

Ken

## OVERCAST

*“Live ‘til you die.”*

A line from a Ken Overcast song, a line from his life  
 Contact Ken at [www.kenovercast.com](http://www.kenovercast.com)

## Cowboy, Poet, Storyteller

If you should ever catch Ken Overcast in performance and then think about it later, you'll remember a wild ride in the middle of the cattle stampede.

Well. Maybe that's an exaggeration. But you will remember a whole lot more than just a cowboy with an eye patch and a microphone on stage by himself.

He's like a one-man rhythm band, dropping to his knees, snorting into the microphone, pawing at the stage like that Kamikaze cow he's imitating in the middle of the 20-minute story told in verse, maybe topped off with a little bit of music on the side. He's working the audience like a cow pony wrangling a herd of cats, a wild one-eyed look, a dance, the shuffle to the side, a wave, a point, another snort, a long, silent stare, a toss of an imaginary loop followed by a spur of a little joke on the side.

(“When I made

this here move with my arm out in Los Angeles the other day, they didn't know what I was doing.” Which was turning a breech calf in utero.)

He's a funny guy, that Overcast. In his columns, his books, his radio program, his songs and his poems.

Well. Maybe not his songs. In fact, not much at all in the songs in his latest CD, “Montana in My Soul.”

You might not think of his selections — all written by Overcast — as sad songs, but one or two of them is likely to bring a tear to your eye. Come to think of it, that's the definition of the sad song.

Speaking of which, there's the one called, “Mama Called Her Praise.” Overcast tells an all too painful story about the loss of a grandchild stillborn. Overcast's daughter told him the Lord had spoken to her, telling her to name the infant girl Praise.

The song speaks for itself in this chorus and stanza:  
*Her Mama called her Praise,  
 Just like the Lord had said  
 Baptized with her tears,  
 Held briefly to her breast*

*Somewhere up above, The angels' anthems raise  
 From here beneath my heart,  
 Oh Lord, I give you Praise*

*On a cold December day, On the hill outside of town  
 A man there dressed in black,  
 And we all gathered 'round  
 He told of Jesus' love, Then raised his hands to pray  
 “Lord into your care, Today we give you Praise”*

“Some of the best songs come from a broken heart,” Overcast says. “Her Dad and I built a little coffin from Maple lumber sawn from trees behind our old ranch house. It was lined with material from a generations old wedding dress, and Praise was dressed in a little gown that her Nana Dawn had worn as a newborn. I can't wait to see her again.”

Overcast doesn't expect to entertain by sharing times of sadness from his life. People go to see him to laugh, to be wrangled like a herd of cats. But beneath it all, is the pain. And that pain lends the richness and authenticity to the cowboy's humor.

# MONTANA

## and the patch is for real, pard

From a column by Ken Overcast, edited for space.

Being a one-eyed singin' cowboy really has its ups and downs. The good deal is I'm a hit with the girls. Unfortunately, all the ladies I impress are over 80 or under 10.

I sure get a lot of questions about this darn eye patch. A few folks wonder if it's just a part of my act.

Actually, I can't see out of the eye it covers up. If I look towards Billings, the right one sort of goes over towards Spokane someplace.

Here's the story. I always had a colt that needed riding, so after supper every evenin', I'd saddle up and take a ride.

The trail from the barn to the pasture went right past the house, and every night I'd see my little bride standing in the window as I rode past. Of course, she was proud as punch of her cowboy and I got this bright idea to make a few extra points with her. I tried it out that very night.

I've figured out through many years of bad experience

that if you just toss the reins at a colt to give him his head and stick a little spur in his belly, he'll bog his head and buck a little.

There are three things here I need to point out about most young cowboys. 1. Any cowboy worth his salt has an itchy ropin' arm. (This doesn't have anything to do with the story... it's just the truth.) 2. They're always trying to prove how well they can ride, so encouraging a colt to buck is not entirely out of their character. 3. They're all trying to figure out how to impress girls. It was the last two of these that helped me lose my eye.

Well, after all these years, I'm still trying my best to impress that same gal. The secret was to get the colt to buck right in front of the window, without the little woman figuring out that I was doing it on purpose. A good spur jab right in the cinch on the side she couldn't see, along with givin' him his head, did the job every evenin'. I'd ride and fan my hat, and she'd swoon.

The problem was that the colt was learnin' how to buck faster than I was learnin' how to ride, and the last night I tried it, he almost ironed me out. Now, that would have been a real catastrophe.

I always ride colts with an old Joseph Sullivan saddle that was made in Fort Benton back in the 1890's. It's one of those old high backed, wide forked, short-seated jobs that's pretty hard to fall out of. As a matter of fact, the only way out of that old thing is straight up.

But bear trap saddle or not, I dum near got bucked off and stood the chance of losin' all the girl-impressin' points I'd built up in the last couple of weeks.

The only thing to do was to shorten the stirrups up a little, and then try to keep him from buckin' again. I don't imagine those old stirrup leathers been changed for 50 years or so, and the old laces were pretty hard and stiff. Oh, I got the dang things unlaced all right, but couldn't get them to go back into the other holes. So with the



Down and Ken Overcast at the ranch on edge of Chinook.

leathers between my knees, I decide to pull on the itty-bitty end of the lace with a pair of needle nosed pliers. It really wasn't a very good idea. They slipped off, and I stuck the pliers in my eye. To make things even worse, it was Christmas Eve.

I think maybe it was guys that operate the way I do that made the Good Lord decide to give us two eyes in the first place... but then my wife says I see way more than I'm supposed to with the one I've got left.

Keep Smilin'... and don't forget to check yer cinch.