



months of rehabbing the neglected animal but like himself there were just so much he could do to ever enable him to trust anyone again. He could feed him, give him water, repair his neglected feet. Even putting balm on the wounds from being whipped with no telling what; but there's just so much you can do about a wounded spirit. Horse and the old cowboy have a lot in common.

And no, he wasn't the best cutting horse ever. And no he had a gait that was as rough as a buckboard. He stumbled from a weak hoof from being foundered and would leave a mile of slack in a roped calf. A dapple grey color and ears more like a donkey but he was Old Cowboys and that made him the best ever to him.

Old Cowboy spent the rest of the morning stumbling around in the grocery store picking up the essentials; coffee, bacon, beans, bread, tissue some of that jerky that he liked. Stores made Old Cowboy nervous. Town made him nervous. People made him nervous. An unnecessary evil he couldn't get back to the ranch soon enough.

But there was one more stop to make that made Old Cowboy even more nervous, Dr. Bentley's office. Waiting on lab results the Dr. sent in. The receptionist tells him "I'm really sorry sir what with the holidays they are behind in the lab" she tells him. "Dr. Bentley told me to tell you he would be calling as soon as he knew something". "Yes Mam, thank you Mam" as he turns and walks outside.

Snowing hard now, Old Cowboy picks Dog up out of the bed and puts him up front for the ride home. Slips him a piece of jerky and heads the grinding, smoking, old truck to the

north. He couldn't help but remember times gone by. He thought of all the places he had spent Christmas. And for a moment the quiet from the snow on the highway took him back to times good and bad. He remembered as a child, like us all, that one special Christmas that just sticks in our minds. His folk didn't have much but what they made out of what they had was something to remember. The Christmas tree was real not fake, he remembered. He could smell the tree; see the lights and strings of cranberry and popcorn around the tree.

Old Cowboy had seen Christmas Eve everywhere from a fox hole to sleeping in a horse trailer on a rodeo ground. Most times it meant nothing to him. But there was that one, that one Christmas that he tried in vain to forget. The ride home too long his mind allowed to wander. Fighting back memories that try to overcome him so. A time, that went from happiness to heartbreak one day that would change the old cowboy forever. A time, like Horse, so overwhelming it would forever rob him of trust. For this, the worst of his scars. He fought hard the heart riddled unbearable hurt.... "How's that jerky Dog?" He asks; anything to break him out of going down that painful road. The old radio broke he breaks into a song to Dog.

O no, Dog must be thinking, not this.....not this.....Of all that Old Cowboy was bad at including cooking, coffee making, washing clothes, among the list. His singing was the absolute worst. Not to mention he knew just the notes to hit and hold that sent Dog into a howling coyote yelp. What a site an old cowboy singing at the top of his lungs and Dog outstretched



*Forgiven Ministries Annual Toy Run
December 15, 2012
Bronte, Texas*

head howling out in perfect time.

Just before turning off the interstate he spots an old car on the side of the road. Hood raised with a man looking underneath. Cowboy starts to rationalize, someone else will stop to help he thought, probably just checking his oil, "why me?" he mumbled. Turning onto the county road that leads to his ranch he could see a family inside, a wife and couple of kids. Dog, up in the window whining looking back at cowboy like ??? A cock of Dogs head seemingly unbelieving, a scolding look that gets Cowboy talking to him. They will be fine Dog! Someone will stop; do I have to do everything?!

Old Cowboy slams it down in 2nd gear and hits the gas. Dog standing up in the seat watching them disappear through the back glass. Finally he lies back in the seat, one more questionable look up at him.

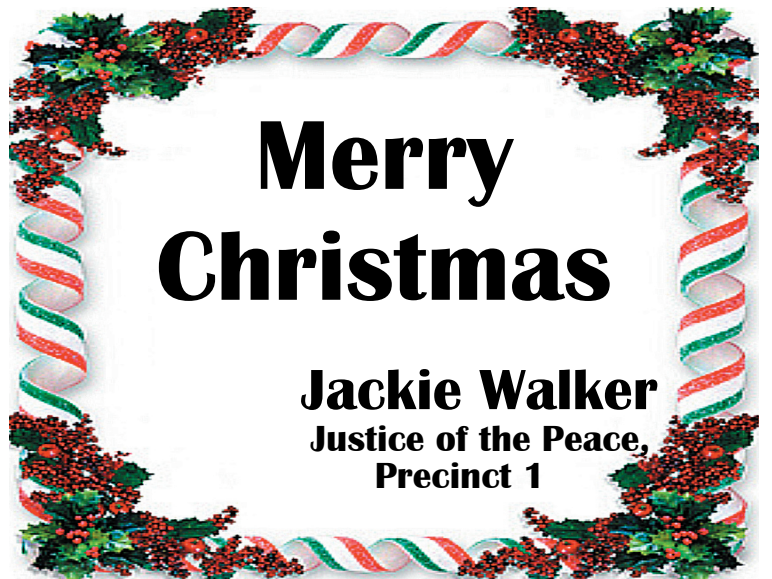
Old Cowboy mumbles and grumbles and talks to Dog.

Dogs not buying all the excuses and turns his head away in pout as Old Cowboy continues the sermon till he reaches the gate and pulls in. As they drive down the road to the ranch house he spots Sarah's truck sitting in the drive.

Sarah, yes Sarah. Sarah was a widowed ranch wife with a place a few miles up the road. Long, black hair, a long, slim, beauty, with dark eyes, that could cut right

through you. You could find her usually in a baseball cap and boots. She was a barrel racer but only for fun anymore and still liked to dabble in it.

There was an unspoken friendship that neither had figured out what. What she did know the 7 years she had known Old Cowboy was that you were only allowed just so close to him. Though they had never really talked in length about it she knew



*Merry Christmas
and God Bless You and
Your Family!
Thank You for
your Patronage!*

*Merry Christmas
from
Coke County Hardware
Donnie, Eddie, Lee and Debbie*



*We will close Christmas Eve and will be closed
Christmas Day and New Year's Day.*