

A Wandering Life

For Sharon Gould, a lifetime of living and working on ranches has been a never-ending adventure.

Words & photos by Kathy McCraine.

Working cowboys are a nomadic lot, always restless to know what lies on the other side of the hill, be it greener pastures, a better string of horses, or wilder cattle to rope. Charlie Gould is no exception, and his wife, Sharon, has been at his side for the entire ride. Throughout 30 years of marriage, the Goulds have worked on 32 outfits in Arizona, New Mexico, and Nevada. Sharon has done it all, from cow work to cooking for the crew. Many times she has gotten up at three in the morning to have breakfast ready for as many as 16 cowboys while Charlie saddled her horse. Then after a day's work in the saddle, she would trot back to camp early to get dinner ready.

At 68, Sharon is slender and vivacious, with long, strawberry-blond hair, a bright smile, and an outgoing personality that fairly bubbles over. She grew up horseback, but was young and just married the first time she had to cook for a crew. The couple had just gone to work on a desert ranch near Florence, Ariz., and was moving into an adobe house where an old bachelor cook named Tom had been living. While cleaning the house up that first day, she discovered a pot of cooked beans under the bed.

"When I opened the lid, it was fuzzy green," she says. "It didn't smell bad, but I didn't know what to do with it. I finally decided to give it to my pet dog. I set the pot on the porch and this dog looked at it and kind of turned his nose up and walked away. Pretty soon the boss came riding up and said, 'Young lady, would you please go in and get that pot of beans that's under the bed and

warm it up for lunch?'"

"I said, 'I've looked at that pot of beans and it looks a little flavorful; it's not real pretty.' He said, 'When Tom cooks beans like that, we eat it if it doesn't smell bad. Just put them on the stove.'"

"Well, the dog had just taken a couple pieces of meat and kind of stirred the mold around. There was no food in the house, not even a can of Spam, so I skimmed all the green off and heated it up. I darned sure

make a hand, so you're kind of under the gun. If I did something wrong, Charlie had a name for me, and it was GTHOTW—get the hell out of the way!"

The cowherd at the 7 Up in the '90s was made up of mostly F1 Brahman cows that were adapted to the country and wise to rotating pastures with the seasons, so it was easy for the two of them to work them alone. "I was kind of like a pet dog," Sharon says. "Charlie didn't have a border collie, so I was

his cow dog. He'd just point and I would jump in, with Charlie coaching me along. We roped a lot of cranky bulls, ones that would come eat you, and that scared me to death. He would head a bull, and it would literally be running up the rope trying to get Charlie, and he'd be yelling, 'Get in here and rope this sonofagun and get him off me!'"

In late fall Charlie would move the cows down to Lovelace, another camp deep in Burro Creek Canyon, some 3,000 feet lower than the surrounding mesas. Lovelace had originally been the homestead of a suspected cattle rustler named

John Lovelace, who became legendary in the 1940s. There was a cabin on the creek there, and Charlie would stay in it for three to four months during the winter. Sharon packed groceries and grain down to him with a horse, a mule, and a little donkey, often staying to help with the cow work. The trail was too rough and steep to take a truck, so it was a difficult two-and-a-half-hour ride from Halfway.

Burro Creek Canyon was a hostile place, filled with dangerous trails, thorny cactus, Gila monsters, rattlesnakes, and Hualapai



Sharon keeps the coffee going for the crew in her backyard during shipping time at the Triangle HC shipping pens on the 7 Up Ranch near Prescott, Ariz.

boiled it before those boys ate it that day, and nobody died or had stomach aches."

Sharon went on to become an outstanding camp cook, but what she really loved was prowling the country and working cows with Charlie. Twice in their career—in the early 1990s and again recently—the couple lived and worked at the 7 Up Ranch near Prescott, Ariz., much of that time at a remote cow camp known as Halfway House.

What is Charlie like to work with? "It's not easy working with your husband," Sharon says, "because you want to please him and



LEFT: Cowboy Charlie Gould worked for the 7 Up Ranch twice during his long career of punching cows, once in the 1990s and again from 2001-2003. This holdup is at the Triangle HC shipping pens on the 7 Up. **BELOW:** Sharon Gould has lived on 32 outfits in Arizona, New Mexico and Nevada in 30 years of marriage to Charlie. She's done it all from cow work to cooking for the crew. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Out of all the outfits Sharon has lived on, the Halfway House camp on the 7 Up Ranch is her favorite and the place where she most felt at home. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Charlie and Sharon at a lion hunting party in New Mexico. Hunting lions is one of Charlie's passions, which comes in handy on the lion-infested ranges of the Southwest.

tigers, a blood-sucking insect that could cause an allergic reaction if you were bitten. Even the big-horned crossbred cows could get on the fight and run a horse and rider off the steep trail. "There was always something down in that country that could get you," Sharon says, "yet Lovelace had a good feel to it. That river was soft against the canyon, and it would just lull you to sleep." Of all the places they worked on, the 7 Up became Sharon's favorite and still holds a special place in her heart. But after returning for two years, it was time to move on.

Today the Goulds live and work on the Windmill Ranch in Sedona, Ariz. Sharon doesn't ride with Charlie as much as she used to because of arthritis and lingering back problems. "It's hard for me at this stage of my life to watch a crew ride out when I'm the one left behind," she says, "but I know I have to gauge myself and take shorter rides, enjoy cooking for the crew and just observing things. I can't stay in town. I enjoy what life brings every day. It's a gift that a person can't put into words." ■

Kathy McCraine is a rancher, writer and photographer from Prescott, Ariz., who owns the 7 Up Ranch. Parts of this story are excerpted from her new book, "The 7 Up Ranch Cookbook: The Story of Arizona's Historic 7 Up Ranch with Recipes and Photos," available at www.kathymcraine.com.

