

On Rider's Rules for Cowboys and Cowgirls  
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As a kid back in the 1940s and '50s I was a big fan of movie and TV cowboy Roy Rogers. When we were about eight or ten, we kids used to line up as being for Roy or, the other big cowboy hero, Gene Autry, and I would announce that I was for Roy.

Roy had what he called "rider's rules," ten standards for how to conduct your life he'd send on a card if you wrote him.

1. Be neat and clean.
2. Be courteous and polite.
3. Always obey your parents.
4. Protect the weak and help them.
5. Be brave and take chances.
6. Study hard and learn all you can.
7. Be kind to animals and take care of them.
8. Eat all your food and never waste any.
9. Love God and go to Sunday school regularly.
10. Always respect our flag and our country.

I admit to changing Roy's rule five. Roy said be brave but *don't* take chances, and I don't know why he said that (if he did; maybe what I read today to write this up was a misprint). In his

own life and in his movies, Roy was both brave and took chances, so I took the liberty to change that rule.

Roy's wife and co-star in his movies and television shows Dale Evans talked about being what she called a "cowgirl": "A cowgirl is an attitude, really, a pioneer spirit, a special brand of courage. The cowgirl faces life head on, lives by her own lights, and makes no excuses. Cowgirls take stands. They speak up. They defend the things they hold dear. A cowgirl might be a rancher, or a barrel racer, or a bull rider, or an actress. But she's just as likely to be a checker at the local Winn Dixie [a grocery store chain], a full time mother, a banker, an attorney, or an astronaut." That sounds to me as if it would characterize a cowboy as well as a cowgirl. Somewhere I read that if you are a cowboy (and I'll add cowgirl), I think it came from Roy or Dale, "you walk tall whether you work at the ranch, the mine, or the state capital" — so I'll include that here.

I've concluded after a long life that whoever you are and wherever you come from, if you live by the rider's rules (including church on Sundays, and I'm not religious), and do it as a cowgirl or a cowboy, you have a really good shot at living an honorable, self-respecting, and successful life in America, even with all its supposed injustices and inequities.

I'm serious about this: I think Roy and Dale were on to something—it comes down to an individual's values. Without always being consciously aware of it (and Roy and Dale weren't alone transmitting this basic orientation—the Chip Hilton sport stories so popular among boys back then come to mind), I picked up a lot of what Roy and Dale, and the others, affirmed about how to conduct oneself and I've done well by it in my life. I started from real low in the social pecking order and now, just about at the end, I'm feeling good about how things have turned out.

I'm wondering who in this time is sending this empowering "Roy and Dale" message to kids. Parents, teachers, public figures? And if they aren't doing it, what's keeping them from it?