

# *Rodeos & Cowgirls*

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by Gail Balden

At the 67<sup>th</sup> annual Long Beach Rodeo at the end of July, one could take in all the rodeo favorites: bareback riding, calf roping, steer wrestling, bull riding, barrel racing and a special division of peewee barrels and junior barrels for the little kids. Barrel racing is my favorite. It pits the rider and horse against the clock. I like it because it's a women's sport whose popularity began to rise when ranch women in the early 1900's started competing for fun. I'm glad they had something to do for fun. The rider must complete a cloverleaf pattern with three barrels placed approximately one hundred feet apart. There's a 5-second penalty for every barrel that's knocked over. Each contestant begins at the starting line and completes a full circle around all three barrels. The best part comes after turning the third barrel when the horse races to the finish line and the official time is taken. That's when the crowd cheers the loudest for both horse and rider as they sail home free doing what they've trained for.

When the time came for the Peewee Barrels, it was a different story. Some of these youngsters on their horses tried their best to get their horse to circle the barrels. Some did, some didn't, and some horses shied away altogether at the sight of the blue barrels. One horse and its 3-year old rider whose feet didn't reach the stirrups, was lead by her instructor around the barrels. That's when the crowd cheered the loudest, supporting this young cowgirl and her horse, encouraging her on, and with their applause letting her know it was all in the trying. And when her horse finally completed the last turn and started for the finish line at a slow trot, the crowd was on its feet lifting this young cowgirl up, letting her know she did good, she made the effort, and the time didn't matter, it was all in the trying.

Like life, I think, it's all in the trying. Despair is all around us, and we each have our pots of sorrow to lick clean. It's election year, the mud slinging has begun in earnest, and most of us are disgusted with it. We don't need any more reminders of how bad it all is. What we need is the image of a young girl getting her little pony to go around the barrels and a crowd to come to its feet to cheer her home. Just like we needed the Olympics, coming as they did, just in the nick of time to lift us up and remind us of the best we can be.

Summer is winding down though most of us here on the Oregon Coast feel like it's barely begun. I've held a few porch parties to connect with friends and neighbors, to share supper and sustenance for body and soul. I've gathered tomatoes, zucchini and greens from the garden and finally tasted a peach whose juice has dripped down my arms. I've won a few first place ribbons for the flowers I entered in the Tillamook County Fair and enjoyed my moment of glory. We who live on the upper western edge of the continent so appreciate the sweet days of summer and all the gifts it brings.

Still, the seasons roll on, and life is all about change. School buses will soon rumble down the road. This year, my grandsons mark their own milestones: kindergarten, first grade, and high school. I get ready to transition to a new decade of life and a new chapter. As fall approaches, in our small towns on the Oregon Coast we gear up for the next season wondering what nature has in store for us this time.

I propose we throw despair aside. It will always be with us. There will always be fires to put out. Instead, I'm going to focus on hope and remembrance: on what we used to be and what we can become, as the Olympics and the three-year old peewee barrel racer shows us. The gathering of neighbors and friends on my deck for porch parties, sharing summer's bounty and conversation reminds me of our need to connect and take care--of each other.