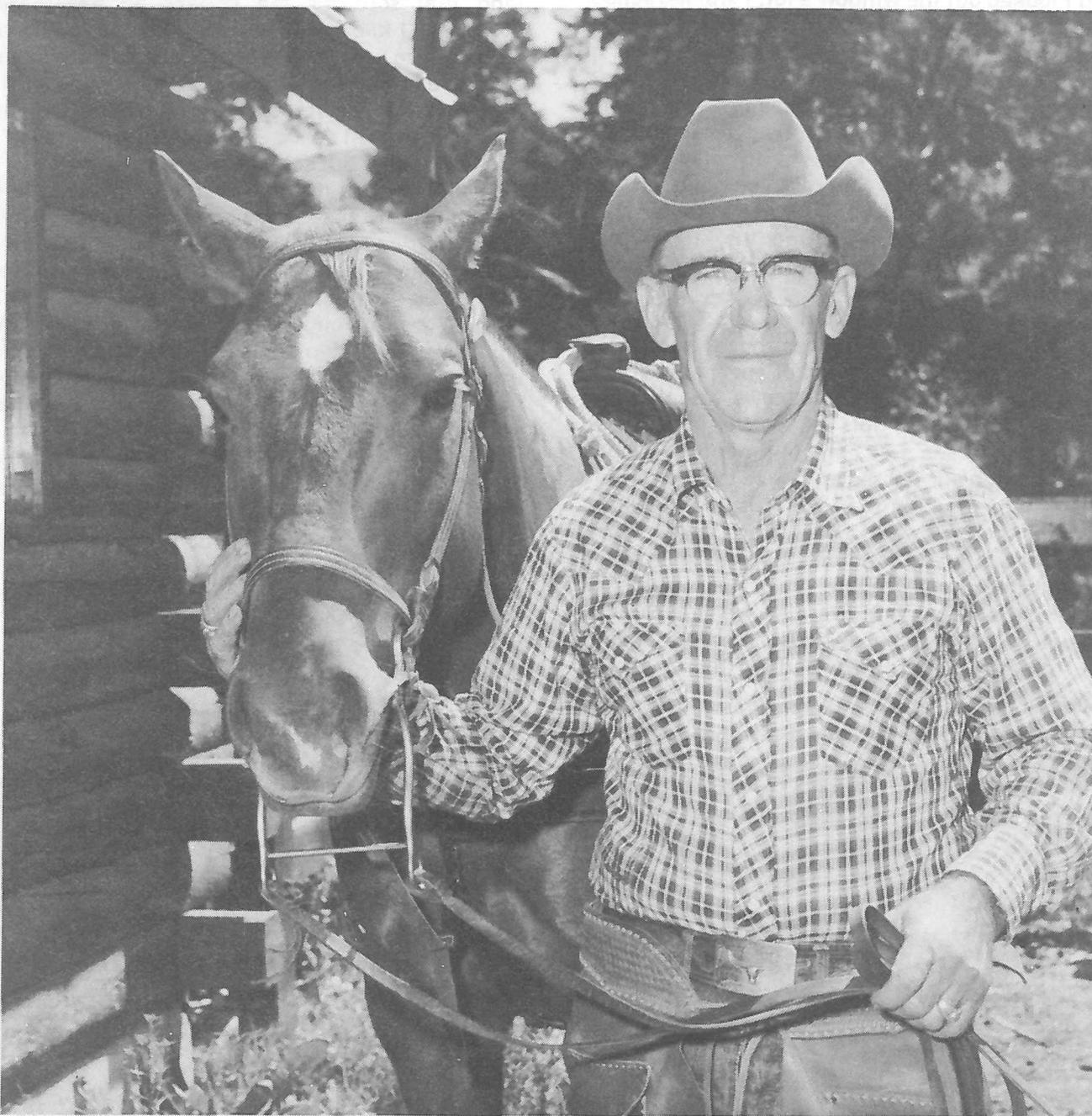


# "I'M GOING TO STAY FOR THE MAIN EVENT"

## KEITH SELBE

BY CATHY KLEBBA



"A little work, a little play to keep us going..." George du Maurier's phrase seems well suited to describe Keith Selbe, Kansas-born, but at home in Steamboat Springs for the past 50 years. In my interview with this man, I realized he approached not just his profession, but everything in life, with a casualness that made me feel at home with him, and almost a part of his stories. It was as though I watched "the bear rummaging around in the chicken coop..."

"I was born February 14, 1913, in Speed,

Kansas. My father always had lots of cattle, and we lived in the rolling hills of Western Kansas, which was rough country, not level. It was regular cattle country. A lot of the land was plowed up that should have never been. It was too steep to plow, but during World War I the government was anxious for wheat, so the farmers commenced to plow up the steep land. It washed awful bad, and it was only 20 years ago that the government came back and paid them to take this land out of service and reseed it back to

pasture. It had washed pretty badly, but now the country looks pretty good. The hillsides are back in grass the way they should be. I would say the country is a lot better than it was, because what followed then was the dust storms of the 30's.

"As a child I liked to play hooky from school, and I looked out the window a lot. I started school at seven and went through country school at Greenwood, and then I went to high school in Phippsburg, when it was the county seat. Education beyond that was hard because no one had any money. To get to school I had to walk two miles, but when I was a little bigger we drove a buggy or rode horses. The children who lived in the country had to be at school by 9:00, and school ran for eight months. If we had special permission we could only go seven months.

"The farm kids had to get up at 5:00 A. M. to milk the cows and do the other chores around the place. We didn't have much of sports program; my father had 60 head of milk cows, and that was our sport. We fed lots of cattle and raised registered horses. For entertainment we used to always catch our horses and go to the swimming hole and meet up with all the kids in the county. None of the girls went. They were taken to the house because the mothers thought they would get into too much trouble. The boys would just sneak off and not tell. We also went to Sunday School in the old school house, and we always held meetings there. We had to, there was no place else.

"One thing that brought us to Colorado was the dust storms of the 30's. My dad bought a place because there wasn't much land to homestead then. If there had been anything left it would have been isolated and poor land, and we probably wouldn't have wanted it. I have seen land that sold for ten dollars an acre, and nowadays I know that some of that land is worth \$5 a square foot or 200,000 thousand dollars an acre. We owned the land where Park Meadows is now and sold 20 acres where the horseshoeing school is, as well as the 80 acres where Whistler's Village is now. But sold it in the sixties.

"I think one of the reasons my family made it through the Depression was because we always had a big garden. We never went hungry, but we went without money lots of times. We went to town generally about once a week. We would take a case of eggs; that was 30 dozen. That would be enough to buy our necessities or what we needed to buy. There was no electric lights or heat, but what we had was wood heat and that was not expensive.

"Since there was not much money and since there was not much to buy except flour and sugar, we didn't have a lot of money left after our trips to town. Sugar was six dollars for a hundred pounds, and flour was equally cheap. Shoes were a dollar a pair, and our shirts were made by hand. On Saturday night my father always handed my brother and me a quarter a piece, and that was what we had to spend. We always had lots of good horses to ride, and we could easily entertain ourselves that way.

"I think people who live here have an opportunity to ride their horses more than other places. There used to be a man where we grew up in Kansas who did some breeding. I didn't do any breeding, but I bought the top of the line horses. I had some of the brothers of studs that brought terrific amounts of money. We usually broke them ourselves. I always kept a gelding because I loved to ride. We rode for pleasure as well as for work. We always had to rope steers, and that was great.

"I have an old buddy, Winston Spangler, who used to rope with me. We are close friends, and he was one of the first people I met when I came here. We liked to ride in shows, fish and rodeo together. On Sundays we would take the kids out together. He's been a lifetime friend, and I've never had more (friends) than I have needed.

"I have had girlfriends all my life, not just during my school years. I don't believe in love at first sight, but I did meet my wife, Anne, at church, at a funeral. We lived twenty miles away from each other, and it wasn't easy to get that far. We were both too old to live at home, and were both needing a place to live, so we decided to get married. We came to Colorado together

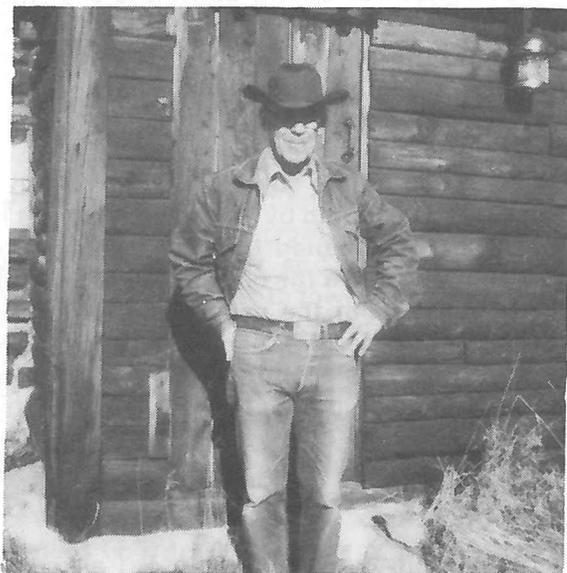


**"HORSES ARE MY LIFE..."**

later in the thirties. I had come here with my family before in the late twenties.

"My father brought me out here the first time, and we spent quite a bit of one fall here, through hay season. When I got to see this place for myself, of course, it was very attractive to me. We had make several trips here and pretty near all the trips we made were by train. After reaching Denver it was still nine hours to get here, at least as far as Phippsburg. Coming over the pass was hard because tires didn't climb well out here. The road was two tracks, and we had to back up every time we met a car until we could get to a wide spot where we could let them go by. However, I can't remember meeting many cars up on the pass.

"I have never ever lived in town; I've always lived in the country, but I worked for two businesses. I ran my own ranch, and at the same time I worked in the oil business for Continental Oil Company. There was lots of money in the oil business, and I wholesaled oil in the country. I refuse to work in the big city."



**"I DO NOT REGRET IT AT ALL!"**

I then asked Mr. Selbe about how the war affected him and his life style. He responded by telling me a funny story. "I had ichthyosis which was a skin disease that my wife cured for only a dollar. She bought this cream that they don't sell any more, which made the disease disappear. I was actually in the army three months before they released me. I had the skin irritation since I was a child, and it was aggravating. I was called into the service almost immediately, but I didn't pass, so I came back and was called again and didn't pass. After three times, they never accepted me. I tell you though, they got to scraping the bottom of the barrel for their man power. I knew people that were 40 years old with families who were drafted. Dwyane Whitecotton was one of them; he might not have quite been 40, but he was close.

"Many people think things about the war, but I think if they could see the wounds it would change their minds. I wouldn't say that I was glad that I wasn't accepted, but I think most of the enthusiasm came pretty much after Pearl Harbor. A lot of people felt a new patriotism and really wanted to fight. Before that there was a war going on, but people weren't as involved as in World War I. During World War I, I was just a small boy. Pearl Harbor came when my wife and I were in the pickup listening to the radio. We were on a picnic, and as I remember, Pearl Harbor was on a Saturday night, which was Sunday morning in Hawaii. So I figured my number would soon be called.

"When we got married my dad bought us a rocking chair and to pay for it he had to cut and split wood. He had to haul the wood 15 miles to the mine to sell it. It sold for three dollars a cord there and to the hospital. All of this was to buy Anne and me a rocking chair which only cost \$5.25. We got two presents: a rocking chair and a linoleum rug. Our old mattress even had a hole in it.

"I worked for Continental Oil for 36 years and ranched at the same time. My wife and I had two children, Anita, who is now 36, and Jim, who is soon to be 34. During that time also my father died in the forties, and we liquidated the sheep. Then I took care of the cattle and still furthered my love for horses. Some of best were raised by Quentin and Evelyn Samoton. My favorite was 'Bogata'.

"What we did for entertainment was the neighbors would come by with the sleigh. Everybody would jump on, and we would go to somebody's house that night and have supper, mostly oyster soup or potato soup. We would pick up four or five families in one sleigh, generally on Saturday night. Then we would play cards and all kinds of games till morning. Often when we came home, we would have the cows to milk before going to bed. Everyone had kids, so we would only do that once a week, not more.

"One of our most memorable nights was three years ago. Our chickens were large enough to dress. Fact is, we were dressing some of them, and Ann asked me, 'Did you shut the chickens

up?' I said 'no!', so I went down and shut them up, but there was a bear inside that I did not see, so I locked him up, too. In the morning when I came back down, the door was knocked down and there was blood all over the place. I'd had 25 pounds of dry milk to feed calves; well, that bear ate it all. Then he ate some chickens on top it, and went down and laid by the creek. I expect his stomach hurt. We called the game department and when they turned the dogs loose, he wasn't a hundred yards from the house, and he jumped the creek to escape. We trapped him in a large trap and then took him back to the game preserve, but he paid me another visit later that summer. We could always tell he'd been here because he would wiggle our trash cans and barrels, then upset them and roll over in the trash."

Bringing the interview to a close, I asked Mr. Selbe about his philosophies and beliefs about life. He replied, "I think teenagers are doing all right. I know lots of good kids that are really doing their lessons, studying hard, and aren't getting in any trouble. I know it's easier to get

into trouble today, because when I was young my dad used to throw me in the back seat of the Model T, and we went home at night. We couldn't bum around town. I know a lot of kids and good people who have moved here that would like to see it the way it used to be. I don't think I ever saw better times than these right here.

"I had a heart attack in 1970 when I was working for Continental Oil. I never worked for them after that. I had proved 36 years with them. I recovered very well, that is, I think I have recovered, and I never have worked as hard. I can make it as long as I get no worse.

"As I ride down through the forest, I see the things that are there, and it's pretty hard not to believe that somebody didn't do it. If I pick up a butterfly and look at it, I pretty near believe somebody created that. It makes a believer out of me.

"I want to impress upon you, Cathy, that I have always lived among good neighbors here and still do. I find out that as I get acquainted with new people, they are good people, too.

## CATHY AND MR. SELBE

### DISCUSSING HIS LOVE FOR HORSES AND RANCHING.

