

## Interview with Paul Decker Wednesday October 26, 2016

By Cindy K. Roberts



I had the honor to meet and talk with cowboy, Paul Decker . . . rancher, muleman, packer and teacher; to many his life is nothing short of extraordinary. To watch him work, witness his teaching at clinics . . . his close connection with mules is amazing. Paul is an inspiration to many. He is a man of conviction and he honors God's word. I am humbled that Paul has asked me to document his work and record his life. This interview is merely an introduction, looking into the heart and soul of Paul Decker.

Cindy K. Roberts: What was your childhood like?

Paul Decker: I had a great childhood; I'm still having a good childhood. I grew up in the West Central Arizona . . . the rest of it was all cow country. That was in the day when cows were king. Big olé Cattle Ranches around there . . . real close knit people . . . no restrictions; it was a good life.

CKR: What did your parents do?

PD: My dad worked for Cypress Bagdad [mining] the big underground there. My mother was a homemaker; she was quite the seamstress made lots of shirts for me. I grew up with two brothers and two sisters. It was good, we were in times of change . . . I was the only one that hung onto the lifestyle. I have a sister that recently widowed. I have one brother that works the mine in Bagdad and one sister that lives with mom and one brother that works for the water company in Raleigh, NC.

CKR: Were there any cowboy heroes or mentors in your life that you admired in your childhood?

PD: John Andrews he is probably the most influential in my life – he was such a good hand, a good teacher, not that he couldn't get riled, his demeanor was always the kindest and willing to help. He was a cowpuncher. He was the youngest guy, early 20's leadership skills, never talked down to anybody. Bagdad AZ – he was running the Mule Shoe ranch at that time . . . a good friend of my dad's – he was there all through my childhood. Kenny Fox was another. This was during the 60's and 70's.

CKR: What was your first equine experience like?

PD: [I was] a year old, Bull Creek, my great grandpa had a big gelding; he had me wrapped up in his arms while ridin' in the saddle to cross high waters . . . and that creek was rollin'.

CKR: When did you start to ride independently? I was eight or ten years old, I knew what I wanted to be. I didn't want to be a fireman . . . I wanted to be on horseback. Either working cattle or having a string of mules, packing stuff up off the mountain.

CKR: What did your family expect from you?

PD: Growin' up in my mommy and daddy's house, there weren't no timeouts at our house. If my daddy took time out it was to tear your ass up for . . . there was no back talk, there was no disrespect.



CKR: What people influenced you in your ranching career?

PD: Heck, you know Cindy there has been so many . . . probably guys like Harry Chineretto, Clay Tyree, "Hoot" Gibson 7U7 Ranch; that community was so tight. To think of all the ranchers that were there, I imagine they were much good hands . . . we were still pretty dang good.

CKR: What made you follow the life/path of a cowboy?

PD: Just, you know Cindy, I don't know that it was a decision to do that. I think you are created to do that. It's not an easy life for anybody I think you are either born to do that or not. We see it today, the way Ranch businesses are gone . . . people buying ranches; people have no idea about ranching etiquette. People don't understand the Cowboy Code . . . it mostly doesn't boil down to anything but GOOD manners. Your stock . . . you don't put your stock ahead of yourselves. It's about your cattle; it's about your livestock! Your comforts don't event fit into the equations. It is about your horses and your cattle.

CKR: It's been an honor Paul. Thank you for sharing a part of your life with me.



Paul Decker leading a pack string of mules in the Grand Canyon.