

# A Buckaroo Heart

*Mary Williams Hyde and her brilliant high-desert images.*

*By Lee Juillerat*

**P**icture Mary Williams Hyde growing up on her family's eastern Oregon cattle ranch. It was a life she loved and one she dearly misses. After years of struggling to find a substitute, picture her behind a camera photographing working buckaroos doing what she'd love to be doing.

Since 2005, Hyde figures she's photographed cowboys at more than 300 ranches or events, many years snapping upwards of 150,000 images. She focuses on traditional buckaroos and ranch rodeos, explaining, "That is so exciting to me, as opposed to pro-rodeos and Hollywood-style cowboys."

Hyde's roots embrace ranching and its lifestyle. "I really enjoyed growing up on a ranch. That's my heart and soul. I loved ranch life with every fiber of my being," she says of her childhood on the BK Ranch near the small community of Bly, between Klamath Falls and Lakeview. "I was 16 months old when I got on



MARY WILLIAMS HYDE ON RIO © YVONNE GETTMAN McDONALD

a horse," she recalls, saying she began helping with ranch work at five or six years old. "By the time I was a teenager, during the summer I was put in charge of the cattle [about 1,000 head]. It was totally frightening, but it was the best thing because you learn, 'I can do this.' On a ranch, everybody helps."

The BK was part of the Yamsay Land & Cattle Co., which also had ranches near the headwaters of the Williamson River and the Klamath Marsh. Started by her great-uncle Buck Williams in 1911, the ranches ran Herefords. Cattle wintered at the BK and were trailed to summer pastures on the other ranches.

"All I ever did was ride and take care of cattle. I wanted to live on a ranch the rest of my life," Hyde says wistfully. Wistfully, because her parents, Ted and Liz Hyde, later moved the family to Klamath Falls, where she began junior high as a tall, socially awkward teen. "It



*Ranch rodeos are different from regular pro-rodeo events primarily because they are team events. Team members are usually real working ranch buckaroos or cowboys who rope and ride almost every day of their working lives. This is a scene from the Will James Roundup in Hardin, Mont. Hyde is the official photographer of the Western States Ranch Rodeo Association Finals held in early November in Winnemucca, Nev.*



was a nightmare. My life has been kind of a struggle since then. If you live that life you don't learn how to socialize or feel comfortable around a lot of people. I don't know what it is about growing up on a ranch, but it becomes who you are. It just leaves a huge hole in your heart."

Hyde, now 72, left college to marry into a ranching family. After two and a half years, with two toddlers and a third on the way, "severe domestic violence and abuse" forced her to flee. For years afterward she struggled being apart from her well-loved lifestyle.

"I never will get to live again on a ranch in my lifetime, and this helps me," she explains. "This" refers to photographing the working buckaroos and ranch rodeos. Even so, photography wasn't something that came naturally or easily. While working in the advertising department for the Klamath Falls newspaper in the 1970s, she mostly took pictures of new and used cars, not ranches and ranchers. "I had no passion for photography."

As her interest and skills developed, Hyde left the newspaper and earned bachelor's and master's degrees in art and communication. She opened a graphics design and advertising agency, and continues to create marketing ads and website designs through her business, Mary Williams Hyde Graphic and Web Design.



*Brady Haigh rides one of Glen Shelley's young bucking horses. Ranch bronc riding differs from regular pro-rodeo bronc riding in two ways: one, the broncs are wilder and more unpredictable because they are generally inexperienced bucking horses; and two, the riders use their regular ranch saddles and hang on any way they can; no free hand in the air is required.*



*Glen Shelley is a traditional buckaroo known especially for his mastery of big-loop roping with his 85-foot rawhide reata. He is the manager of a large Burns, Ore.-area ranch and also raises bucking horses.*





*Stud-gelding day at the Blossom Ranch near Owyhee, Nev. These horses are older, and many are half-draft and very big animals. The buckaroo crew from the nearby YP Ranch had the high level of roping skills needed to keep the 45 studs, saddle horses, and crew safe for this dangerous work. The horses are bred for rodeo stock and the best of them end up being valuable ranch and pro-rodeo bucking horses.*





In the early 1990s, photographing ranches in Nevada, California and Oregon relit Hyde's passion for ranch life. "Because I grew up with both buckaroos and nonbuckaroos, I began researching every aspect of buckaroo traditions to make sure I knew them inside out." She started collecting traditional gear and says, "I really learned the fine details of how the gear should be used and put together."

In 2005, using her father's Nikon camera, Hyde showed up at a ranch roping in the eastern Oregon town of Paisley knowing no one. "Looking back, I can't believe I didn't get run off by people worried about animal rights' activists."

She believes her upbringing helps make her images come alive. "Some photographers are not ranch people. They're not taking the same photos I take." Hyde's focus has been on the older buckaroos who lived the old ways. "I don't think my dad would have called himself a buckaroo. I learned kind of a mixed bag of ranching. You take different photos when you know traditions and when you know how the horses and riders are going to behave." Those traditions she learned include tying horse tails in "mud knots," wearing jingle-bobs, chinks, flat-crowned and flat-brimmed hats, along with big-loop roping, and preferences for rawhide reatas and ropes, A-fork saddles, ornately decorated spade bits, and "lots of silver."

Because Hyde has a buckaroo heart, she's become a fixture at ranch rodeos and other working cowboy events. Her photos were featured at Shooting the West in Winnemucca, Nev., recently and at the National Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Elko, and she helps Western States Ranch Rodeo Association with photography and promotions. Though she travels less now, she continues to enjoy her favorite brandings and the Jordan Valley Big Loop event in May. She lets her camera run so as not to miss any of the best shots and took more than 17,000 photos at the Big Loop this year.

"There are some really strict rules on how the riding gear is supposed to be used. I try to emphasize and highlight the people who carry on the old ways," Hyde says. "My overall goal is to record as many people as I can who keep these old buckaroo traditions alive."

For years Hyde worked alongside family members at the historic Yamsi Ranch, near the headwaters of the Williamson River.

"I'd go up and help. I've had my own horses for years."

Along with her father, who died in 1988





*Ranch bronc-riding action in Burns, Ore., on Glen Shelley broncs. Hyde likes to keep her high-speed camera running after the eight-second ride ends to capture shots like this.*



*It is typical to see this kind of wild action at ranch rodeos. Often the broncs are saddle horses that have gone rogue. This mare was NOT going to be ridden!*

never having seen any of her photos, she credits her uncle, Dayton “Hawk” Hyde, a former rodeo photographer and bull rider, as inspiration. Hawk, who managed Yamsi for several years, wrote several books about ranch life, including “Yamsi” and “Pastures of Beyond.” Hyde says, “He captured my youth. A lot of the stories he tells are things I remember.”

For years she joined friends for extended rides into wild and remote backcountry areas, including places that frightened her. “I’ve been horseback everywhere up in the mountains,” she says, “including the rim of Crater Lake.”

While her life away from ranches hasn’t been picture perfect, Hyde prides herself on taking and selecting pictures that accurately document buckaroos and ranching. As she explains: “I take photographs that make people feel excited, like they’re there. That takes some thought and care, and that’s what I love to do. I like to celebrate the skills of the people I photograph while keeping the clear thought that the photos are not about me; they are about the people I photograph. I thank everyone for allowing me the great privilege of documenting their lives.” ■

*Lee Juillerat is a frequent RANGE contributor who lives in Klamath Falls, Ore. He is working with Jack Nicol, the former owner of southeastern Oregon’s MC Ranch, on a book that will include Juillerat’s 40-plus years of photos and stories about ranchers and ranching.*

*Mary shares her photos on three Facebook pages: Mary Williams Hyde, Buckaroo Country, and Buckaroo Country Photography. Also check [www.buckaroorcountry.com/BCblog](http://www.buckaroorcountry.com/BCblog).*



*Hyde has traveled to eastern Oregon, northern Nevada and northeastern California, as well as Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, South Dakota and Utah. This high-action shot was taken of Timber Holmquist at the Will James Roundup in Hardin, Mont. On one of the four trips she made as the official photographer of the Will James Roundup, she had the thrill of photographing the gathering of some of the bucking horses owned by Kelly Passes on the Crow Indian Reservation.*



*Fourteen-year-old Jette Black is the daughter of a well-known ranch rodeo contestant, Georgia Black. Hyde likes to take photos of interesting people as she finds them at events and ranches, then she uses a Photoshop masking technique to apply the same background to all of the photos. This makes them into a coordinated body of work for gallery shows and Facebook. She currently has 10 portraits from this series on display at the Western Folklife Center in Elko, Nev., and hopes to have several hundred more done by the end of her travels.*