crossing the Border.

Going into the house he could see the Rodeo posters and photographs his Dad had been so proud of . He went to his Dad's desk and there were a dozen or more of the silver belt buckles, he'd won over the years. Some were almost jewelry quality and his immediate thoughts were to find a buyer. He remembered that he had a lot of horse gear that he could also sell. A couple of beautiful Herford roping saddles would buy groceries for a good while. Going to his room , he shuffled through a box of his old records and papers he'd held on to instead of burning. He was thinking, " A bunch of junk ; old Christmas cards and stuff even from his school days. Gotta leave it for now and clean this place up. Gotta sleep here tonight."

Two weeks had gone by and with Esta's pick up he'd been into town and made a few sales. His cupboard was full of food and things were not so desperate. The house was now like his Mom had always kept it and Esta was saying ' He'd make someone a good wife.' His jaw was doing well and the ribs were causing him less pain. The leg was still a problem, but coming along. His biggest concern was, he didn't know what he was going to do; couldn't live this way for very long. He needed a job.

It was the morning following a big sand storm that things took a big turn in his life. He saw a small truck pull off the road and park near the only tree anywhere around. It was an ironwood and it was a wonder no one had cut it down for firewood. It did offer a small patch of shade and it looked like that's what the driver wanted. Jeff thought no more about it. Folks stopped along there frequently. His thoughts were on the stuff in his Dad's desk. Bills and things of the past, he rooted through. studying old photographs of his Mom and Dad. He was

wishing for those good ol'days and loving the memories, when he thought he heard a scraping noise. He was wondering if he had a ground squirrel problem. He knew that his hearing wasn't the best and then the noise got louder. He quickly got to his feet and there coming in his yard was a little girl dragging a large plastic water jug. He called, ' Hey little girl whatta you got there?' the small voice answered, 'Mister can you help me? Mama's hurt real bad. She needs some water.' Jef said, ",Honey , sure I'll fill that jug; is that you parked down the road?' Little girl crying replied, 'It's a long way, Mister. I gotta hurry. Mama's hurt real bad.' Jeff now alarmed exclaimed, " Honey, I'll only be a minute. We'll get to your Mom." Quickly grabbing a bottle of water Jeff hurried down to the truck holding the little girl's hand to help her stay up with him.

The passenger door was open and Jeff could see the woman lying on the seat and one look had him almost dizzy sucking his breath with the shock and terrible thing he saw. He knew the woman! His heart was breaking as the little girl asked, " Please Mister can you help her, she's bad sick." Jeff could hardly speak when getting over his own shock, he had to tell the little girl, " I'm so very sorry Honey, but your Mama has gone to be with the angels. Your Mom has died." The little girl crying scrambled up into the truck and desperately tried to awaken her crying, 'Wake up Mommy, please wake up! Please wake up!' she didn't know what death was and couldn't believe her Mom was dead. Jeff gently folded the little scared and frightened, girl in his arms and tried to comfort her . She was bitterly crying as she couldn't believe or understand ; her Mommy was gone forever. Slowly Jeff helped her from the truck . Maria had seen Jeff walking to the truck and sent Esta out to see what was going on.

Esta was shocked when Jeff explained and went immediately back to call for help. Jeff stayed with the truck and asked the little girl for her name hoping to help her get through this tragedy with talking. She said, 'My name is Tessie, but everyone calls me Tes. Her Mother

lay with her eyes open and Jeff wished this was all a dream .He needed something to cover her face , but instead reached past Tes to close them as if she were in sleep. Jeff tried to dry his own eyes. The shock he felt was almost too much. Just touching the woman and closing her eyes, almost stopped his heart. The dead Mother was Tessie Overstreet, a schoolmate and sweetheart when they were in school together. He just couldn't believe this was happening. 'My God', he thought, 'This is too much, Damn, how does something like this happen .Tessie was beautiful, not the poor wasted girl that died. What happened? We had dreamed about getting married someday. That got shot to hell when i went to college. She got in with a bad crowd and next thing I heard she was pregnant. Little Tessie would be about four or five now. That would be about right.'

The Coroner and Sheriff came and poor little Tessie hung onto Jeff as they took her Mom away. He drove the truck into his yard and Maria tried hard to comfort Tessie, but she clung to Jeff. He wasn't sure what to do, but hold her and try to get her interested in things in his place. Anything to get her mind away from her loss. They both sat and cried together. Jeff was crying inside for his old sweetheart from High School, it was just beyond belief.

Maria came over to help Jeff get a bed ready for little Tes. Life had to go on and although she broke down crying , she helped and thanked them both for helping her. That night Jeff let the tears flow for his own grief. Long in the night he sat on the edge of his bed trying to make sense outta what happened that day. It was gonna be a few months before he learned most of Tessie's life after school.

The following day Jeff learned that the County would have the body cremated as there were no living relatives. Little Tes would become a ward of the Court eventually going to a Foster home. This ,he learned from the sheriff and he just couldn't handle it. he said, " Can't you let her stay with us for a few days anyway. She clings to me like I'm the only one in the world. I can't see putting her through

another hurt. The poor thing has probably never had a decent place to live. At least give her a chance.” The Sheriff told him there would be a lady come out from Child Care the next day. They were getting background information on Tessie and trying to locate her Father.

Jeff knew from a letter he received long ago that Tessie had refused to name a father. He had already been thinking of going through and throwing away most of his Collage and High School stuff. He wondered if he still had that letter. That night at ten o'clock he found it. Yeah it was Tessie's, telling him how sorry she was for getting into alcohol. It had ruined her life and she begged Jeff to forgive her. She had written “I always dreamed that you would be the man I married and you were my baby's Father. Jeff Darling, is there anything I can do to bring you back and make a life for us? Please give me a chance .” It was signed I love you Darling, Tessie Overstreet. Jeff sat and cried as he remembered being insulted by her letter. It interfered with his Bull riding. No! as a pride wounded young man, he wouldn't take her back even if she didn't have a Bastard Brat! The letter was all he had left of Tessie. It was hours before he could sleep.

The next day the lady from Child Services Doris Bell came asking for Tessie; she was to be taken into custody and processed for Foster care. Jeff had worried all night about what to do about her. Maybe there was a relative somewhere. Doris said, “ No we have a history on her. She was taken from her mother once before for child abuse from Miss Overstreet's boy friend. She had a number of bruises. We were told that she had moved to Tucson and was working there. No she has no Father of record and no relatives to turn to. Miss Overstreet's folks were killed in a car wreck about four years ago. Her boyfriend was jailed for 30 days. That was three years ago . Mister Dunnigan, we appreciate your concern for the little girl ,but believe me she will be in good hands.”

Tessie wanted no part of Mrs Bell, she clung to Jeff begging him not to send her away. She was desperate and crying. Jeff breaking

down himself said, “ Mrs Bell can you please let me reason with her today and I’ll bring her in tomorrow. You can see what this is doing to her. God lady, have a heart will you. Her mother died in her arms just yesterday. Please give her some time to accept her loss. Please! Leave her with me , I promise I’ll bring her in.” Doris replied, “ Can’t do it! She has to go. I can’t possibly leave her in your hands. A single man at that. No! the only possible way I can leave her with you is if you are a relative. I’m sorry but come on Tessie, you have to go with me.” The little girl crying loud and begging Jeff not to send her away just broke his heart. Desperate, to do something he exclaimed, “ Damn it, woman ,she’s mine ! I’m her Dad. No she stays here with me, I wasn’t married to her Mother, but I’m her Dad , don’t that mean anything? “ Doris exclaimed , “Mister, you’re something else. I don’t believe you and I’m calling the sheriff; he’ll handle this and Mister Dunnigan you will be arrested. Jeff said, “I don’t care lady, call the Sheriff. Get him out here if that’s what it takes; look at Tessie. You’ve made her worse than yesterday when her Mom died.”

At this moment Esta came in with Maria and both asked ‘ What’s wrong?’ Jeff explained and Maria said , “ Government lady, Is the little girl Ok to stay with us. She is bad heart broken and loves Jeffery very much you can see.” Doris said, “I didn’t know you had family here. Ok I’ll give you till tomorrow to bring her in or bring proof that she is your child. We don’t ever want to be part of separating family, but Mister Dunnigan, you’re like all the young men now days out there having fun when you’ve given a young girl a burden for life. I’ll bet you never sent her Mom a dollar. It’s about damn time you owned up to responsibility. I’ll see you tomorrow or you see the Sheriff.”

Later Jeff knew that he had a problem. How did he prove the lie that he was Tessie’s father; he knew there was no way and resigned himself to the fact that she would go outta his life. Looking at the little girl sleeping on his couch, he said, “ God if you’re up there, little Tessie needs your help; we both need your help.” He was thinking , “

How long ago has it been that he asked God for anything. I can't remember. Probably when Dad died." Taking his mind away from the problem, he began looking through the cardboard boxes and the ragged suitcase he'd taken from the truck. It hurt him seeing that the Tessie he had known, had so little. There was mostly clothes and he separated those for little Tes. She would have to have them wherever she went. Done with the clothes, he opened the suitcase and there in pictures and letters was the sad story of Tessie Overstreet . The pictures showed a number of different men and it looked like she had worked mostly as a Waitress and had lived in small apartments. Shocking him, he saw her medical bills and records. She had Ovarian cancer! That's what killed her. He wondered aloud, 'What could possibly have sent her down the road by my Dad's ol'place to die. It was obvious that she was moving back to Kearny maybe, from Tucson. Had she come home to die? It seemed awful strange. Jeff could only wonder.

While going thru Tessie's things, he opened an envelope that contained personal stuff and her social Security card was there together with hers and Tes's birth certificates. Plainly little Tes's Birth Certificate was not an official county copy, but the Hospital one. It plainly showed no name for the Father. That line was empty. Jeff studied everything in the suit case looking for any reference to the Father. There was nothing. As he sat studying the certificate , he wondered what would happen if he put his name in there. It wouldn't be official, but it might delay things . Little Tes might be able to stay awhile. He was thinking his name should be in Tessie's hand writing. She had written her name when she filled out the paper. His name as the Father had to be in her hand also. Inspiration came to him and he got out that old letter from her and made a very good copy of her writing from his name in the address. Most folks wouldn't notice that it was a forgery.

Once again he read and reread that letter she wrote to him. it was heart breaking all over again. Suddenly he exclaimed out loud, “Uhh oh!” almost waking Tes. ‘The letter was the answer. There it was ,plain as day. The envelope and letter had cigarette burns from laying around in his room when he was on cigarettes for awhile. He remembered almost throwing it away, but his anger, at that time resulted in him throwing the cigarettes away. Getting up quickly he carried the letter over to Esta’s where he borrowed a cigarette. Esta was a smoker. He very carefully burned a small hole in the letter . Esta couldn’t believe what he was doing and Jeff said, “ No problem Esta, I just had to change things a little. I didn’t like this letter the way it was.” Esta just shook his head, maybe Jeff was losing it.

Returning to his room the letter now read “ I always dreamed that you would be the man I married(Burn hole) you were my baby’s Father. Jeff Darling, is there anything I can do to bring you back and make a life for us. Please give me a chance .” It was signed I love you Darling. Tessie Overstreet. Jeff read the letter out loud and with a big smile he said, “ God please forgive me, but I’m sure you understand.”

The next morning here come Mrs Bell with the Sheriff ready to take custody of little Tes. Jeff produced the hospital birth certificate and it was good enough for him, but Mrs Bell was not convinced saying, “ Mister Dunnigan you’ll have to come to our office so we can verify your claim. Our records show that Miss Overstreet put no man’s name on the Certificate. We may need additional proof and you sir have not shown a Fathers interest in the child. There is no payment of child support shown any where in Miss Overstreet’s past income statements and she has been on government aid before and after her daughter was born . It’s my feeling that she would be better served in a Foster home, but you will have the opportunity to state your case. Time considerations are important. Please come to our Office tomorrow.”

The following day was a real shock to Jeff. Yes, Mrs Bell saw the letter and recommended the county accept his claim as the father of Tessie. Then came the bad news, he owed back child support and he had no job! The county wanted their money. Fortunately his Dad's ranch was still in his Dad's name. He had never had it changed; just paid the taxes and kept running around. Some day he was gonna have to grow up and take responsibility. He knew this, but had always kept putting it off. Sitting at home thinking about it , he looked at little Tes and knew she was worth everything and anything he had to do to keep her. Tessie's truck was the first thing. He needed a way to get around and left the truck in Tessie's name, just included his name as a driver, after all Tessie Overstreet was still alive; she just had a new address and was a little younger than twenty five. Jeff said aloud, " God, I know I been talking to you a lot and I know this ain't exactly honest but I need help." Tes heard him talking and said, " Mister Jeff, Mommy talked to God a lot when she was so sick, but I never heard him say anything. She kept asking him to "Please take care of me." Thank you Mister Jeff for letting me stay with you ." Jeff didn't hear her, he was looking at Want Ads for a job. There was nothing he was trained for. Maybe tomorrow something would turn up. He still had a lotta stuff to sell and think about getting Tes in school. He shook his head thinking, " Gotta remember I've got a family now."

Two more weeks and still nothing. He turned the news paper over and sat his coffee cup on it and Boom! There in the middle of the page was an advertisement for a PBA contest coming to Arizona . The Professional Bull Riders Association was putting on a big competition in eight weeks at the Fair Grounds arena in Gila Bend. Yes he avidly read the advertisement. He could feel the rush of adrenalin just reading it. Yeah that ol'feeling and love for the Sport was still there. Well he was thinking , " Mister Nasty Brocious, you didn't knock it outta me. There's the Want Ad I was lookin for! I've gotta get in shape. If I can't make Gila Bend, there's a lotta others out there. Maybe I can still ride well enough to get me and Tes outta hock with the County."

Jeff was really surprised when he began work outs ; he was fifteen pounds overweight from over a year back when he won the Championship. Tes asked him what he was doing when he began different exercises. He told her that he was going to begin riding Bulls and had to get himself in shape. Tes was trying to understand and said, ‘ Do you have to ride cows, what’s wrong with horses. I rode a pony one time. I really liked it. It was a lotta fun. ’” Jeff laughed and said, ‘Honey , I love horses too, but people will pay me to ride bulls, they’re boy cows; if I can . It’s kinda like a job. I’ll take you with me sometime and you can watch me ride. Honey, that’s a promise. This exercise is to help me build the muscle I need. I’m gonna have to get my weight down. I think that’s what’s wrong with me. Too many big parties eatin and drinkin. I’m packin too much soft muscle and fat. Gotta get lean. “ Tes tried to imitate him saying,” Mister Jeff I want to be just like you. I wanna be lean too.” Jeff replied, “ Honey, you’re plenty lean enough, we’ve gotta fatten you up, but you can work out with me if you want to. I love having you live here with me and Uncle Esta . Oh and honey have you ever been in school with other kids? I’ve gotta get you entered before school starts.”

Her answer broke ol’tough Jeff’s heart, when she said, “ Mommy tried to get a woman with lots of kids to let me play with them. There were lots of toys to play with, but she got mad at Mommy and one day took me into town and left me across the street from where Mommy worked. She said , Mommy didn’t pay her. I was scared, when a man wanted me to go with him to see Mommy, but a Policeman shooed the man away and took me to Mommy. He wanted to know where my Daddy worked. I told him I didn’t have one. I stayed there all day. Mommy never took me back to the kids place.” Jeff could feel his heart melting and the tearful hurt for his little girl and said , “ Honey, when school starts and the other kids wanna know who your Dad is , you tell’em , I’m your Dad Jeffery Dunnigan. “ Tessie said, ‘Mister Jeff, I ain’t never had a Daddy before. Thank you for being my Daddy.” Jeff

couldn't hardly hold back the tears and said, " OK Tes, you call me Daddy and I promise to always be your Dad."

Aunt Maria and Uncle Esta were loving the change of having Tessie around and spoiling her with treats. Jeff was thinking, 'Don't have to worry about her getting enough to eat. She'll be a butter ball if this keeps up, but I've gotta shed more weight. I know now why my Bull Ridin went to hell. Get myself in shape and might try ol'Brocius again, if I get him in the draw. That last ride, he got me in the face when he had me loose. I've gotta keep my seat and the only way I can do that is hold my butt close to my hand hold and lean back a little. I should know better and bail when I'm in trouble, but knowin and doin don't always happen. I've gotta get more muscle and strength in my hands and God, I know I ain't done much of this before, but thank you for the help."

Three weeks had gone by with Jeff killing himself with workouts, but he was seeing results. Hadn't lost but six pounds, but the strength in arms, legs, and hands was showing good results and he was feeling more confidence every day. He felt the need to do a few practice rides but there were no bulls in Kearny or an arena. He had plenty of room for one on the Ranch. The ranch during his Dad's life had been swarming with cattle over the hundreds of acres he leased from the government.

There had been plenty of bulls to ride when he grew up. it was that Ranch life that got him into Bull riding. There had been many wild horses too, but Jeff had enjoyed the bulls. Not too many ranch hands wanted to risk injury and lose their jobs to a bad injury. Jeff didn't have that problem being a family member and the more the merrier. He loved it and his Dad had raised and bought bulls that provided for the breeding necessary, but would serve for practice when they were not otherwise occupied.

Jeff continued working harder than ever. He only had two weeks before the contest, but got his entry fee in. It was another Professional

Bull Riders event in the Beat the Beast Tour. One of his silver belt buckles paid the way. He was thinking, “I never wore the things except for photographs anyway. You wear one of them big ornate jewelry pieces on a bull and it can really hurt you.” As the contest got closer, Jeff could feel himself getting anxious to ride and looking forward to the excitement and cheering crowds he’d seen so much of in past years. He was a little concerned about his riding ability. Would he still have that dare devil attitude and confidence that had propelled him to Championship winning or would the creaming he’d received from Brocious dent that ability? He’d soon find out and hope that he didn’t embarrass himself.

Broken Arrow bucking Bulls were some of the very best and these were what he’d be facing at Gila Bend. Though, anxious to get going, he took every evening to tell Tes about Rodeo and especially Bull Riding. Jeff laughed as Tes didn’t seem too excited about it, she was disappointed that he would be gone a week or so, but he told her, “ I’ve gotta give this a try and Honey if it don’t work out, maybe I can do some truck driving for that copper mine outfit in town. I’ll only be gone a week and you could go with me, but there’s no one to be with you while I’m working. I can’t do that, but I promise you that if things work out maybe Aunt Maria or Uncle Esta can go along some time and stay with you when I ride. You’ll be close to the bucking chutes and see me ride. But right now, you can stay with them this week, while I’m gone”.

Thursday evening Jeff was looking at the Bulls and wondering which one he’d draw in the opening round on Friday. Every bull was big pushing 2000 pounds and they sure looked healthy. He’d look for a good performance out of every one. The stock contractor Broken Arrow was a top notch out fit and his nemesis Brocious was owned by another contractor and not in this event. Jeff almost felt disappointed, he was wondering if he was getting soft in the head. He should be happy that he wouldn’t be taking a chance of drawing Brocious. He

remembered that in the past, like all bull riders ,he always wanted to draw the best and laughed thinking, “ You did , you idiot, and you’ve got scars to prove it.”

Fridays schedule began with opening fire works and a beautiful rendition of the Star Spangled Banner by a local high school girl. Riding action was scheduled to begin at 7:45 Pm with round one . there were 35 riders in the contest and he was number 8 draw for that evening. Round 2 would follow and at 6 :45 Saturday the totals for the event would be tallied and the 15 top scores would compete for the Championship.

The fan fare was finally over and he’d heard his name called and touted as a former world’s champion. That ol’feeling of jubilation and the pumping of adrenalin began , he was anxious to get on a bull. His rope was hot in his hands from working the rosin into the hand hold and his glove for a better grip. He’d been there many times before and he was more than ready to ride.

His bull was Double Spot and the other riders had kinda told him what to expect. He was a spinner after two jumps, easy to keep a seat on, but sometimes going the other way. Not an easy ride. Most considered him an average bull. Nothing special. There was a lotta action going on but as he remembered don’t watch the other riders when you’re getting set up. One little mistake is too many. Looking down on Double Spot, he didn’t appear to him to be average. This bull was an athlete and looked ready to roll. No 5 was out and he climbed over as the gate man helped him get his rope set . His chute man was ready to pull and tighten his rope for his hand hold. Number 6 was out and that ol’high was about to take hold of him. Number 7 was ready to pop and he scooted up on his hand as a rider got dumped . The Clowns were doing their job as a buck off and the bull Sling Shot was trying to horn his rider. The arena cleared and the gate man looked at him.

Set and pulling his hat down a bit as he got the question. Leaning back pushing hard against his hand while gluing his eyes to that

hump in front of him, he bobbed his head. Bang! Outta the chute with a huge lunge, then another and Jeff sat tight, his championship form was still there and he easily rode the spin working his spurs for score. When the buzzer went off , he released his hand hold throwing the rope tail around preventing a half hitch hang up, swung his leg over on another jump by Double Spot and almost stayed on his feet landing. Waving his hat to the stands and applause the Judges gave him an 82. Not really good, but a lot better than six buck offs ahead of him. His 82 didn't hold up very long and he watched the action of all of the riders and bulls coming out after him. He gave particular attention to the good Bulls. He might be drawing one of the good ones later. The bulls Dust Up and Silver Bullet were the best of the lot that he saw. Both were buck offs. He hoped to draw one of those in the contest, if he made it to the Championship Round. He was pleased that he made his ride, but hoped for better in Round 2.

Surprisingly he drew a bull called Kiss Me Gently in Round 2. Jeff was thinking later after his ride, “ Wasn't nothing gentle about that bull', his head was still rattling when he hit the ground and plain lucky to see an 86 for his ride. He hadn't heard the Buzzer and figured a buck off, but thinking about his ride, he knew the whip like action during the ride and the bang he took hitting the ground coming off the bull, was gonna give him a real sore neck the next day.”

The following afternoon all 35 riders had finished Round 2 and combined scores would put the top 15 in the Championship Round. Jeff had not followed the scores and was surprised to find that he was Number 12 in the Finals . He'd have to do a lot better if he wanted to take money home. That evening he watched the three riders ahead of him. He normally didn't do that but kinda figured he was already outta the money and might as well enjoy what he could. He knew most of the riders and a few good ones were up on him ten points or better. He drew Sling Shot for his last ride and that bull was a ground fighter and plenty mean. He was surprised by the fast action of his bull, but made

a very good ride carrying it longer than normal, not anxious to get off and hang up in his rope. The clowns were close when he bailed and Sling Shot gave the crowd a little excitement. He received a lot of applause and whistles for his 89 ride.

Jeff was pleased, it looked like he would get a little money and finish in fourth place, but ol'Silver Bullet was a buck off putting him in third place and the last rider of the night, Billy Conn had drawn Dust Up and a sure fire winner even with a low score. Evidently no one had told Dust Up this, and he dusted Billy. Jeff headed home with \$17,780, second place money. He had found a job! Thank you Lord. were his thoughts.

Jeff took all to dinner on Monday night to celebrate his winnings. He also made a trip earlier to give the Child Services \$5,000 and receive a big smile from Mrs Bell. Later that week he began looking for another Contest. It was time for him to get serious about making the circuit and try to follow as much as possible the Beat the Beast Tour of professional bull riding, but it would be impossible for him to make'em all. His next best shot was Tulsa, Oklahoma and this time the bull Brocious was in the draw. Jeff wondered how he would feel if he got him in the draw .Would he freeze up. Would he lose a nights sleep in worrying about an injury again or would he pass the draw like so many had refusing to attempt the ride for fear of injury he was thinking, " If I feel that scared ,I better stay home."

Jeff had a great night. This time Brocious dumped his top competition and Jeff collected \$38,000 and awards. Tes loved his pictures on the Cover of Pro Bull Rider magazine, he had gone 3 for 3, all scoring above 85. When he went to Child Services with another payment, Tes proudly showed Mrs Bell the magazine. She was horrified saying how cruel Rodeo was to the animals and she was upset that Jeff defended them.

She said, ' Mister Dunnigan, I can't see how anyone can defend the physical abuse you and people like you use on animals for

entertainment. I'm sorry that we have to deal with people like you. I'm recommending that you come to Globe for our annual ASPCA meeting and be enlightened. There will be hundreds of people there. It's the largest organization in America. A Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, specifically Rodeo animals, one of the biggest concerns in our country. Maybe you would like to participate and say a few words." Mrs. Bell seeing he was on the verge of refusal said, "I dare you to try and defend what you're doing with Rodeo animals. You'll be crucified and booed outta the place." Jeff was angry and said, " You people don't know even half of what you're talking about. Maybe I'll just do that!"

Later Jeff realized he'd let his mouth overload his butt once again. In College he had learned a few things about speaking , but trying to basically compete against a biased crowd of hundreds was something he really didn't want to do. He had to admit, he'd probably get booed off stage. Mrs Bell had given him a date. He hoped it conflicted with his schedule. He would have a good reason to back out. He was thinking, " Let someone else do it. That group would cheer and clap for speakers that agreed with everything said. They're all there to make themselves feel good and collect money to further their Kill Rodeo Campaign. Anything I say will be wasted words."

School started and Jeff wanted to take Tes for her first day. The school bus ran by his place, but he was afraid she might be scared all alone . Two days and Tes said, " Daddy ,I'm big enough to ride the Bus. All the kids in my class ride and say it's fun. Can I ride ?" Jeff answered her question by taking her out to the road and helped her get on the Bus. She happily waved to him as the bus drove off.

Jeff had no idea that his Tes was so proud of him. Soon everyone in school, knew he was a professional Bull Rider. She had shown his picture to everyone, but that wasn't the worse of it. Everyone knew he was gonna talk at a big meeting in Globe. Maria and Esta had unknowingly made it impossible for him to get outta that

talk. They had assured folks that their Jeffery was gonna talk about Rodeo in a big theatre in Globe. He would be home that week.

“Stuck!” He was thinking, “ I’ve gotta sit down and make some notes”. Once into thinking about it, he found that putting it all together came pretty easy and he began to look forward to the event. His Dad had always told him when studying for his finals, “ Write it down and read it slowly out loud, study each word written. Now you’ve entered it in your brain in three different locations. Shouldn’t be that hard to locate when you go lookin for it. Your eyes entered it, your ears entered it and your hand entered it. Seems easy, but if you’re like some folks that only have half a brain, it’s too crowded.”

Jeff followed his Dad’s advice and when he went to the meeting, he wore nothing that set him apart from everyone else. He didn’t want to be badgered with questions and wanted to concentrate on what was said that he might talk about in his speech .After opening ceremonies, the Chairman introduced various speakers and indicated they had a special guest to be introduced later. Jeff sat through a boring array of folks talking about what success they’d had furthering their Agenda in limiting and completely killing Rodeo performance in some cities. Jeff was getting a little hot, but knew that was the one thing he didn’t want. Try to hold his emotions in check and just lay out the facts or he might wind up cussing a few people out which would only cost him everything he said.

Following his introduction as a Champion Rodeo Cowboy, there was very little clapping. He could almost feel the animosity, but nodded to the applause and Said “ Thank you. First let me say that I appreciate this opportunity to speak for the profession that I earn my living in. From the talks given tonight I assume some of your speakers know more about rodeo animal treatment than I do though; I’ve spent my life around rodeo’s handling and using those animals. I’m not here to argue a point, I’m just an entertainer engaged in probably the most dangerous Sport in America today. I entertain thousands of people

every year in just the same manner as other Sport figures. I pit my riding skills against 2,000 pound Bulls. Frequently I lose and occasionally get injured. Seldom do the Bulls get hurt in any manner. The American Humane Association(AHA) works in conjunction with the PRCA (our organization) to establish rules improving animal welfare and the overall treatment of rodeo animals. Every sports organization in the world develops rules and committees to protect the athletes.

My specialty of course is Bucking Bulls . So from beginning to the end let me first describe what a bucking Bull is and how they're treated. Most folks, even those that watch and enjoy rodeo's don't know this and frequently public priorities are emotionally conceived without full investigation.

Bull's are selected for rodeo work by size , disposition and athletic ability. Like athletes, they receive the very best in nutrition and care . They have been schooled and trained to buck. Some are like Cereal Box Hero's, better than others, but all are valuable animals and like football players, must receive the best of care in order to perform at the highest level. Yes there are injuries, but as you've no doubt noticed , it's mostly to the riders, folks like me that enjoy the thrill and the high, but don't know any better. Winning big money helps of course. Sometimes it even pays the doctor Bills. While on the subject of money there are literally hundreds of thousands of families that live on monies generated by rodeos and other sports involving animals. From birth to the grave God put his animals on earth for a reason. What each and every one was for , I don't know and neither does anyone else.

I agree that cruelty has no place with any animal .Some folks take exception and complain of horrible torture equipment used on bulls. Nothing could be farther from the truth. There is no beating or whipping of the animal. The riders wear spurs , but these are required to be round rowels that will roll. Kinda like a quarter with a hole in it.

Yeah, jab one in your ribs and it'll hurt, but your ribs are not covered with bull hide and muscle. On a bull it's more of an irritation than a pain. The other thing is, if you've ever rode a bull, there's damn little chance for spurring except on an easy ride where you can work them for score. The flank strap is soft material that is tightened so the animal will try to kick it off while bucking. This significantly adds to the difficulty of riding the animal. The only other equipment used is the riders bull rope a flat braided hemp that has a woven hand hold and serves as a slip knot like lasso around the chest of the bull. Usually on the first jump outta the chute a good bull can almost brake your fingers with his powerful chest action. The violent pitching, twisting , jarring you feel is almost equal to being in a car wreck . Them eight seconds feels like half an hour and when you finally bail, that ain't no milk cow you meet on the ground.

- Finally let me say this. We don't know all of God's plans for animals on this earth for food, work, or entertainment and how he works, but you know what; Run this over in your minds and see how you read it. There's thousands of Bulls out there that just might be grateful that today they're not hamburgers or-- were aborted as babies so the cow could keep working." There was nothing but silence in the Theater as Jeff walked off stage and left the building.

On his next visit to Child Services, Mrs Bell avoided even speaking to him. he was thinking, " That's Ok , because I don't intend to be in here again. I'm sure I wasted my breath at that meeting. Those folks have an agenda and won't be happy with what I had to say." He was wrong; Mrs Bell came to see him at his home and told him that his speech had really impressed her. She had no idea that rodeo animals were treated like hero athletes in some cases. That she had been led to believe all kinds of horror stories of cruelty that couldn't be tied to anything other than some ones imagination. Jeff told her that , " Unfortunately one bad potato spoils the bunch and there have been a lot of true stories of cruelty and misuse as in all sports. These have to

be eliminated with fines and strict measures imposed on abusers. The best control will never be perfect when money is involved. People will go to great measures to get over max performance from an animal. We can only do what we can and report cruelty when we see it.” Mrs. Bell said, “ Thank you for opening some of our eyes. Your speech hit a lotta folks right between the eyes on a lotta issues. Thank you.” Jeff was pleased that someone heard him but giving speeches was not his Petunia. He was a Bull Rider.

Jeff was looking at some of the performances in the Bull Rider magazine from a Beat the Beast contest in Oregon and Brocious had gone 3 for 3 unloading riders. This brought the bulls total to 15 for 15 in the tour. His next chance to draw him would be in Springfield, Missouri . Maybe he’d get another shot at Brocious. It was another 35 rider event for \$40,000. And too far for Tes to go, although she kept reminding him of his promise to take her. He reminded her that she was in school now and maybe over the holidays he might find a Beat the Beast event closer to home that she could go to.

In Springfield Jeff went 3 for 3 but his scores were down going into the Championship round. He was thinking that the long drive had taken the buzz outta him . Once again though, he drew Slingshot and scored an impressive 88 to get second money of \$20,000 a frightening moment in that contest occurred in the second round when Brocious lost footing coming outta the chute and fell to his knees dumping his rider. Neither appeared to be hurt, but Brocious was pulled and the rider given a re-ride on another bull. Later reports stated that Brocious would be pulled for the remainder of the tour just as a precautionary measure. He was far too valuable to take chances. Jeff was disappointed. He had a reckoning coming with Brocious and it looked like it might be another year before he’d get a chance to draw him. That was assuming he’d be coming back. You never knew with bulls.

Later that evening at the Round Up Bar and Grill Jeff had just walked in when a girl yelled, “ Jeffery! Jeffery!” then came running to

his table grabbing him in a bear hug and kissing him. Jeff startled and confused grabbed the girl's arms pushing her back, but suddenly realized he knew her and blurted " Tammy! Tammy Severs , Whoa girl, you really got to me! Still doing Rodeo Barrel Racing? Lord , how long has it been? Two years? Where's Johnny?" Tammy replied, "Busted up Jeff almost a year ago. What's with you now days, I heard you dropped Vicki. Tell me about yourself. Whatta you been up to; saw you ride today. Cowboy you've still got it! That was a hell of a ride you put on Slingshot. Man you're still the best. Money must be pretty good. Looks like you're back on top again. Whatta you doing tonight? Thought you'd be over at the Twilight Inn tonight for the big party. I was just headin that way myself. Jeff it'll be like ol'times. Man I'm glad I ran into you. We can sure live it up tonight. You're not with anyone are you?"

Jeff was still trying to get a word in edgewise and said. " No. Tammy, I'm outta the partying now. I was invited but I'm gonna hit the hay and get an early start home. I've got a sweet little girl waitin for me to get back." Tammy replied, "Well damn Jeff, you could still make the party and you know I could give your little girl some tough competition. Don't you remember? We, were pretty close to being an item till Vicki came along. What do you say ? Grab a bite and come on; I promise you won't be sorry." Jeff said, " Tammy, I know we had a thing going years back and I enjoyed our time together, but that's all over for me. I'm a family man now." Tammy replied showing some temper, " Ok!Ok! I wouldn't want to break up your happy home. Mister you've sure changed. You're turning me down now. I can't believe it. Jeff Dunnigan refusing a good time. Who would ever thought something like that would happen. Mister, good riddance! Sorry I wasted my time." Then said sarcastically, " You git on home to your sweet little girl and have a sweet little life." Jeff breathed a sigh of relief as Tammy stomped out.

Jeff was mulling over his meeting with Tammy and smiled thinking, " She thought Tes was my wife, or that I had a great

relationship going with a sweet little girl. It was sure easy to read Tammy, she's looking for a meal ticket. Things must be going bad for her right now, but I sure don't wanna get back in that life style again. She's a pretty girl, but hard around the eyes, with too much gushing talk. She'll probably hook up with one of the young and new Rodeo hands. I don't wanna remember my own place in that picture. It sure ain't something I'm proud of and sure pales when I think of the honest joy and thrill my little angel will have just to see me home."

" You're leaving again Daddy?" asked Tes. Jeff replied, 'Yeah Hon but I think this will be it for this year. I know I've only been home a couple of weeks, but I just found out about this event and I wanna take advantage of it while I'm still in good shape. Remember Honey you helped me get lean. I'll only be gone a few days."

Sioux Falls was next on the tour and Jeff drove up there four days early to be sure he was rested for the contest. His first bull No Way Baby spun him into first for the go round. In the second he drew Dust Up and was looking at a high 80 mark but bad luck hit him when Dust Up swung his head around violently breaking rhythm and thrown sideways" Jeff hit him with his free hand disqualifying . A really tough break but his high score on No Way Baby got him in the finals where he turned a rank bull Victor Lane with an 87 into a second place and \$18,000 pay day. Jeff figured this was his last event for the year and would go home to begin working on his Ranch. He had plans for the Ranch that he wanted to run by Esta and Maria for their opinion.

He was met with a terrible shock when he got home , Tes was in the hospital ! ' Oh God! What happened?' his first words as a cold fear came over him. 'His little girl was sick! Tick fever!' he rushed to the Hospital praying that Tes would be Ok and kicking himself for being away when she got sick. He could have skipped Sioux Falls. His Bank account was looking good enough to carry them through the winter. The Doctor assured him that they had things under control. They had given her antibiotics and surface treatment for the rash . She was

asleep when he arrived and her bite was a common thing for Kearny. They asked him to leave and Jeff said, "No!, I'll sleep right here. On the floor if I have to. I won't leave her alone. She needs me and I need her. I'll be here when she wakes up." The nurses were upset by his actions, but brought him a soft chair to sit in. It was obvious to everyone that he was deathly afraid for the little girl's life. They ,in turn had dealt with this before and it was common for them with Mothers, but they had never dealt with a Father like Jeff .Tes seemed to be resting easy and Jeff went down to the first floor to get a meal.

When he returned the nurse on duty was alarmed by a shocking yell for 'Help! Help! Nurse' . Rushing to Tes's room, Jeff was holding a struggling and gasping Tes in his arms pleading and exclaiming , 'Honey don't die! Don't die! Please God! Don't let her die !' The Nurse quickly took Tes from Jeff sharply saying, 'Lay her down! Lay her down! she needs oxygen!' nurse grabbed a line from the wall and quickly fitted a mask over Tes's mouth and nose. Within seconds Tes responded and quit gasping. Jeff fell into his chair by the bed crying. He couldn't help the relief from the terror he felt, when he came into the room from downstairs and saw little Tes gasping and open eyed staring at the ceiling looking just like her dead Mother. His felt that his heart had stopped in that terrible instant. He sat numb, Thanking God that his little Tes was outta danger. He hadn't realized how much, he loved this little girl.

What a relief it was when the Doctor came in saying, " Unfortunately Mister Dunnigan, we never have a guarantee of reactions when antibodies are injected. It's very unusual for it to affect anyone's breathing. She was in shock and would have become unconscious which would have given her relief. We'll keep her on a monitor alarm for the night Nurse." Jeff still worried said, " Maybe so Doc, but I'm gonna stay here. I never should have gone downstairs, when do you think she will get over this tick fever thing?' The doctor replied, "Commonly about two days will do it. She's really a very

healthy little girl. Are you her Dad, the bull rider she can't quit talking about. She's mighty proud of her Daddy." Jeff stayed with a mighty happy Tes and going home she had to know about his trip. He said, "Honey, I won't be going on any more I don't think . The tour I was on has ended and the only thing left is Vegas and the big Championship. I haven't qualified for that ,I'm afraid." Tes said, " That's all right Daddy you're my champion." Jeff couldn't help the tears as he looked at his little Angel. He was thinking , "God, how have I wasted it? This little darling is more love than anything I ever had. If I could only live my life all over again, I would be the real father she needed and the husband of Tessie, pregnant or not."

A week later Jeff was hit with a big Hospital Bill! Yes he could pay it but it would cut him short for the plans he had made for the Ranch. Remembering his Rodeo Insurance, he wondered if it would cover his daughter. Thankfully, Yes it would . All he had to do was fill out the claim forms. " Hey that's easy!" he was thinking. Wrong! It covered family but with Tes having a different last name, that was a No,No.

He contacted a representative that told him that they understood a lotta wives wanted to keep their family name after marriage. What he had to do was furnish them a copy of his marriage license or a registered statement indicating that he and his spouse be recognized as a married couple. Whoa! He contacted Mrs Bell and in answer to his question, she said, ' You have been recognized as the girl's father and in doing so she is family, you meet the requirements for common law marriage as soon as you make a statement to that fact. It really isn't necessary, but some companies require different things . Go to the Register's office record your statement and Mister Dunnigan you are married.'

Jeff brought copies of Tes's Birth certificate and then found out that this was all he needed. His Family policy would cover Tes as well as himself. It was also time to get the property title straightened out

and make sure if he should lose his life, that Tes would receive his Ranch property. The one thing he felt good about, all of his future dealings would be as a married man to Tessie Overstreet(deceased), his wife and Mother of Tes. It would ease the awkwardness he always felt when folks assumed that Tes was his outta wedlock child. He had no knowledge that he legally was still a single man. It was just in his mind, that he was married to the dying image of Tessie. Another marriage might be in his future some time ,but he didn't think so. All of his future dealings, he would conduct as a family man. Once again , he felt guilty of stretching the rules and knew that God was giving him a hard look. That money thing was really the root to all evil, awful hard to get away from. He said aloud, " God can you forgive me, ain't enough of you rubbed off on me yet, but I know when I'm outta line." Tes was back in school and Jeff was designing and ordering equipment for rebuilding his ranch when the long list of permits and government regulations shut him down. He had plans to build a Medical Sanctuary for rodeo lay up animals. In his and a number of others minds, it was desperately needed. Injured and layups could be shipped to his Ranch and be cared for . A lot of minor injuries were things that resulted in death for the animal when it couldn't be tended to or shipped with rough stock. Only the super stars like Brocious would be handled differently. Jeff knew this and also knew every stock Contractor in the country would appreciate having a phone number to call for Stock pick up or shipment to. Most of the complaints from SPCA involved injured animals mingling with the rough stock and not individually penned for treatment. He was planning on building such a ranch and staff it with a capable veterinarian and handling crew