

## JUST A RANCHER

*An occupation as old as the human race. By Lee Pitts*

■ was talking to my friend Phil on Thanksgiving about his father, Peter Tognazzini, and I mentioned that there would be a good turnout for his funeral. Phil, in his modest manner, said, “Why would there be a crowd, he was just a rancher.”

Just a rancher, indeed! Pete was engaged in an occupation as old as the human race. He was just a rancher who made the land come alive providing nourishing food for people who live in big cities and then turn right around and criticize those responsible for their sustenance. Pete was just a rancher who made two blades of grass grow where there had only been one before. Just a rancher who loved being in the company of cows, and those who raised them. Pete liked his cows red, his grass green, his hay cheap, and his rain regular.

Pete had been just a dairyman, but when he heard there were cows you didn’t have to milk twice a day he became just a rancher. And a good one. I knew Pete for nearly 40 years but we got off to a rocky start. I mentioned in my column that Pete had served chicken at his branding. To this day I still get people who come up to me and ask, “Did that guy really serve chicken at his branding?”

Well, it wasn’t like he handed out boxes of KFC to all his neighbors. No, that would have cost too much. “You really didn’t want me to waste beef on a bunch of ropers, did you?” Pete asked in self-defense.

Thirty-five years ago Pete went from being just a rancher to being just a farmer too. It’s bad enough that a rancher and president of the county cattlemen’s organization served poultry, but then to become a farmer too! A stump rancher, a tree trimmer. Nothing worse. Probably started taking showers every day too. The only thing worse for a rancher than eating chicken and farming would be if Pete was a banker. But I suppose serving on the board of Farm Credit for 30 years made him one of their ilk too.

To say that Pete was just a rancher is like

saying he was just a husband—married to the lovely Amelia for 66 years. I’ve heard of others being married that long but it wasn’t all to the same woman! After 66 years the two looked at each other with a gleam still in their eyes as if they were teenagers in love. They finished each other’s sentences and talked with that sass, spunk and sparkle that made every day special.

But Pete was not just a husband and a rancher, he was just a father too. Pete was so proud of his children, justifiably so, and their home is filled with several generations of history and accomplishment.

Pete was just a patriot too, having served in the Army Air Corps during World War II. He served in England and France helping build the gliders that carried soldiers to the Battle of the Bulge. He served on a plethora of committees and cared deeply about the only community he ever had.

Pete was also just a friend. A salt-of-the-earth good neighbor who liked nothing more than a branding or a barbecue. Simple pleasures for simple people who celebrated life on a daily basis.

Pete was just a religious man who lived by the Golden Rule, the Ten Commandments and the word of God. He had a strong sense of morality. He believed with all his heart that he would be reunited one day with his beloved Amelia. And rest assured, heaven will be Pete’s final address. I’ve delivered eulogies for business titans, politicians and all sorts of big shots but this is the first time I can say with 100 percent certainty where the deceased would end up. And I hope to see him there one day, just not too soon. Maybe Pete will have a welcome barbecue for me and Pete but it had better not be chicken!

Peter Tognazzini...just a rancher, just a husband, just a father, just a friend. Just a man who loved his wife, his family, his God and, yes, his cows. And that, my friends, is just the legacy of one wonderful man. ■

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