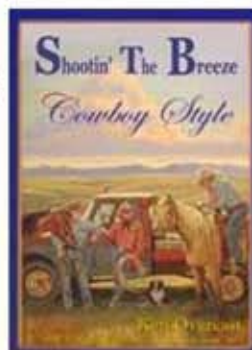


**Billings Gazette**

Overcast shares humor in rough life of cowboys

"Shootin' the Breeze, Cowboy Style"**Author: Ken Overcast****Publisher: Bear Valley Press****By Chris Rubich**

Of The Gazette Staff



Third-generation Montanan Ken Overcast has the ranching life running through high veins and has been riding since childhood.

His ranching days continue as he and his wife, Dawn, wrangle a cow/calf operation on Lodge Creek and as he shares his tales of the cowboy life in song and writing and with a nationally syndicated radio show.

Among his latest ventures is *Shootin the Breeze, Cowboy Style*, a 240 page book packed with wry observation about life and love – of family, friends, critters and cowboy culture. The book unwinds in short tales that can easily be savored one at a time for a morning round of "thank goodness that's not me" or a nightly chuckle before bed.

Reading the book is like listening in on a couple of old hands swapping stories. In the introduction, Overcast says, "Far more of these little musings are true than you might expect," but he admits to applying a bit of what says an acquaintance calls "creative truth enhancement."

Enhanced or not, the tales are reflective of real rural life. The tales are never so tall that they couldn't have occurred, even if the names are changed and a bit of stretching applied.

Overcast takes on topics from the fear of rattlesnakes to ravages of drink to the Fort Benton arrival of William Wesley Van Orsdel, best known as "Brother Van." Who started many Methodist churches in Montana during territorial days.

He shares the story of how his efforts to impress his young bride led to an injury that prompted him to wear an eye patch and pokes fun at how any dreams of becoming "a cowboy sex symbol" would require some brushing up on his part.

To his book, Overcast gives cadence and vocabulary that echo casual storytelling among friends. The reader is just another poke stretched out on the porch swing beside those who share a piece

of life that grows ever rarer.

His many recordings may be to credit for Overcast's attention to sound in his writings. The tale of a mounted cowboy's encounter with a moose on its urban wanderings provides a demonstration:

"Shounds like he's killin' 'er Red drawled as the awfulest beller you ever heard came from the direction of the clickity-click of the horseshoes."

Or sample this take on "Dolly The Calf Thief":

"Dolly and I had a love/hate relationship... She'd be dang shore hard to get along with, but she WAS really handy around the outfit, and because you weren't real sure you could whup her in a fair fight, you just make the best of it."

The Dolly in question is, of course, a milk cow. But, as with other animals in his tales, Overcast recognizes that the relationships between critters and ranch folk can have closeness and emotion similar to those with other humans.

Some may find a few of his tales politically incorrect, but it's the reality of relationships.

From the goat who gives a woman a reason to trade in her wheels to heartsickness at the wanton killing of cattle, Overcast is true to triumphs and traumas, even when a tale isn't totally true.

The book is sprinkled with humorous black-and-white illustrations and photos as well as sayings and short poems that add to the light touch right in style for the author, who has been named Western Music Association's Yodeler of the Year and received the Will Rogers Award from the Academy of Western Artists.

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If you go

Cowboy musician, writer and radio personality Ken Overcast, of Montana will perform at the third annual Montana's Western Jubilee at the Alberta Bair's Theater on Saturday.

The 8 p.m. show is a benefit for the nonprofit Yellowstone County Museum Foundation. The emcee is Lonnie Bell, whose KGHl radio program has regularly featured Overcast. Tickets cost \$22.50 at the Alberta Bair Ticket Office 256-6052.

You also may buy tickets at the Rimrock Mall Customer Service Center and MetraPark Box Office for \$22.50 plus a \$2 surcharge.