

Theron K. Weatherby Family History Heritage Park 2019

Theron K. Weatherby exemplifies what a West Texas rancher is all about. He was born and raised in the San Angelo and Big Lake area. His mother was travelling in a horse and buggy by a creek near Grape Creek, when it ran away with her and she was thrown out. This accident caused her to give birth to Theron prematurely and he was so small that the family put him in a shoe box and set him aside thinking he wouldn't live. All the attention was given to Theron's injured mother until hours later when surprisingly a rustling was heard in the box. Theron was very much alive and an Aunt who had also recently had a baby served as wet nurse to him and he survived. The fact that he was a fighter showed that day and many times during his life as he survived what would have been fatal to other people.

One such example of his incredible survivor spirit is displayed when he was twelve years old and they were ranching at Juno. They were moving stock to a ranch in Reagan County and he and a man drove the sheep down. When they arrived, the man left him there alone with cheese and crackers and that is all he had to eat until he made it back to the Reagan county ranch. He also was shot in the early 70's near the Big Lake south of the city. There were some young men in their early twenties that came there and Theron's insurance man had told him to not allow people to fish there and be in the water for liability reasons. Mr. Weatherby shouted to the young men and asked them to get out of the water but they ignored him. He ended up getting his pistol out and shot it up into the air as a warning shot for them get out. They got out of the water, wrestled him to the ground, and shot him in the abdomen. He had a really bad infection from that and the wound had to be left open. His wife cleaned it daily with peroxide and long Q-tips and he had to wear a specific medical belt around his waist to hold all of his stomach in. It took several months for him to recover and from this grueling ordeal.

Theron Weatherby had a certain philosophy about lending money to people. He said that if he thought enough of them to lend them money, he just gave it to them and he never expected it back. He did help many people through the years.

A sentimental story passed down through the years is that of his daughter Kay running up to him downtown and hugging him so intensely that a friend standing nearby commented "Theron, she acts like she hasn't seen you in months." Theron replied "I guess she hasn't. I leave before she gets up every morning and she's asleep when I come home at night." This is indicative of his hard work ethic.

Grandchildren remember in the summers when he would come home from the ranch and bring an ice-cold watermelon, and cut it open out in the yard. They all would eat watermelon and spit seeds everywhere but hose off the sidewalks when finished. They also fondly remember sitting in his lap and standing beside his recliner where he would cut an apple or peach with his pocket knife. He always had that knife with him and they jokingly do not ever remember it being cleaned. They recall he just swiped it on his jeans when finished.

Granddaughter Brandi Ellis shares about going to work at the ranch with her grandfather and reports "I would be asleep and he would come in and touch my big toe. If I wanted to go to the ranch, I had to get up, brush my teeth, splash cold water on my face and then we would go to the café downtown on Main Street there in Big Lake. He'd make me eat a full breakfast with bacon, eggs, biscuits, the whole shebang and also drink milk which I hated, drink a glass of orange juice then we'd hit the road to the ranch and get there before the sun would come up. I think the main reason he took me was to open the gates. Sometimes we did ride horseback and I remember wearing his jacket and pulling the reins up in the sleeves of his jacket because it was cold.

Family shares that these days it is hard to make a living ranching. They view it as a side job or hobby. Theron was very wise in that the land he purchased all had oil and that is a great gift to descendants today. He literally spent the last day before he went in for his heart surgery at the lawyer's office making sure all his properties and business interests were in order. He wanted his three children provided for and he saw to it that they were. He went in for another heart bypass surgery and they were never able to wean him off the bypass machine.

One story in particular stands out in regards to his character. When he was a trader and a buyer for the Wrath and Swift companies, he bought sheep for people all over the country. He had a leather briefcase and he carried checkbooks from many different people. It also contained his mail, his important papers and his checkbooks. It speaks volumes that people would give him their checkbooks to carry. That was back in the day when it was a handshake and not a contract.

A true treasure that the Weatherby family has is a recording of their Patriarch. He was interviewed by an author from Denmark. She was doing research on the sheep industry in the United States. Here is an excerpt from that interview.

"I grew up when there weren't any fences in this part of the country. There were just three wires to run your cattle and we went with our sheep on the third. We had herders but we went with the herders to take them everywhere and show them where the water was. When we were traveling with them, we stayed with them and they did the herding but we stayed to check everyday to see if they had missed anything or lost any of our sheep."

He was very frugal although he did drive a Cadillac, that was in his latter years, but that's all he did. He wore jumpsuits and not fancy clothes but he did buy his wife a new car and then after she drove it several years, he would drive it and purchase a new one for her.

The family strives to maintain their ranch lands and interests in a way that would honor their dad and granddad. There are struggles with some procedures the family deems intrusive and abrasive and they watch constantly for these encroachments by drilling companies. Although they are very grateful for the income this drilling brings, they want the ranching heritage to stay intact. They are very grateful for his good choices and they know that everyone benefits from them including family, the state and the country. Brandi tells everybody that she talks to that the ranch is first and foremost a working ranch and the hope is to keep it that way. Theron Weatherby died February 18, 1992.

