



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

Fiddling away an Evening

Fiddling away an Evening

As most of you know, perhaps with the exception of newcomers to my blog postings, several generations of my Black family have been involved in what is called the cowboy life. In previous pieces, I've sent you several brief anecdotes about these times, and I will get around to writing a fuller explanation about one of America's most enduring legends: the cowboy and his horse---and some short narratives about my family's involvement with these parts of our country's culture.

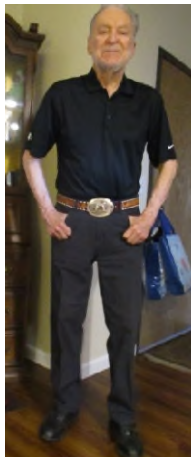
For now, a few weeks, ago Holly and I attended a fund raiser for the Coeur d'Alene Symphony. We have season tickets to the symphony's concerts and wanted to help this gifted group of musicians, who contribute much to the community.



The themes of the get-together were cowboys and western music. The advertising brochure is shown in the photo on the left.

Having grown up in America's cowboy country, I became knowledgeable and appreciative of country and western (C&W) music at an early age. C&W tunes were the standard musical fare in my New Mexico home town. My father, Jim---the granddad or great grandad of several of the readers of this report---was talented with the fiddle and harmonica. I especially liked his fiddling to the famous C&W song, "Cotton Eyed Joe." Listening to it now still brings back fond memories of Dad's performances for his family.

While registering for reservations and tickets for the event, I received messages that encouraged the attendees to deck-out in western clothing. I had long since given up my cowboy boots for slip-on loafers. A headgear of past times, a wide brim Stetson hat my Dad gave me, had been handed down to son, Tommy. Holly never wore cowboy clothes. She has been a city slicker for most of her life.



Nonetheless, we got into the spirit of the evening by donning what were semblances of cowboy get-ups. The results are shown in the photos to the left. Yours truly, being a fan of Johnny Cash, was arrayed in black. I tried to assume a haughty Johnny Cash pose for the photo. And I still have a western belt with the requisite hand-sized buckle. It was a gift my brother, Tom, gave me over forty years ago. Since that time, I have worn the belt only one or two times. It did not go with the pin-striped suits I wore during my work in the white-collar world. But I kept it as a memory of my bro and past times of living in New Mexico's western world on Dad's cattle and horse ranch. Holly wore a lovely squash blossom silver necklace she obtained when we lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico. As you can see, it has a southwestern flair.

Off we went to the fund raiser, ready for an evening of western music, and I hoped fiddle solos of some of the tunes Dad played many years ago. I was not disappointed.

The event was held in an old barn twenty miles from our home in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. The site is called the Rockin' B Ranch, a former working spread. Nowadays, the barn serves as a meeting place for meals, a convention hall, and a museum. The barn is as old as this writer and equally weather-beaten.

The left-most photo below shows the entrance to the barn, where cowboys and cowgirls line up to gain entrance to the place. The interior of the barn is shown in the next photo, with part of this picture showing the sun-filled roof and some diners of a delicious buffet. The third photo depicts one of the museum exhibits, a living room of long ago. The right-most photo is of the stage, showing a reconstructed covered wagon. To the left in the picture is a musician playing an electric steel guitar. His electric twangs reminded me of Buck Owens' "Together Again," one of the classic C&W steel guitar tunes.



During the evening several raffles were held to raise more money for the symphony. Interspersed with these events were performances by local artists. The Blazen Divaz, shown in the figure to the left, shows a nifty group of women who perform around the area for events such as parades and fundraisers. Their self-made costumes vary, depending on the occasion. For this fundraiser, they wore western attire and danced to C&W music.

This excerpt is taken from their website (The Blazen Divaz, which shows photos of some of their remarkable costumes): "The Blazen Divaz founded in 2010, consist of a group of active young-at-heart women in the Inland Northwest that believe in restorative powers of group exercise, camaraderie and creative expression with the goal of spreading cheer through event and parade participation. Membership is flexible and affordable, and routines adaptable to meet each woman's ability."

Another local entertainer captivated the audience. Maybe not all the attendees, as her music was tailored for the western music evening. But certainly, this C&W fan was delighted by her music. Her name is Pamela Benton. Key her name into your browser to watch and listen to her music. She is more versatile than playing just country tunes, but for this night, she stuck to

conventional western fiddle music, as she walked around the audience, as shown in the picture below.



It appeared the fundraiser for the Coeur d'Alene Symphony was a big success. Several hundred people paid \$85 for admittance and contributed more money during the raffles. A fine buffet was included with the admittance fee.



In closing, a bit more about the cowboy belt buckle I wore. It is inscribed with "World Champion Brother." As mentioned, it was given to me by my brother. Tom was fine steer wrestler in his youth, and also known for his C&W band that performed in the Albuquerque/Santa Fe area in the 1970s and 80s. His voice and southwestern drawl were pleasant imitations of Hank Williams, and he played a mean guitar.

I did not spend much time in my younger days on horses, tamed or untamed. Time available, I was swimming in our cow tanks or the local pool. I captured some swimming medals, but belt buckles did not fit with Speedo swimming gear. So, any western belt buckles I wore were gifts from members of the Black family.

Nonetheless, the cowboy way of life, its ways of forthrightness and steadfastness; its independence from unneeded, unwarranted authority; its self-reliance---I like to think they have stayed with me as I made my way through the years.

My family won many belt buckles during their rodeo contests. I wouldn't trade the buckle Tom gave me for ten of the others.

I will treasure this belt and belt buckle for all my remaining days. For days thereafter, they will still be around my waist.