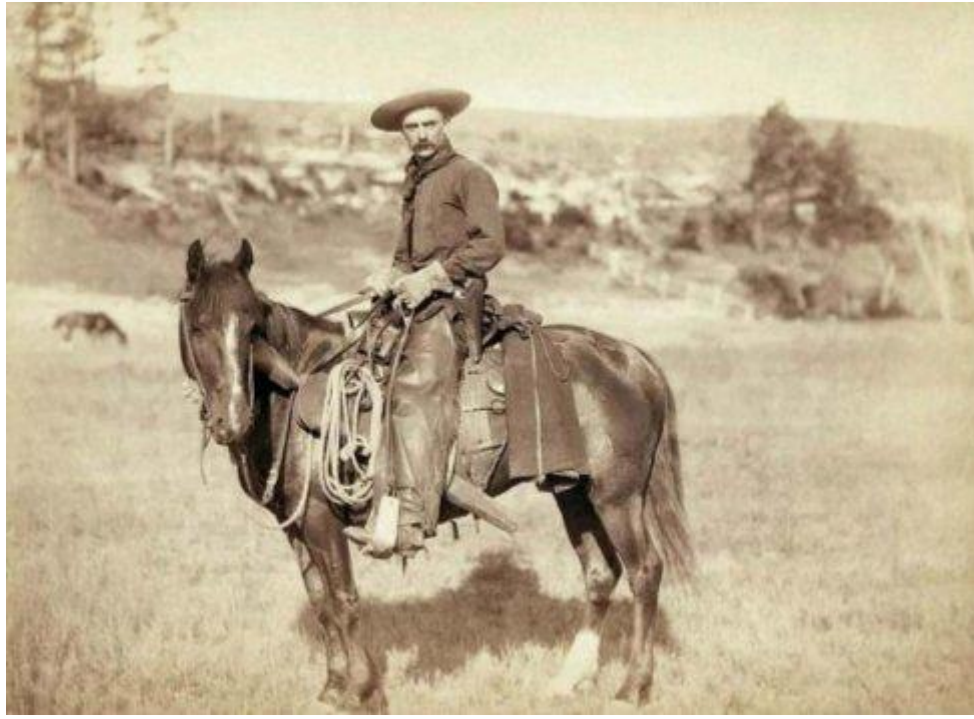


## Yiddle Joe From *Vest* of Ft. Lauderdale, Oye!



By William Rabinowitz

Well howdy, to ya'all out there, fellow members of the Tribe and otherwise. Name's *Yiddle Joe*. That is the name I chose. You have to choose a name. I could have used my name William but then they would call me Willie and I don't feel like no Willie. It sounds like Lilly and I ain't no Lilly - the wife will verify that.

Nope, it was the wife who picked out the name while we was trying names on. I said *Yiddle Jim* and she who must be obeyed said, no it should be *Yiddle Joe*. Shabbat was not even close and I was not worrying about Ketubah rights yet, so on occasion I give heed. She was right of course. Who the heck was Yiddle Jim? Everybody, with gray hair knows who Little Joe was. So, I became *Yiddle Joe*.

Yup, if you are above a certain decade along the road to geriatricitude, you grew up watching *Bonanza* on T.V. You watched the story of the Cartwright family on their ranch, the Ponderosa, near Virginia City, Nevada.

*Bonanza* was the second longest running western TV series in American T.V. history. Gunsmoke was the first. *Bonanza* first aired September 12, 1959 and rocketed to popularity and fame. In all NBC aired 430 episodes over fourteen seasons. The last episode ran in 1973. Don't be too depressed. *Bonanza* still airs in syndication worldwide. I hear it remains very popular in Arab countries. That remains a might hard to understand given their feelings toward Jews.

Ya see, the Cartwright family was a sort of mixed marriage type of situation.

Paw - Ben Cartwright was played by Lorne Greene. Ben's oldest son, Adam Cartwright was played by Pernell Roberts. Ben's middle son, a big strapping guy they called Hoss was played by Dan Blocker. And...the baby of the family was Joseph. They called him "Little Joe" played by Michael Landon.

The problem, for those that love Bonanza and hate Jews, was that Lorne Greene's real name was Lymon Chaim Green, a Jew from Ottawa, Canada. Little Joe was Eugene Maurice Orowitz, a Yid from Queens, N.Y.

A few full months back, the wife and I took a ride out to Markham Park near Sunshine, Florida - way, way west, almost into the swamps of the Everglades in Broward County. We heard they had a dog park there and of course we were thinking of Norman, our little Cock-a-Tzu Dog. Sort of sounds like a chicken sneezing don't it? He doesn't get to run very far in our bird cage outback over the pool. Lately, Norman has taken to being very careful running around the bird cage.

One day, awhile back, he spotted a grey squirrel perched on the outside, high above, on the rafters of the bird cage. He took off on one raging, barking jag to frighten the squirrel away from his territory. The squirrel took off at a run. Norman followed barking his head off and looking upward in total concentration on the squirrel. But, Norman forgot one thing; the swimming pool is not a rectangle. It is kidney shaped and with curves. Norman dashed down the side of the bird cage next to the swimming pool yapping at the squirrel. Before he knew what happened, he hit the bend in the pool and over he went - right into the pool. Rather humiliating for a ferocious 18 lbs Cock-a-Tzu pup defending his home against viciously squirrely intruders.

He doggie paddled to the concrete steps and clambered out. A hard, hard shake to get the water off and a look of pure sheepishness and humiliation was there. If a dog has a facial expression to tell how he felt, Norman's read easily. Sheila and I, once we knew that Norman was fine, laughed until we pished. Norman looked at us with the "what's so funny look" of resentment and soggily waddled off to dry. That evening, all three of us agreed, we need to find somewhere Norman can be let off the leash and out to run. We needed a doggie park.

Markham Park has a doggie run. It is a wonderful recreational area with biking, hiking, a lake, picnicking, jet skiing, a place to fly model airplanes and even a rifle range. We checked out the doggie park first and then the rest of the facilities. Way in the back of the park is the rifle range, so we rode through. They had trap and skeet ranges. They had a sporting clays course and a large covered 200 yard rifle/pistol range.

Just stopping by and rolling down the windows, it was unreal. Enormous kabooms of shotguns, the rattle of rifles and bangs of pistols pounded on the ears. Signs warned not to approach without eyes and ears. What they meant was that you needed eye and ear protection when you got to near where they were shooting. And there were lots of folks shooting.

We drove to the far end of the ranges and were about to make the loop back when something extraordinary caught my eye. They looked like something from out of the Old West. They wore

cowboy hats, boots, complete outfits from the 1880's and even more. They all had holsters strapped to their sides, with two gun six shooters bulging out and lead bullets in the loops in the back. They wore belts around their middles with shotgun shells for the short coach shotguns some carried. Others were carrying lever action rifles. The outfits were creative and colorful. Even the women had pistols hanging from their waists.

You know I had to stop. Having grown up watching every western there was, heck, I even had a Daniel Boone, coonskin cap with an imitation raccoon tail hanging in the back. It was every kid's dream to be a cowboy. These folks were cowboys.

An elderly, friendly man complete in Western attire, boots to ten gallon hat, met me at the gate. He had a large red bandanna tied about his neck with a jaunty western knot to the side.

"Name's Ferocious Dan, only folks around here, now a days, call me Slow Poke Dan." He extended his hand. "Want to come in?" I took his hand and said "my name is William, William Rabinowitz."

He was clearly country in his drawl and demeanor - I mean real country. He even was missing a few teeth. I thought of anti-Semitism. I had a whole story appear in my head about what might be appearing in his head. "What is a Jew doing here?" I imagined his thoughts. What I imagined, if it did, it never came out. Ferocious was as friendly as could be.

I stood there gawking for a full minute at the sight. Dozens of men and women, all ages, were waiting their turn to walk up to the firing lines. Not firing lines but stages. The stages were Western sets complete, with buildings, jails, banks, steel targets of outlaws, buffalo, cactus and such, that continually clanged out metallically as the guns were being fired at them by the shooters.

I heard someone cry out, 'they robbed the bank". Suddenly there was a bang, bang, clang, clang. He had drawn his ivory handled pistols from his brown leather holsters, firing at the escaping bad guys (targets). He jumped to the next stage where his lever action rifle awaited and blasted another ten rounds - sometimes hitting the targets thirty feet away and sometimes not. Replacing the rifle on the table, he took large strides to another table where his shotgun lay. Swiftly picking up the gun he yanked two large green shotgun shells from his belt. He popped open the breech dropping in two shells in a single smooth motion. With a snap, the shotgun closed. Two blasts filled the air as the cactus target clanged back. He had fired 24 rounds off at the bad guys in the stage - and he did it in 45 seconds. I found out later that 45 seconds was o.k. but the record was 12 seconds and with accuracy.

My eyes widened. I accepted Ferocious Dan's offer of ear plugs and moved closer. They were using real guns and firing real bullets. After taking their turns and following stringent safety procedures, they retrieved their guns and put them back in their pull along golf carts. Everyone had a war wagon - a little two wheeled or four wheeled cart they used to drag their guns, ammunition and diet coke bottles along with them from stage to stage. Folks kept their cell phones in the war wagon as it was not period no matter how much you tried. Everyone was having a great time. It did not matter so much if your time was low or you hit the targets

properly. It mattered if you enjoyed the friendship and camaraderie as part time cowboys or cowgirls.

"Ya interested?" Ferocious Dan said to me. He had to say it twice as I was plainly transfixed by the sight out there in the Wilds of Western Broward County, Florida. Ferocious Dan handed me a brochure about the group, "We are the Gold Coast Gunslingers. We are all part of the Single Action Shooting Society - SASS for short" he grinned at me with that tooth shy look of his. My dreams of being a kid again, being a cowboy, returned with instant salivation - I could taste it.

"Sure", I took the brochure and thanked Ferocious Dan.

Back in the car Sheila looked at me. "What a bunch of old kooks" she said. Sheila had refused to get out of the car. It was hot and she wanted to keep the air-conditioning running. We left Markham Park and drove to Ft. Lauderdale to Mel's Kosher Deli where I ordered an extra-fatty, pastrami on rye, and then added salt to the pastrami to irritate Sheila. Sheila had an iceberg wedge of lettuce, Thousand Island dressing on the side. She gossiped about the Cohens getting a divorce. Mrs. Cohen became suspicious when she learned that Mrs. Solomon's dishwasher really did not break down weekly. She always called Mr. Cohen to fix the problem. Being the nice guy that he was, he was more than willing to help, regularly. Sheila went on and on about the Cohens. I dreamed of being a cowboy.

The American Jewish story began, frankly with Columbus. Luis de Torres was a former Jew, a translator taken by Columbus on his 1492 mission to the New World. He was a former Jew because he was given two choices just before the voyage began. Columbus needed a translator when he found the great Kingdoms of the Far East. Torres' choices were convert to Catholicism and join the voyage or consider the alternatives. Torres converted.

Torres was the first man Columbus sent ashore when he discovered land. After all Torres, he knew, spoke Hebrew, Arabic, Spanish and a few other languages that might be useful. So you might say the first European in the West was a Jew - sort of. No one knows what happened to Torres. Some say he married a local Indian princess and lived happily ever after as a free Jew in America. Others say he was abandoned by Columbus, along with 39 of his closest friends, no doubt a number of them Marranos (secret Jews) to hold the fort until Columbus returned. Bottom line, Torres vanished from history.

For most folks, American Jewish Western history is the West of Cowboys and Indians, somewhere West of the Mississippi River. Not too many people know about Jews and the American West, maybe because the Jews of the East were far more numerous and wanted to be Top Dog in the story. But, yes there was a real history of Jews in the West, even if there were not a lot of us.

Jews were mountain men, the Jim Bridger type, who lived in the Rockies, hunted for fur and melded with the Indians and the Land. Jews were pioneers, explorers like Solomon Carvalho, wagon train masters, like Dr. Snow who settled in Placerville, California, high up in the Sierras looking for gold. Jews were Indian fighters, even Indian Chiefs. Go figure, a Jewish Indian Chief, Solomon Bibo, a nice yiddisher boychik from Poland was a Jewish Indian Chief in New

Mexico. Jews were frontier soldiers, recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor - Simon Suhler, David Goodman, Jacob Trautman, for bravery in the Indian Wars. Jews were ranchers - one even had his own cattle brand - a Star of David.

In 1860 San Francisco estimates place the number of Jews at 5,000, another 500 in Sacramento and about a 100 in the dusty nothing of a town further South, Los Angeles.

Jews were shop keepers, bankers, farmers, good guys and bad guys. Jim Levy, until he met his end at the barrel of a gun one dark night in Tucson, was a gunfighter. We had Jews fighting for Texas Independence with Sam Houston. Adolphus Sterne ran guns to Houston's little army through Mexican lines.

There always was something about the West that resonated freedom to the Jewish American. Jews did experience anti-Semitism in the West but it was never anything like the institutionalized anti-Semitism of Europe.

The first Jewish governor came out of the American West, Moses Alexander from Idaho. The first Jewish female Rabbi, Rachel Franks came from the American West. Jews argue exactly who or what is a Rabbi, even in the West. Jews argue if someone's mother wasn't Jewish or was Jewish, it all depends on who wants the credit. For that matter, if we trace matrilineal descent as being the sole arbitrator of being Jewish over the generations, Elvis Presley was Jewish. His matrilineal line was clearly Jewish, though Christian in practice until him. Is someone a half Jew, a full Jew, a quarter Jew, a gastronomic Jew, a Jew by choice, all the meshugas you can imagine, we fought about it. Is a Jew white, black, red, yellow or just someone crazy enough to want to be Jewish?

It is true, that there were not a lot of Jewish girls on the frontier. Some guys like Sol Starr, the mayor the Wild West Gold town of Deadwood, South Dakota simply did not marry. Others married the local ladies, sometimes Christians, and sometimes even Indians. They waited for the first good rain storm to go out and find a flowing creek for their own self conversions. To the horror of some of the Orthodox, these self converted folks had the nerve to raise their kids as Jews. Today, who knows anymore? In the West there were all sorts of blends. In the East, we just pretend that everyone went to a Beit Din and a Mikveh and that true Jews are all white.

The Palestinians say that White European Jews are really the bastard converts of the Khazar Kingdom and have no legitimate right to be in Israel. That is another Oye!

So where does that put us. Once there was a time in America being a cowboy was stylish. Today it is politically incorrect. Someone called President George Bush a cowboy and it stuck. Bush's cowboyism was made to be a real hated negative metaphor for a loony with a gun. President's Lyndon Johnson and Ronald Regan were called cowboys. American cowboy presidents have been the friendliest to Israel since its creation.

Last weekend, after Ketubah Shabbat, I was feeling husbandly toward Sheila.

"Sheila," I called to her in my nicest voice. "How would you like to go to a rodeo?"

"A what?" came the bodiless answer from the other room.

I tried again, "How would you like to go to a rodeo down at the world famous, Bergeron rodeo grounds in Davie", I replied again.

"William, since you saw those alte cocker meshuganahs playing cowboy and shooting metal cactus bushes you must have a prickly pear in the head or two. Why would I want to go see a rodeo? If you said we are going to Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills so I can go shopping, O.K.. but a rodeo?"



Trying once more, "Sheila, did you know that Bull Riding was a Jewish sport - sort of", I called to her.

"Jewish sport my tuchas, Jews don't do such dangerous and stupid things" the headless voice from the other room came back.

"Sheila, really, there was a famous champion Jewish rodeo Bull Rider."

"Like who?", she quickly answered.

"Johnny Hochman rode bucking bulls for a living. He is a nice Jewish boy who was bar mitzvahed in Philadelphia. He makes his home in Texas. I doubt if he rides anymore, too many broken this or that's to count" I told her.

"No wonder he doesn't ride those cows anymore. The only good reason to ride them is to meet a nurse" she said.

"They are not cows, Sheila. They are bulls".

The one word reply from Sheila meant I needed to try a different angle.

"Bull".

"Sheila," I started. The one word rebuttal again was emphasized. I knew it was time to stop.

"William," she who must be obeyed called out.

"William, why don't you take Mendel?"

Not a bad idea I thought. I called Mendel, my Hassidish friend. We made a date to go to the rodeo the following Sunday. Mendel generally is up for most things.

Sunday morning, I picked Mendel up at his home. We were going to the rodeo.

"Good morning William" Mendel greeted me. "The world is new to us every morning - this is God's gift and every man should believe he is reborn each day. Baal Shem Tov"

"Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.

- Maria Robinson" I shot back.

"Cowboy boots William?" Mendel looked at my new shinny, pointy boots.

"Yup," I said. "Boots, Hats and Cowboys. Nothing else matters", American Proverb.

Mendel grinned at me and tugged on his right Payyah as was his way. "Don't squat with your spurs on. - Anonymous", he said.

We both laughed.



Bronco Billy

"Mendel" I said. "Bet you never knew that the first American Cowboy Movie Film star was Bronco Billy Anderson. He was the very first star of the shoot-em-ups that graced the silent silver screen. He was the first cowboy hero to the American public. Bronco Billy was from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, only there his name was Maxwell Henry Aronson. Bronco Billy was part of the Tribe."

"I love Westerns" Mendel said excitedly.

"And William", Mendel picked up; "God took a handful of southerly wind, blew his breath over it and created the horse."

"We are going to see some real horsemanship today Mendel", I said. And we did.

A few weeks later I told Sheila, I was joining with the alta cockers cowboys. I want to be a member of the Gold Coast Gunslingers Single Action Shooting Society. Sometimes Sheila really surprises me. I expected, well, what I expected, I don't know what I expected. Let me put it in cowboy terms.

*"A stubborn horse walks behind you, an impatient horse walks in front of you, but a noble companion walks beside you".*

"William if that is something you want to do then do it right - that is the cowboy way. There is a little cowboy in all of us, you know. Louis L'amour said that."

I was astonished. Where did that come from? We began talking about monikers that was when she said "not Yiddle Jim but Yiddle Joe". I became Yiddle Joe.



She even went with me when I had to get my rig. She helped me pick out my cowboy hat, my shirt, and pants. She even approved of my boots. But the big test was coming. I told her about the guns.

To be a cowboy action shooter you had to have two six shooters - single action revolvers. You need a gun belt with two holsters and a shotgun belt. I need a coach style double barreled shotgun and a lever action period rifle.

Sheila confessed to me that as a young girl in Jewish summer camp they would target shoot with 22's. "I rather liked the sport" she said. "It's very politically out of step today."

With every word she said, my eyes grew wider about this woman I had lived with all these years and really did not seem to know.

Sometimes Sheila would come to a Gold Coast Gunslinger shoot at Markham. She never got into the sport. On occasion Mendel would come along. He would sit happily in his long black Hassidic coat, with the white shirt collar open reading from a book on Jewish thought. His hand unconsciously turning his Keepah when he hit upon a particular bit of wisdom that he relished. He always knew when to look up, smile and give me the thumbs up salute, when it was my turn to shoot.

My first awkward social concerns about Cowboy Action shooting, was way off. In time, Jeremiah Long Knife introduced me to the Hebrew Kid and Jewish Lightning, shooters from other clubs. Though my cowboy action name was Yiddle Joe, the guys just called me Yiddle. It was easier for them and it was no offence to me.

Mendel had an important thought to share with me after he came to the first shoot. I told him that the guys called me Yiddle.

"William," Mendel said, "It is not so much what you call yourself, it is what you call others".

You are right Mendel, I said. "And judge a man by what he does not by what he wears. It is the code of the West."

The years have passed and something in America has fundamentally been transformed from when I was a kid. Sheila and I talked about it one night. We both had been fans of the Roy Rogers and Dale Evans Cowboy Western TV Show. I was a member of the Roy Rogers Rangers - fan club. To be a member in good standing I had to recite the ten commandments of the Rangers.

1. Be neat and clean.
2. Be courteous and polite.
3. Always obey your parents.
4. Protect the weak and help them.
5. Be brave but never take chances.
6. Study hard and learn all you can.

7. Be kind to animals and take care of them.
8. Eat all your food and never waste any.
9. Love God and go to Sunday school regularly.
10. Always respect our flag and our country.

Roy is politically incorrect today.

Roy Rogers and his wife, Dale Evans, closed each show with a song.

Happy trails to you, until we meet again.  
Happy trails to you, keep smilin' until then.  
Who cares about the clouds when we're together?  
Just sing a song and bring the sunny weather.  
Happy trails to you, 'till we meet again.

Some trails are happy ones,  
Others are blue.  
It's the way you ride the trail that counts,  
Here's a happy one for you.

Happy trails to you, until we meet again.  
Happy trails to you, keep smilin' until then.  
Who cares about the clouds when we're together?  
Just sing a song and bring the sunny weather.

Happy trails to you, 'till we meet again.

"Sheila", I said as we lay in bed awake at three in the morning talking. "I wonder if we can get those days of innocence back? Everything is so politically incorrect."

"William you have always been politically incorrect", she gently pinched my arm. "Out West they have a sayin. Once you know where your'a' goin', just climb in the saddle and stay on the trail 'til you get there."

"God", I thought, "this woman does amaze me sometimes."

Yiddle Joe lives with his wife Sheila and their little dog Norman in Boynton Beach, Fl.  
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