

PORTRAIT OF THE WEST

*Low man on the totem pole.
Words and photo by Cynthia Baldauf.*

A waitress approaches Andy Baldauf while he is eating lunch at the Crossing restaurant in Wisdom, Mont. Handing the phone over, she says grimly, "It's Ed at the gas station and he wants to talk to you." Silence falls over the table as Andy says hi and begins listening. On the other end, Ed is talking loud enough so everyone can hear him.

"Were you with that group that just drove those cows through my station?"

Andy says, "Yes, I was."

Ed continues loudly, "I'm guessing you are low man on the totem pole?"

Andy starts looking worried and says, "Uh...yeah...I guess so."

"Get over here and hose off my pumps and driveway!" says Ed, ending the conversation. The whole lunch crowd roars with laughter. Andy grins and heads across the street.

Andy didn't take up cowboying until he arrived in the Big Hole Valley in southwest Montana at 57. He still sports positivity and a can-do attitude at 77 and jumps at every opportunity to ride horses and work cattle, even if it means heading home covered in the liquid form of yesterday's grass. ■

Cynthia Baldauf has been married to Andy "for 43 glorious years." They live part time in Indiana and part time in Wisdom, Mont., where they have been adopted by real ranchers. You can find cleaner images at cynthiabaldaufimages.com.



"Tough Day in the Pens"

Andy Baldauf joined the horseback crew at the Dudley Ranch for the early morning gather. It started out way below zero, but as the sun hit the sorting pens things got slick quickly. After countless face-plants he was still smiling when the day ended.