



10-2013

# A Lone A Last A Loved A Long

Madison Beckstead Bowman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/inscape>

---

## Recommended Citation

Bowman, Madison Beckstead (2013) "A Lone A Last A Loved A Long," *Inscape*: Vol. 33 : No. 1 , Article 10.  
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/inscape/vol33/iss1/10>

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Inscape* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

## **A LONE A LAST A LOVED A LONG**

*by*

**Madison Beckstead Bowman**

1. My mother's cowboy hat is felt and cream-colored. She wears it low on her forehead until it hides her eyebrows and almost her eyes, which are dark and set far back into her skull. Her hat is dusty because she is no show cowgirl, but one that can quickly corral a calf back through the stock chute as well as ride the serpentine ride with a pearly smile, giving the choppy up-and-down wave that one gives while galloping. Once Zeb has read the cowboy prayer in his booming announcer's voice, she will ride off out of the arena while her children and grandchildren cheer from their seats in section B or, if they're the lucky ones, the seats over the chutes. This is my rodeo mother.

2. Fifteen years before I was born, a horse bucked my mother off its back onto a cement slab, then sat on her head, cracked her skull, and snuffed her into a coma. My father's parents heard this news while my dad was at work and waited for him to come home so they could tell him. And even though my parents, who had been high school sweethearts, were not dating when my mother had the accident, when my grandparents told my father what had happened, he turned pale and shaky and, without saying a word, walked out

the door, got into his truck, and drove away to be with her. "That was the moment we knew he loved her," my grandfather told me once. Ten days later, and a few hours after my mother's doctor said it was unlikely she would survive, my mother woke from unconsciousness and found my father sitting by her side. I have never asked her when she knew my father loved her.

3. My mother was born in the town she was raised in, the town she still lives in, a town she is made of. When she walks down the street, she greets everyone she sees. She knows their stories, their parents, their children. At Christmastime, she is the organizer of the Festival of Lights event: a bed race, parade, fireworks, and the lighting of the town. In the summer, she is consumed with the rodeo. She is its committee chair, the first woman in its 79 year history to fill that position. When I was young, I believed she ran the whole town. Now that I'm older, I'm not sure she doesn't.

4. Seventeen years before I was born, my mother's father, a healthy man, a horse man in his late 40s, contracted pancreatic cancer and died four months after his diagnosis. He died a ravaged, yellowing skeleton, but until the end he retained a mischievous twinkle in his eye, as though dying were just a trick he was playing, or a joke he told to pass the time.

5. In a box in my parents' basement is a collection of Super 8 film reels. When many of us are together and someone makes the effort of setting up the projector, we watch the rolls of film and talk about the past. The reels consist of silent snippets, black and white scenes with a slow, choppy frame rate like the movies from the 20s, though these home videos were mostly taken in the 50s and 60s. One video shows my teenaged mother and her father returning

from a day of riding, unsaddling their horses and parading for the camera with stiff legs and radiant faces. I like to watch the films reflected on the faces of my mother and her two older brothers as they sit with rapt attention, the grainy shades of gray and light illuminating their sibling-similar features. They share a pair of eyes: deep-set, with their father's playful twinkle and their mother's way of shrinking up and squeezing shut when they really get laughing. These are the eyes of my siblings, too, and when we are together, I love to make them laugh long and hard so I can watch their cheekbones rising up, folding the eye skin like a suddenly compressed accordion, pressing their eyes shut, sticking their eyelids together, making us the same.

6. My mother was orphaned at age 56, when her mother passed away from pneumonia. I did not consider her an orphan, did not think someone her age could be one, but she told me that she was and when I looked at her eyes for months afterward and saw the subtle loneliness in their depth, I believed her.

7. During the deepest week of August, the deepest month of the year, the field of the rodeo arena is watered until the dust is defeated, then plowed into earthy troughs. My grandfather used to do this, then my father, and now my brother has taken over the job of circling the arena with tractor and plow in smaller and smaller circles, repeating as necessary, until the ground is primed for roping calves and wrestling steers and circling barrels and bucking broncos. In the rich dirt of that arena, my family has walked, boots sinking into the topsoil, or they have ridden, galloping buckskins who shoot dirt in arcs behind them as they launch forward. If you're there on that weekend in August, when the tractor drives

away and its exhaust evaporates into the dwindling dusk, there will be a moment when you think you should have brought a sweater, and moments after that, you will discover the finest smell on Earth, the smell of pure earth. You will want to lie in that dirt, sweep angel tracks into it with your arms and legs, stick your nose down into a furrow and inhale deeply, heap mounds of it onto your legs and torso until you yourself are a large mound of blackish, heavy soil. The next day, hats will be flung into that dirt, tossed from the heads of bull-riding cowboys or whisked off the heads of dolled-up rodeo queens. But when my mother rides in that arena she will push her hat down low on her head. It will stay until she chooses to take it off, and when she does, her hair will be flat against her scalp and there will be seen for hours afterward a slight band of indented red across her brow.