



Rodeo, trucking legend Carl Sawyer dies at 96

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TORRINGTON, Wyo. (AP) - Carl Sawyer, once one of the top steer ropers in professional rodeo and who attended every Cheyenne Frontier Days since 1927 until this year, died at age 96 from injuries suffered in an accident.

Sawyer, who owned Sawyer Stockliners for decades, died last Friday. He was injured about two months earlier in an all-terrain vehicle accident.

"At one time or another Carl probably won every major steer roping (title) there was," said longtime friend Monty Hopkins of LaGrange, who delivered the eulogy Tuesday at Sawyer's funeral.

Sawyer was first and foremost a Christian, Hopkins said.

"He was fine old man. He was one of a kind," he said.

As a 15-year-old cab driver in Oklahoma City, Sawyer had given a lift to C.B. Irwin, a legendary and longtime promoter of Frontier Days who later hired him and brought him to Wyoming.

Sawyer went to work on the Y6 Ranch near Meriden in Laramie County and broke into rodeo shortly thereafter, working all events.

"Later on he went more to the roping events and eventually settled on roping steers," said Beckie Havelly, a granddaughter.

In 1929, Carl met and married Wilda Arnold from LaGrange. They had two daughters, Beverley and Carlene, while living in the town.

In the 1930s, Sawyer started delivering gasoline and diesel fuel to farms and ranches in the area. He also hauled dry goods and cattle.

In 1941 he purchased Bear Mountain Station near LaGrange, and moved his family and his trucking company to Torrington three years later. The fleet eventually included eight trucks and trailers.

He was the first to have a covered 28-foot stock trailer and a 50-foot trailer in Wyoming, his daughter, Beverley Yeik, said in the book, "Wind Pudding and Rabbit Tracks."

Sawyer was also the first to use diesel motors, short-wave radios and overhead doors in stock trailers.

"Work was work, but we also played a lot," said Phil Fraser, a driver and friend of Sawyer's for 45 years and now living in Kansas.

"He and I would get up at the crack of dawn and also rope at night when it was cool," Fraser said. "He was always training horses."

Carl was a gentleman "from the word go," he said. "You did not swear in front of a woman. And you took your hat off when you sat at a table."

Sawyer supplied stock to the Frontier Days rodeo and attended or competed in the event each year since 1927.

"He loved it," Fraser said. "This is the first year he couldn't go, because of his accident."

Sawyer set the world steer roping record at Laramie Jubilee Days in 1957 and held it for 2.5 years. He also won the championship at the Pendleton (Ore.) Roundup in 1954.

In 1955, he finished fifth in the world steer roping standings, according to the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association.

"He was really well-known, especially in the old-time rodeo circuit," said Shawn Madden of Torrington Livestock Markets. "He had friends all over the western United States. He's kind of one of the last of the era in this part of the country."

Sawyer and his friends held roping events that drew legends such as Casey Tibbs to Torrington and helped raise money for county fair buildings and projects.

He donated many personal items to Torrington's Homesteaders Museum, including saddlery and photographs.

Reba McIntyre's brother, Pake, sang at Sawyer's funeral. The McIntyre and Sawyer families are close.

"For a 96-year-old man, he was pretty phenomenal and extremely active," said Ross Newman, a Goshen County commissioner.

Fraser agreed.

"There's people that lived longer but none that lived the life he did," he said.

Sawyer was preceded in death by his wife, Wilda; six sisters and two half-brothers.

He is survived by two daughters, Bev and her husband, Bob Yeik, and Carlene and her husband, Les Schmidt; five grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren; and one great-great-grandchild.

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