

"CONFESSIONS OF A GUNSMOKE JUNKIE!"

by Jean Dallin

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I admit it, not even reluctant am I to make this admission! I have an addiction. I am an addict of Television Series, "Gunsmoke". It doesn't matter that it is no longer on the air, I have my ways to get my fix! And as I will explain later in this article, Shingletown and its good folks reminds us a lot of Dodge City.

My life is focused on the days of Dodge City with Matt Dillon, Miss Kitty, Festus Haggen, Doc Adams, Chester and Quint. Those people have influenced my life, partner. They are the core of my morals and the spring in my step. I live in the 1870's in mind and spirit.

You think that was just a TV show? No way, it was full of mores and values of the era. Not a rip roaring shoot 'em up type show. Matt regretted when he had to plug a bad'em on Front Street...even if Percy, the undertaker made a profit on it! And old Doc Adams really regretted losing his patient and would be there day and night for his patients in rain or shine. Don't you wish you had a doctor that would drive his modern transportation and make house calls like Doc did in his horse and buggy?

Even Louie, the town drunk, had his values. When his friends or town were in crisis, Louie would go "cold turkey" and put the interests of his friends above his craving for the spirits and so be of help.

Just as we fight to keep our quality of life as high as possible, they fought bandits and drought (or El Nino for us) and modern interferences to their way of life i.e., the Iron Horse (railroad) coming. And mourned the loss of the buffalo, mountain men and the quieter way of frontier life. While they realized that change was inevitable, they still could regret that it was coming.

I am not alone. The Internet has a chat group of similar junkies and they meet at the Longbranch (online) and have a sasparillo and jaw. They are meeting in August in Dodge City, Kansas. They sent birthday cards

to Jim Arness in May on his 78th birthday. They analyze each episode and see meanings, wiser than the ages. They can tell you how many times Matt was shot, held Kitty's hand, and name each episode by name. They love the characters and love the themes of the shows. They have Gunsmoke lunch boxes, keychains, dolls, 8 x 10 photos of the cast, and even the old black and white tapes. Just received a marvelous gift from this group...that will not help my addiction. All the black and white 30 minute Gunsmoke tapes...in order. I think there is close to 600 episodes in total, including the color one hour episodes. Do you remember that John Wayne introduced the first episode in 1955? Or that Kitty once kissed an outlaw and Matt was watching? We do. (con't on next post)

Our biggest interest is the relationship of Matt and Kitty. The sacrifice that both made not to marry for the good of Matt's job and the protection of Dodge City; so Matt would not be distracted from doing his job. And so Kitty would not be in danger, from being the Marshal's woman. His badge may have been TIN, but he wore it with honor. He was dedicated to his job.

We live our lives in quest of the BETTER olden days. Not too many have branding irons in their living rooms, at least in San Francisco...or kerosene lamps. And yup, Warren has an old blue granite coffee pot that he makes hobo coffee in each morning. When we move, we hope to have a Western theme room. Our best evenings are to curl up, with a kero lamp lit, and watch old Gunsmoke tapes on that modern contraption called a "telly-vision" with a new fangled "VCR" as we munch on jerky and cornbread (not exactly those vittels, but it goes with the flow of the story I'm telling)

I see Gunsmoke wherever I go in our modern lives. I see Rick Slocum as Matt himself as he circles Shasta plains...with his posse of Green Coat volunteers. Not sure who Miss Kitty is yet, but bet you he has one. Kind

and gentle, but tough as nails if need be. Is Big Wheels the LongBranch Saloon or Goodtimes Pizza? Maybe Dry Creek Cattle Company is more appropriate? They sure have the Dodge City type of grub. Been thee and enjoyed! Our kind of vittles! And Ma Smalley ran the boarding house and provided breakfast to travelers to Dodge City, would that be the present day Weston House?

And the good natured and helpful, always full of interesting tales, is the namesake of Festus Hagggen is who else? Jim Hagen. Knew we would "cotton to" Jim, when we learned his last name! And then the bonus to find out he is as generous and kind in spirit as was Festus! And Festus loved to spin the yarns and tell the tales of the town, and so does our own Mr. Hagen! Not sure if there is a Ruth, the mule of Festus. Certainly NOT Cheryl. (Sorry, Cheryl...had to inject some humor here).

Were those days better when a man took care of his family and stayed honorable to his wife and fed his family? When a man worked hard on his farm or ranch and earned and enjoyed the fruits of his labor? When morality was more than a word?

I guess that is why we have come to love Shingletown. Because we see your spirit of a western town (even if Alpine) and the love and compassion of community spirit. A small town that knows one another and would be there if a barn raising was necessary for a sick townite. (Or a spaghetti feed for an injured beloved doctor). Am I addicted to these values? You bet, and tain't I lucky! And if Jim HAGEN is not a distant relative of Festus, please don't anyone tell me!

See ya around Dodge, oops I meant Shingletown! Still looking for our "new spread."

www.shingletown.com (The Consolidated Press)