



It's boot scootin' time, y'all.

And no I don't line dance. But I do love, especially when there is a slight chill in the air, pulling out, pulling on and prancing around in one of my well-worn pairs of cowboy boots.

As far as boots go, there is a mighty distinction in the cowboy kind. Fads dictate the march of most other boots; this year's suede ankle bootie, last year's Hunter wellies, the UGGs, the FUGGS (fake UGGs) and the continual rise and fall of all things fringe and stiletto, as well as slouchy, tall, short and super skinny.

But the cowboy boot . . . ahhh . . . if you see someone strutting their stuff in a pair of these, well, they are the real deal, the tried and true, the steady as she comes kind of folk.

It all started around 1870, after the Civil War when the young survivors headed back west to drive cattle. It seems a lone Texas cowboy commissioned a pair of boots that would do a better job than the military issues they were all used to. And that basic design and construction has since, much like the Lone Star state, never wavered in pride, craftsmanship and uniqueness.

The toe has to be pointy to get in and out of a saddle's stirrup with ease. The tough leather shaft of the boot must be high enough to protect the rider's legs from rubbing against the stirrup's leathers while at the same time shielding them from barbed wire fencing, thorny underbrush and poisonous rattlesnake bites. The high, under slung heel allows the rider to steady and dig himself into the stirrup as well as the ground when attempting to wrangle a lassoed steer that refuses to budge the tiniest of inch. And last but not least, the mule-eared straps at the top make them easy to pull on and the width and looseness of the whole boot

allows the rider to free himself if caught up and bucked off a spooked horse just in the nick of time.

Talk about rugged perfection.

Myself, I own quite a few pairs. Actually, I look at them more like a collection of artistry; an anthology of the places and people I've visited and love with all my heart; a rattlesnake skinned pair my Dad got me in San Antonio, the ostrich leather found on a road trip to Taos from Santa Fe, the most bad*#s pair with cut-out hearts and skulls given to me from my mom 'just because', a well-oiled, well-loved pair of Caiman Tail squared toes gifted over instant chemistry and love of all things cowboy from an elderly dying man's bed on a farm outside Waynesboro, GA.

See, there are a lot of things we don't know about each other quite yet. And I'm pretty sure one thing you may not know about me is though I am a 'loving it' lowcountry dweller and a Georgia Peach to the pitted core, I am also a Texas Rose at the hub of my heart. Yes, I was born in the Peach State, but as of one year of age I spent the next nine, the formative ones, living and learning and growing in Texas before moving back to Georgia during the fourth grade.

What exactly is a Texas Rose, my lowcountry friends might wonder? Well, like the flower itself that thrives in the Lone Star state, it represents someone hearty by nature, a person who doesn't need a bunch of extra tending to and not a whole lot of fuss. A Texas Rose loves – no, blossoms – in full sun, dry air, rocky soil, vast, wide open spaces where one can ramble and roam which ever direction the blistering wind blows.

It's a pull yourself up by the bootstraps kinda place; a state full of cowhide and cowboy hats; cactus and cold ones. It's sharp and sturdy; a rugged piece of land with an edge.

Growing up as a little girl, I adored watching the tumbleweeds, as tall as me and twice as wide, roll down our neighborhood street. I looked forward to the weekends when we would take our Blazer, the 'Bumblebee', far out into the desert where my dad would teach us how to shoot a .22 and knock down soda cans from atop a flat, weathered rock, the Eagles playing from the radio.

Cowboys, Cactus and Cold Ones

Written by Laura Packard

It was here, among the rattlers and the cactus flowers, the hot sand and the coyotes, that I learned how to be truly still and solid in place, but know when to get the heck out of Dodge in a hurry if need be.

See, there was the world, literally laid out flat and very much alive, in every direction for miles and miles and miles . . .

I always think back fondly of my time in Texas and how it taught me a great many things. Things I now pass on to my girls who are old enough, and their feet now big enough, to saunter out the door on their own, with their skinny jeans tucked safely inside a pair of my old cowboy boots.

I learned how, as Aunt Pam always says, to be tougher than a \$2 steak.

I learned that grit is a form of gratitude and that if you always stay true to yourself, stay strong, in good times and bad, you'll emerge, yes sometimes worse for wear, but thankful.

I learned to love the land, truly love it, as well as all of its people – whether roaming or rooted – black, white or brown, we are all tied, if not by blood than by brotherhood, to the place where we dwell.

I kind of like the fact that I'm a southern mish/mash, hybrid of sorts. Georgia, Texas, Alabama, Florida, South Carolina have all affected me, deep down, in some profound way. But it was Texas that formed the beginning of what I like to call my pitted core, the beginnings of me.

I found strength in the serene, purity within the roughness and awe in the impossible. I take it with me always as I add the layers of my own unique experiences, though always gently and with care, around my humble, but hardy beginnings.

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I guess what I am trying to say is that when I pull on my beloved cowboys boots, it feels like coming home. And Texas, you will always be home to me.