

# LIVING COWBOY ETHICS

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Singer/Songwriter R.W. Hampton at the gate of his Clearview Ranch near Cimarron, New Mexico. *Photo by Mark Bedor.*

## R.W. HAMPTON

### A VISIT WITH A SON OF NEW MEXICO AND A PROUD MARINE FATHER

BY MARK BEDOR

Cimarron, New Mexico. Here, where the Rockies meet the plains, you can still see the ruts of the homestretch of the Santa Fe Trail. Apache and Ute warriors once roamed the area, as did the legendary Kit Carson. Later, a quieter hero made perhaps even more of an impact when Oklahoma oilman, Waite Phillips, donated the land that would become the 137,000-acre Philmont Scout Ranch for the Boy Scouts of America.

Phillips had one condition – that the land would always remain a working cattle ranch so that Scouts from around

the world would not only learn about horses, cattle and cowboys, but a lucky few would actually get to work here as cowboys. And, that's how Western singer/songwriter, and longtime working cowboy, R.W. Hampton got his start. More than 30 years later, Hampton's trail has come full circle. Today, he has his own ranch just a few miles from Philmont. The Clearview Ranch he shares with his family offers a spectacular view of the magnificent Sangre de Cristo Mountains. It's a land that still produces heroes, like the one symbolized by the U.S. Marine Corps flag

flying at the end of Hampton's long, gravel driveway in honor of his son, Cooper.

There's no hesitation when you ask R.W. and his wife, Lisa, how they feel about their young Marine. "Proud!" she beams. Cooper's not the only young Leatherneck from this rural ranching county of eastern New Mexico. There were only seven kids in Cooper's high school graduating class. Three of them joined the Marines. "I think they feel like it's a high calling," reflects R.W. "It's an honor."

By definition, no member of the Few and the Proud is ordinary but Cooper is no ordinary Marine. He was selected during basic training for the Marines' "Special Services," the unit that guards the President of the United States. That meant advanced training, top-secret security clearance and duties he can't talk about. And yet, at first, Cooper was disappointed with his selection. "He was bummed," tells Lisa, "because he wanted to be a grunt. He was like, "I know this is an honor but I wanna get in the action! I wanna do something that counts!"

Cooper ended up getting his wish. After serving 18 months with the Presidential detail, he volunteered for a machine gun unit and became its squad leader. He recently returned to the U.S. after serving in Ramadi, Iraq, confident that America is making a difference. "I'm really likin' what I'm doing," Cooper told his dad.

The Hamptons admit they have the same concerns of any parent with a child serving in a war zone. "But you know what?" reflects R.W. "I was just sad I couldn't go with him." Lisa is equally supportive, and both believe in the mission – fight the terrorists there so we don't have to fight them here. "I don't think we ever had a problem at all with Cooper going over there," she says. "It's what Cooper wanted to do. He loves his country. He loves being a Marine." So much so, that young Sergeant Hampton has just re-upped for another four years.

R.W.'s music reflects his support for both his son and the entire U.S. military. His song, *For The Freedom*, is a regular part of his Western music concerts. "I just wanted to give voice to the young men and women," explains the songwriter. "(Talking to them) I was hearing different stories than what I was hearing on the news. I was just hearing that what they were doing was worthwhile."

Cooper's well aware not everyone agrees with that. "He once told his father, 'I have sworn to protect... even to the death, the sorriest there is,'" revealed R.W., who added, "There's an old Marine saying that goes 'We are the unwanted, doing the unforgiveable, for the unappreciative.' And I thought, 'That's pretty accurate.'"

It's comparable to another hero R.W. sings about – the American Cowboy. "I heard a guy say one time that the cowboy is the most highly skilled, underpaid occupation in the world," recalls Hampton. "You gotta know a lot about a lot of things to be a good hand – cattle, horses, a little mechanics, weather... You gotta know a lot."

R.W. should know. The one time Eagle Scout spent his last three summers of high school cowboyin' on the Philmont Scout Ranch, then the next 13 years working on cattle ranches throughout the West. And, whether it was Texas,

eastern Oregon, Wyoming or Arizona, he only took what he calls, "a riding job."

"There's some parts of the country that just the nature of the terrain requires you to be horseback every day," he explains. But, it wasn't always sunny and warm. "In Wyoming, we were horseback every day, and there were days when it was 30 below zero. And just the way the ranch was set up, there was no other way you could have done it."

Whether it was breaking horses, riding fence or checking on pregnant momma cows, R.W. was living the life he'd dreamed of and raising a family – cowboy style. "When he was a little bitty guy, I would take Cooper and put him in the saddle in front of me and just go for miles just checkin' cattle, and he would fall asleep on me," R.W. recounts. "So, I would turn him around and face him toward me. I would have a piggin' string and I would tie it up under his arms and around my waist. He'd flop around and sleep for hours like that!"

Wherever the ranch, R.W. always had the guitar out in the evening, singing to his wife or "just to the walls." His



No ordinary Marine, R.W.'s son, Sgt. Cooper Hampton.  
*photo courtesy of R.W. Hampton.*



Lisa & R.W. Hampton with their Wrangler Award for *Oklahoma, Where the West Remains*

*Photo courtesy of R.W. Hampton*

music found a much bigger audience when R.W. performed in the 1979 documentary, *Kenny Rogers and the American Cowboy*. Years later, Rogers tracked down R.W. to sing again in his 1985 TV movie, *Wild Horses*. Rogers and Pam Dawber were billed as the stars but, to Hampton, the real stars of the show were Western icons Richard Farnsworth, Ben Johnson and Buck Taylor. "Oh, it was a huge thrill!" he smiles.

It was also quite an education in show business. The producer asked the new performer if he had an agent. "He said, 'You need one, you're good and you've got a big future in this. When you get home, call me,'" Hampton tells. "I called him but he didn't remember who I was. It was not something that stopped me."

More than 20 years later, R.W. has recorded a dozen albums, appeared in 13 movies and performed in Australia, Brazil, at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. and Nashville's Grand Ole Opry. His music and songwriting has been honored many times by the Western Music Association and Academy of Western Artists. He also co-wrote and performs the innovative on-man stage play, *The Last Cowboy*. The accompanying album is one of two Hampton recordings that have won the prestigious Wrangler Award, presented during the Western Heritage Awards at Oklahoma City's National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum.

His personal life is thriving as well. He and his wife, Lisa,



R.W. shares some quality time with youngest son, Ethan, at home in New Mexico. *Photo by Mark Bedor.*

have two young sons of their own, in a family of six remarkable kids. They include 21-year-old Colter, attending West Texas State University on a rodeo scholarship. "I get a kick out of people saying, 'R.W. Hampton? Are you related to that roper Colter Hampton?' I say, 'Yeah, I am!'" laughs the proud father.

Colter is following dad's musical footsteps as well. He wrote *Austin to Boston*, the title track about rodeo life that is one of the many highlights of R.W.'s new CD, slated for a fall release. He calls it, "The album I've always wanted to do. I wanted to do something with a little more production to it. I wanted to do some songs that required a little more of me, both vocally and emotionally." The songs, the arrangements and R.W.'s vocals give this record a catchy, radio-friendly, two-steppin' flavor. "We're hoping to broaden our fan base to include a younger audience. And, I think we'll breathe some new life into this music," he says hopefully.

A growing number of R.W. listeners are in the United Kingdom. Thanks to the work of his Nashville-based personal manager Brian Ferriman, R.W. has scored two recent top ten hits on the U.K. country charts from his *Oklahoma* CD. There's talk of an overseas tour as well. "Brian said something one time that really was very simple.



R.W. with son, Calvin, in the backyard at Clearview Ranch, his New Mexico home. Photo by Mark Bedor.



Sharing a laugh in the ranch music office with friend and assistant, Alan Kirkpatrick. Photo by Mark Bedor.

He said, 'I just don't think we've caught all the R.W. fans that there are in the world so let's go find some more.'"

R.W.'s wife is also a key partner in his career. Lisa's name is engraved as a co-producer on one of his Wrangler awards. And, with a background in real estate and a talent for business, "She took it to the next level because she believe in me," he shares, remembering, "I used to go (to a concert) with a grocery sack full of CDs, and she'd say, 'You know, honey, you could sell these things.'"

From the looks of their beautiful home on 300 acres in New Mexico, it appears that they've sold a few. However, this Christian couple is quick to credit God for their blessings and share them with others. R.W. often speaks about his faith when he performs. "Basically what I've said is, 'This is something that's important to me and I want to share it with you,'" he confides. "In the space of 90 minutes, if I do *How Great Thou Art* or *It is No Secret*, that's just one song. People can listen to it or they can turn it off or whatever. I think if you're real, if you're authentic, most people say, 'Well that's not my deal but I sure respect him for it.'"

Along with the movies, records, concerts, awards and travel, R.W. is also doing a growing number of commercials, including serving as the TV and radio spokesman for the Atwood's Home and Ranch chain of stores. At 51, it's already been quite a life. He was reminded of that by a wealthy banker he met at a concert, who told him, "Man, you have lived the life that I can only dream about." "It helped me realize that I was truly blessed."

The best may be yet to come. "It's funny," he reflects. "I'm at an age where a lot of people, if they're not slowing down, they're kinda thinkin' about it. And I'm just kinda getting' cranked up."