

JACK DEWERFF (1924 -)



Jack DeWerff is a published cowboy poet from the Ellinwood area. The cattle industry remains strong in Kansas, and this very American art form also still thrives. Its origins go back to the 1870s cattle drives from Texas to Kansas. In 1985 the first cowboy poetry conference started in Elko, Nevada. Most often cowboy poetry is about the trail, ranching, and Western life adventures. Cowboy poetry is essentially storytelling that can be set to tunes—hymns, sea chanties, or ballads. Because this verse fits patterns of familiar songs, the rhyme and meter are important. These also help memory. Jim Hoy's book *Prairie Poetry* is further introduction to this popular style.

"Married to a Cowboy" refers to the cruder aspects of a cowboy life—fondness for chewing tobacco and lack of personal hygiene. Like most cowboy poems, it is a long narrative, so this is an excerpt. DeWerff's narrator disarms his listener with self-deprecating humor—he anticipates criticisms and admits to them. This is a typical Kansas ploy to smooth relationships, and here a husband attempts to placate a wife. He also asserts the golden qualities of the cowboy character—honesty and loyalty.

MARRIED TO A COWBOY

**It ain't easy being married to a cowboy;
It takes the patience of Job, I am sure.
They come in dirty, and wet,
And smell like horse sweat,
And track in lots of mud and manure.**

**And they ain't worth a hoot doing housework,
Like cleaning or makin' the bed.
And sometimes she wishes
He'd help with the dishes,
But he'll go strum his guitar instead.**

**Etiquette ain't in his vocabulary;
He spits in a cup when he chews.
And at a dinner affair,
If two forks are there,
He won't know which one to use....**

**He forgets anniversaries and birthdays,
And sometimes he'll scratch where it itches.
But his word is good,
He wouldn't cheat you if he could.
And his friends mean more to him than riches....**

Education: Jack DeWerff graduated from Ellinwood High School and learned ranching as a boy.

Career: Jack DeWerff and his wife Loretta (Tedford) DeWerff farmed south of Ellinwood until 1975, when he began working for the Kansas State Animal Health Department. In 1990 he published a book of poetry inspired by his rodeo experiences *Cowboy Philosophy in Rhyme* (Ellinwood).