

Snubbin' Post

*Do not remember the former things,
nor consider the things of old.*

ISAIAH 43:18



I shrugged on my jean jacket, pulled a halter and lead rope off a hook, and slipped on my black cowboy hat. The hat felt silly. Even though I'd owned a horse and ridden since I was 14, I felt like a fraud. Every day when I chummed around real, old-time cowboys I would get to thinking, *I wish I'd grown up on a ranch. If I'd grown up punching cows, I would've earned the right to wear a cowboy hat.* My boss insisted that his crew wear cowboy hats on the pack trips we guided, but until then... I hung the hat on its peg, opened the door, stepped onto the porch, and closed the door behind me.

The spring clouds hung low on the mountains, trapping a cold mist in the air. I headed to the corral, slogging through deep mud. With each step the gooey mess threatened to suck the boots off my feet. Today I was going to catch the new chocolate-brown gelding. He'd been dubbed Dusty because he wasn't much to look at. The horse was a middle-aged, snorty critter stuck in with the wild mules and horse

I was working with. I unbuckled the halter and slipped it over my shoulder, attempting to hide it. *Too late!* The horses and mules saw the halter, snorted, and galloped to the other side of the pasture. *Not again,* I moaned. This was the hardest part of the job—separating one of the wild-eyed buggers from the herd in a 10-acre field. *If I'd grown up on a ranch, I would have learned to rope,* I groused.

I chased after the herd, trying to keep my boots on by curling my toes. I huffed and puffed as I zigzagged, cutting out the extra animals and keeping Dusty in the center of my vision. Finally the now smaller group stampeded into a corner of the field. Sweat rolled down my back. My side hurt from running. I gave the critters plenty of room to mill around while I stood panting. One by one I let the other horse and mules spurt out, until only Dusty stood in the corner, snorting and blowing. His eyes brimmed with fear. I looked at the ground, lowered my voice, and spoke slowly, “That a boy. You must have had something pretty bad happen to you to make you this scared.”

Dusty's eyes looked left and then right. He bolted. I sprinted and blocked him. “You're not going anywhere without this halter on,” I told him. For the next half hour I stepped forward until he squirmed, and then backed up one step to give him room to breathe. Forward and back we went as he got used to me. Soon he let me rub his neck with the rope, which I gently put around his neck. I pulled on the halter and buckled it up. I turned around and headed toward the corals, and Dusty followed me like he'd been handled quite a bit. I led him out of the pasture, tied him to the snubbing post next to the tack shed, and brushed him down. He goosed a little, but I found some of his itchy spots. Pretty soon he leaned into the brush and relaxed.

Suddenly he jumped straight into the air. He came down snorting and blowing, the whites of his eyes showing.

I quickly stepped back and glanced around to see what spooked him. I didn't see anything unusual. *Somebody must have really hurt this horse,* I repeated.

Dusty was sure he'd seen a bogeyman. He bucked, hauled back,

and hit the end of the lead rope. He jumped forward, slamming into the post. It cracked. He hauled back again, this time digging in with his hind legs. He whipped his head back and forth with all his might. Crack! The snubbing post snapped and jerked into Dusty's chest. The horse swung around. Because the lead rope held fast to the halter and the post, the post end slammed into Dusty's hindquarters.

He jumped, causing the lead rope to snap the post toward him again. It hit hard, and Dusty bolted down the driveway as if he were on the last turn at the Kentucky Derby. I stood in a cloud of dust watching the broken post chase him out of sight.

God, protect him, I quickly prayed as I dashed over and fired up the pickup. Taking off I followed that cloud. *What if he breaks a leg? Or falls off a cliff?* Three miles later the road wound between towering limestone cliffs. I rounded the bend. There he stood. White lather blanketed him from head to hoof. I frowned. Dusty looked like a different horse. He calmly stood and munched grass in a ditch. Next to him was the remnant of post, still securely tied to the lead rope.

Dusty had spooked because of being abused in his past. The harder he ran from it, the harder the post beat him. When he quit running, he learned that the post quit whacking him. So, basically, instead of running from his past, Dusty used it as a starting place. From that time on, Dusty was the calmest, most levelheaded guest horse on the ranch. After that day, nothing spooked him.

The next morning I took Dusty's lesson to heart. I quit tying my past to a snubbin' post and, instead, used it as a starting place. I slipped on my cowboy hat and headed to the corral. I hadn't been raised on a ranch, but I earned my hat each day I slogged through the mud chasing critters and every night when I took in Western lore by peppering my old-time cowboy friends with questions. They gave me the leg up I would need to ride into the wilderness.

Lord, thanks for teaching me to use my past as a tool to build my future. Amen.