

**Jerry McKelvy's**  
**WAY BACK WHEN**

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**HAPPY 250<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY, AMERICA**

Plans are in place for a grand celebration as America celebrates its 250<sup>th</sup> birthday on July 4. A big celebration is planned for Washington, DC and I'm sure cities all across America will have some sort of celebration. The United States is a young country compared to many others in the world. We have been through good times and bad times throughout our history including wars and depressions. The Founding Fathers put together a government and a constitution which has served us well so far.

It was a big decision to declare our independence back in 1776. Fifty-six men signed their names to the document. Five of them were captured by the British and tortured. Twelve of them had their homes ransacked or burned. Nine fought in the Revolutionary War and died from wounds or hardships. One had to keep his family hidden while he served in the war.

The most prominent signature of the document is that of John Hancock. Legend says he wrote his name so big that King George could read it without his glasses. His signature became a popular colloquialism for a person's signature when signing important documents such as "I need your John Hancock at the bottom of this form"

A large, elegant, cursive handwritten signature of John Hancock, written in black ink. The signature is highly stylized with long, sweeping flourishes, particularly at the beginning and end.

How long has it been since you read the Declaration of Independence? It is not a long document and can be easily found online or in history books. Probably, the most often quoted sentence in the document is this:

*"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness"*

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Some anniversaries seem to call for larger celebrations such as the 100<sup>th</sup>, the 150<sup>th</sup>, 200<sup>th</sup>, and 250<sup>th</sup>. I checked some of the old papers to see how they celebrated Independence Day on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1926. The Arkansas Gazette had a pretty good article describing the celebration in Little Rock in 1926. The Fourth of July that year fell on a Sunday, so many events took place the next day.

The site for the celebration in Little Rock was Fair Park where an estimated crowd of 20,000 people had congregated. The celebration lasted all day and late into the night. The paper reported that fireworks were noisy, colorful, and plentiful. Many refreshment stands sold out as thousands of customers demanded more and colder drinks. The weather was hot as it usually is in July. Games were played between pedestrians and motorists. The article didn't give details, but reported plenty of bent fenders, profanity, narrow escapes, but no fatalities. The crowd sang "America" during the celebration. There were few accidents during the celebration, and except for sunburns and chiggers, no one suffered much. It seemed that city folks headed for the country and the rural folks headed for the city. Many headed for bodies of water for swimming and picnics. Every stream within a 100-mile radius was infected with anglers.

There were parades in most cities and patriotic speeches by leading politicians of the day. Usually, someone was selected to read the Declaration of Independence. Some of the games played at the Little Rock celebration that year included baseball, girls end ball, sack races for boys and girls, 440-yard relay, girls 50-yard dash, boys 50-yard dash, and boys volleyball.

Another event in the Little Rock celebration was horse racing. There was a slow mule race won by a mule named Jenny. Second place was a mule named Maude. The first horse race was won by a horse named Lightning and second place winner was a horse named White Eagle. The next race was won by a horse named Princess, with Buster coming in second, and Juanita in third place.

Some Fourth of July celebrations have become traditions which take place every year in certain cities. New York City has a hot dog eating contest to see how many hot dogs a person can eat in ten minutes. San Diego has a marshmallow fight each year. Bar Harbor, Maine has lobster races, and the cities of Bolinas and Stinson Beach, California

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have an annual tug of war with people from both towns trying to drag the others into the mud.

Fifty years ago, the nation celebrated the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary with celebrations in almost every town in America, large or small. Many of the big events were televised. Besides the usual speechmaking, residents enjoyed a variety of local events in many towns in Arkansas including music concerts, fireworks, parades, picnics, 21-gun salutes, bell ringing, frog-jumping contests, greased pig contests, terrapin races, baby crawling races, wood chopping contests, and tobacco spitting contests. One town gave a prize to the oldest person present and to the man who had the longest beard.

How ever you choose to celebrate our 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary, be safe and take a moment to appreciate the freedoms we have in this country. You might also say a little prayer for our country. Our country is very divided today. A recent Gallup poll shows that only 58% were extremely or very proud to be an American. Some even wonder if the country can survive much longer. Even Abraham Lincoln in giving his famous Gettysburg Address back in 1863 said “Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure”. Benjamin Franklin was asked following the constitutional convention what type of government they had created. He said “A republic, if you can keep it”. Our country has made it for 250 years. Hopefully, in another hundred years, there will be celebrations of America’s 350<sup>th</sup> birthday.

There was a drawing in the Arkansas Gazette in 1976 drawn by George Fisher as America celebrated our 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It pictured the Founding Fathers gathered around a table signing the Declaration of Independence. Below the picture were these words:

*“The document those men signed 200 years ago set the course of liberty, but did not guarantee it. Each succeeding generation inherits the task of re-winning it. The price of liberty is eternal vigilance, but who among us is unwilling to pay it?”*

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The following article was submitted by Mary Grace Ketner of San Antonio, Texas, a friend of Don Mathis, who is a frequent contributor.

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## GUADALUPE RIVER ANTHOLOGY

Guadalupe River Anthology—a series of vignettes by Mary Grace Ketner. (inspired by Spoon River Anthology, by Edgar Lee Masters), in which deceased characters rise from the grave and reflect on the hidden realities and regrets of their lives. The only difference is these characters are real, all ancestors of Mary Grace.

### Daphne Williams Heidel



After Sid died in the Great War  
I just thought my life was over,  
So, when Oliver asked me to marry him,  
I did.

He had a dairy, and  
we lived there in a tent.  
His sister, mean and lazy,  
lived in the house nearby with their mother  
and made life as hard as she could for us

and everyone else.

Still, that was the happiest time in our marriage,  
living in that tent, just the two of us.

When children came along, we got a house of our own.

One day, Oliver came in from working all day,  
sat down at the kitchen table, and heaved a great sigh.  
“If it weren’t for you and kids, he said,  
“I think I could make a go of this dairy.

And I thought, “Well, all right”.  
So, we divorced.

The divorce petition had to say something,  
and it said that I had been unfaithful,  
but I knew I was true to my heart,  
more true than I had ever been.

That was because of Wes.  
He loved me, I know, since some time before all that,  
and I think, if truth be told, I loved him, too.  
He played with my four children, teased them,  
laughed with them, loved them, really---  
which is something Oliver never did.

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We married.  
And Charles, then Louis, came along, making six.

Charlie-boy was late in learning to walk,  
and people said it was because Wes never set him down.

## John H. and Virginia Klingemann

Virginia said,

I was eighteen and working as an elevator operator at the Bluebonnet Hotel,  
*Fourth floor, please, miss.*  
Up and down, up and down, all day  
*First floor, please*  
Yes sir, going down.

When the door opened, I looked out and saw this good-looking man walking to the soda fountain  
I watched him stride to the counter  
He stood up straight, showing his angular posture at its best.  
I blushed at admiring him.

Oh, I thought, if he looks at me, I'll just melt into a puddle.  
Johnny didn't look my way that day, and I didn't melt.

Johnny said,

Several of us men who were recovering from TB  
had walked from the VA to a social club on Quilan Creek.

There I saw a happy, lovely woman dancing with another man.  
A man from the town.  
He thought he was going to walk her home, but I walked her home!  
Her name was Virginia.

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They tell me, in photos before I met her, I am never smiling  
and in the photos taken after, I am always smiling.  
I don't know how I looked, but I know how I felt.

So here we lie, side by side, in the shade of a broad pin oak.  
You can't tell, but we are both still smiling.



## Starr Bryden

That was a long trip for a boy sick with  
Galluping Consumption at the tender age of 16.  
(How they got the initials "T.B." out of "Galluping Consumption"  
I don't know).

My father had read about the healing powers of the Texas Hill Country air,  
so, we came all the way from Tennessee.  
me, just a jump and a skip ahead of Father Time with the scythe.  
He made quite a few passes at me, but I jumped  
and the scythe went under my feet.

Where Mr. Williams found me was right there by the creek.  
He ran back and got his wife, and they carried me home,  
closed in their porch for my infirmary  
and she nursed me back to life.

I don't know how I got into my head to go  
back and visit Tennessee that one time, but I did.  
Fifteen hundred miles. I had \$10 and my bike  
and I made that ride in twenty-one days  
I paid for everything I ate on the way  
and when I got home, I had exactly 25 cents.

I guess I could have stayed, but I didn't.  
Back in Kerrville, I told Dr. Jackson  
"That trip didn't kill me like you said it would"  
and he said, "Hell no, but it should have".

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I got drafted in the Big War  
but not for long  
I went in when the cap busted  
and came out before the gun fired,  
so to speak.

A lot of that, people don't know.  
What they remember is me buzzing around Kerrville  
on my bicycle or later, my red motor scooter  
with the white star on the front  
and my camera.

I photographed the Guadalupe,  
a thousand times, I'll wager, and every last cypress on  
her banks  
and the town, too. Old buildings that aren't there  
anymore.

Little girls in fields of bluebonnets that I colored with a

blue pencil.

And boys that are old men now.



But what I remember—and never forgot for a minute—  
was Grace.

She loved me, I know, maybe as much as I loved her  
if that is possible. But she married another, a rich man.

She had a good life, I reckon  
with everything she could desire,  
but I could have loved her more than he did  
I could have loved her more.

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[National Day of the Cowboy](#) is July 25. This poem celebrates the Hispanic origins of Western life.

## Vaquero to Buckaroo – by Don Mathis

You’ve heard the word, “Ten Gallon Hat.”  
But did you ever wonder why is that?  
Most people know of the Mexican vaqueros,  
so gallant they were in their sombreros.

“So gallant” is “tan galán” in translation.  
It’s true, and I can give you the citation!  
Ergo, the tan galán hat is just an aspect  
of the English and Spanish dialect.

Other words were adopted by the buckaroo.  
It’s amazing what the language will construe.  
A mustang or bronco can be found at the rodeo.  
You can rope a remuda if you have a lasso.

If you ride in a canyon with too much brush,  
better wear your chaps when you’re in a rush.  
A Mexican horseman is called a charro.  
He works the corral on the rancho.

If you break the law, you must vamoose,  
or else you’ll end up in the calaboose.  
There’s no English word for Texas or Colorado  
– or patio, mosquito, taco, or even tornado.

If you’re savvy, you’ll know the hackamore  
is from the jáquima bridle in days of yore.  
I could tell you more but you may not bear it,  
but you can trust me, I’m a Cowboy Poet Lariat!