

She's An Eagle When She Flies

by [Cindy K. Roberts](#) ©Dec2010



The Oklahoma cowgirl climbed up the fence rail, over the gate and down into the chute...her heart is in her throat and her pulse is racing. She is used to the smell of livestock along with the 400,000 tons of dirt that sets the stage inside the grand arena for another summer's night of bull riding competition. The lights dim, a roaming spotlight searches through the darkness while the echo of her name blasts off the walls to 45,000 excited fans; a sellout crowd awaits. She carefully slides one leg over a ferocious two thousand pound animal, while securing her leather grip. His back is tense, he snorts, jerks and gives a stomp...she knows that "Satan" will live up to his name tonight. The wranglers are giving the fearless cowgirl last minute instructions on how to stay out of trouble on number 22. After all, they don't want to see their little comrade get hurt. The buzzer sounded, the gate flew open and the bull bolted out of the chute. This is it. The Oklahoma cowgirl knows she has to make another high score this round, and it's never easy. Satan, now bucking with powerful force, does a perfect tornado spin with all fours off the ground. Like a tiny rag doll, her legs flop up and down while her hard-fisted grip locked in for the ride. This is the longest six seconds of this Oklahoma cowgirl's life. Soon, she will be at the mercy of the fire breathing black bull named Satan when she tumbles to the dirt packed floor. This is rodeo and it leaves your breathless. This is a story about one special cowgirl, The Queen of Hearts of Rodeo, Melissa Phillips, who has had her share of ups and downs..she's an eagle when she flies.

She's that special person that will leave an impact on your emotional spirit. A person that will touch your heart and soul with heartfelt truth, yet will leave you feeling hopeful and blessed at the very same time...if you are indeed lucky to meet her in your lifetime. She is an exceptional lady of sensitive nature and she has a heart bigger than Texas. Lady bull rider Melissa Phillips is perhaps a cowgirl legend and known to me as The Queen of Hearts of Rodeo.

I met mid-western cowgirl legend Melissa Phillips, while riding in the Rocky Mountains in 2003. A spit-fire attitude

of self-assurance surrounded her pint size frame; this little rodeo star fills her boots completely. Standing knee high to a grasshopper, Melissa has learned to survive in this business with a cowgirl up attitude. She's tougher than bull hide and meaner than a barnyard snake...that means she can more than hold her own, bar none.

I believe we didn't meet by chance and to hear Melissa talk about her life while on the road is remarkable and inspiring. I learned more and more about her as we rode up to Green Mountain crossing over Tonahutu Creek in Colorado that year. We talked about horses, cowboys and bull riding. We also shared our thoughts about life, our choices and the cowgirl spirit. We became friends and I instantly knew this go-getter cowgirl is a true winner. Her endless energy and positive attitude truly contributes to her successful bull-riding career.

Melissa has titles and awards that can fill any trophy room, yet she yearns to do it all over again, to prove herself. A 1992 Reserve Champion Bull Rider, 1993 Pro Women's Rodeo Association Rough Stock Rookie of The Year, 1993 PWRA Champion (bull riding), 1993 two time Bareback Riding Finalist; Bareback Riding Director; Bull Riding Director, 1995 Reserve Champion Bull Rider and a 1995 National Cowgirl Hall of Fame Nominee. In 1997 Melissa was the first woman on The Worlds Toughest Tour. This is just a few of her accomplishments.



Those big Oklahoma eyes can light up any western sky and she wears a smile wider than the Rio Grande. I remember we talked late into the moonlit night while sitting around a Rocky Mountain campfire. I watched her wipe away a tear as the hazy smoke lifted a burning ember to the sky. We talked about the rainbow we saw earlier that day, rodeo...and cowboy legends that we both held dear to our hearts. Melissa then spotted a shooting star, pointed to it and made a wish. Her heartfelt laughter told me her spirits were lifted again...yes she is living her dream.

There is a price to pay for rodeo accomplishments. Eleven broken ribs, two broken collar bones, a skull fracture, a broken wrist and not to mention several head injuries. There were some broken hearts along the way too and sometimes they don't heal as quickly; Melissa boldly bounces forward as she has had a lot of lessons on how to start over again. With uttermost determination, she never stops to look back. She knows that life on earth is the real deal with no make up rides or second chances.

She talks about God and what he has done for her life that has meaning; a purpose that she guards with deliberating thoughts. She has had her share of ups and downs and yet she feels blessed in every sense of the way. She is a cancer survivor, a devoted soul and admired by many.

Melissa produced a professional, promotional CD for the purpose of endorsing women's rodeo. Her love for the sport is a lifelong commitment. She has toured with Long Horn Rodeo Productions (www.longhornrodeo.com) as the celebrity headliner for 2006. She has signed on sponsors such as Dillard's (cosmetic division) Department Stores after all, cowgirls wear lip gloss too. If you're lucky, you might be able to rope this rodeo Queen of Hearts into promoting your next rodeo or ranch event.

Melissa is now coaching a young lady to ride bulls in the arena and believes she will be her next champion. Besides the physical and competitive side of bull riding, Melissa will coach her student on image, attitude and how to address the media. Melissa has inspired many women through the years and encourages women to be active and supportive in women's pro rodeo events. Women's bull riding demands a 6 second ride and the prize money increases every year for the ladies.



I met with Melissa on the trail last month to get the rest of her story for this article. Our time spent sitting around the campfire and in the saddle was heart warming...filled with true cowgirl spirit. We rode across the Current River and climbed to the top of the bluff to a spectacular view of Turkey Vultures, dancing through the clear-blue Ozark sky. Melissa rode her six-year-old sorrel gelding, "Patches," that she had started under saddle in the last ninety days. He is her next hopeful barrel racing prospect and so far he is looking very promising. The athletic gelding is quick on his feet, rides like a pair of aces with his Queen of Hearts of Rodeo in the saddle.

Melissa knows in her heart that she has been blessed throughout her life. Her life story is unique and no one can change that or take that away. She is currently writing a book that she believes will be an inspiration to women. As Melissa has learned, life is uncertain and you have to take the punches, then to get up and be stronger for the next harrowing adventure. That is the very winning cowgirl attitude that has given her the drive and energy to pursue her dreams.

As cowgirl fate would have it, Melissa has also been approached by a movie production company for an interview; in hopes to team her up with the writers working on a screenplay that will portray her life's story.

Melissa Phillips, The Queen of Hearts of Rodeo wouldn't trade her life for anyone else's...and I believe God planned it this way. Her true grit and determination portrayed in her own life's beaten path, makes her a legend. A life that she created in her very own boots; whether she flew high or took a tumble and crashed to the ground, it's her life story. A life story filled with laughter, anger and tears; measured by the thrill and excitement of it all, that makes her a true cowgirl legend. Thanks for the memories Melissa...this is your year for ridin' high again. Yes, she's an eagle when she flies.