

Becky Kimber
Historic Site-essay

Simpson Springs - Pony Express Station

1981 - I sat on an outcrop of rocks, our truck and the road below me, could not be seen; the hills and trees hid them from my view. I looked to the west where a faint dirt road disappeared into the distance. I looked to the north—the valley, so wide, so large, went forever. I-80 was somewhere beyond my vision, where the sky met the Salt Flats and they blend. The valley was so empty—nothing but sagebrush and greasewood as far as the eye could see. I saw the evidence of man: the Pony Express Station, rebuilt with native rock; a plaque explaining what took place there. I felt connected to this place. What was this feeling for something, seemingly so desolate and remote?

My children had taken off on some small three-wheelers to the other side around to the south; their dad had gone to check on them. In the stillness and quiet, I was alone. Time was suspended. I could feel the spirit of something, but of what? Not much had changed in these last one hundred and twenty years. It would be just as isolated then, as now. I thought about a lone Pony Express rider, riding into the sunset, or into the starry night, or into the blistering wind, or into a winter's storm. The Pony Express rider would be leaving one of the few sources of water for miles, leaving the protection from the elements, and leaving the safety of the station tender. Those things were not on his mind. His only concern: "The mail must go through."

Because my dad held the contract from the BLM to take care of Simpson Springs, he would often send my young family to do the work. We would water the trees, clean the latrine, and clean up garbage. It was family time; we worked together and played together: Cameron, M.J., Michelle, Tammy and Brian. It would be a few years before Kevin joined our family, but

he would never know the fun times we had on this desert oasis. Little did I know that my best memories connected to Simpson Springs would not begin for another twenty years.

2001 - Cracker Jack slowed to a walk. He only had two speeds—running and stopping, unless my dad was on him; then he would do whatever my dad wanted him to do. My dad was on the Pony Express re-ride; this was his second run of the day. His first run was a few miles outside of Camp Floyd. At eighty years old, he could still work longer and harder than my boys. After hauling hay all day, in the hot sun with their grandpa, my boys would be exhausted. But not Dad; he was anxious to get the water on the field, and so in the cool of the evening, he would get Mom to come to drive the truck for him while he picked up just a few more bails.

This was Kevin's first re-ride; he was fifteen. I thought to myself, have I ever felt more excited and more proud in my life? What a thrill to have Kevin hand-off the mail to my dad, at Lookout Pass.

Dad knew the mail had a schedule to keep; he motioned for my son, Kevin, to come and take over. Cracker Jack, without hesitation, took off in a full run. The wind was blowing the dust trail off to the south, enabling me to watch Kevin—until he turned and went down the hill, taking the mail farther away from Lookout Pass towards Simpson Springs. I thought—it doesn't get better than this!

2004 - Dad was eighty-three; it was around his eighteenth annual re-ride. He was riding Puppy Dog. The mail was headed east from Simpson Springs. I took a picture of Dad; his back was towards me. The mail pouches were bulging on the four corners of the mochila—nothing in the picture, but dad, an old dirt road and lots of sage brush as far as I could see. Pretty soon Dad started to run Puppy Dog; it was a slow run. I had no idea it would be Dad's last "re-ride." I had no idea this would be the last picture in his history book—with Dad's favorite words that he

would often say with a twinkle in his eye and a smile on his face, “Cowboys never die— they just ride off into the sunset.”

2005 - A few months after my father passed away, it was again time for the annual re-ride. As a tribute to my dad, my daughter, Tammy, and three of my boys, M.J., Brian, and Kevin, rode in the annual re-ride. It felt like we were a hundred miles west of Simpson Springs, in the middle of the night, in the middle of the desert, in the middle of nowhere. No lights as far as the eye could see, unless one counted the twenty million stars that lit up the sky. Puppy Dog was ready to go; however, it would be a while before the mail reached us, so I climbed on Puppy Dog and just sat there, surrounded by my children. I thought—it doesn’t get better than this!

2007 - We left the hustle and hassle of Eagle Mountain and civilization behind; the developers seemed to give no heed to the Pony Express Trail. Tammy, my daughter, was on Cracker Jack; the mochila covered the saddle. Did anyone notice, besides me, that Cracker Jack was running like the wind, his blonde tail flying straight back, with Tammy’s blonde pony tail doing the same? I was overcome with tears at this scene, and again as I watched the exchange of mail between Tammy and her brother, Brian, tears filled my eyes. Brian rode Chena into Fairfield, and stopped in front of the Stagecoach Inn. Later in the day, I watched as the mail left Simpson Springs headed across the desert. I thought—it doesn’t get better than this!