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Review of *Chasing the Rodeo: On Wild Rides and Big Dreams, Broken Hearts and Broken Bones, and One Man's Search for the West* By W. K. Stratton

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Chasing the Rodeo: On Wild Rides and Big Dreams, Broken Hearts and Broken Bones, and One Man's Search for the West. By W. K. Stratton. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc., 2005. 326 pp. Bibliography, index. \$25.00 cloth, \$14.00 paper.

Chasing the Rodeo involves one man's year-long search for himself, his father, and both the rodeo of his childhood past (during the classical period of the 1950s) and of today.

W. K. Stratton skillfully weaves what might look like disparate themes into a riveting, coherent book of introspection and renewal. In part, the book focuses on his personal chase to explore the ways of a shiftless father who left the family in the author's childhood to follow dreams of booze, bulls, and bucks. In part, it is a story of the author at midlife coming to terms with this haunt of a father by exploring his own life, using rodeo as the connection. Examining with a historian's flair two dozen selective rodeos throughout the Great Plain states and beyond, Stratton traces their origins, focusing as well on the "movers and shakers" who give each rodeo its unique personality.

Giving himself entirely to the allure (or "wanderlust," as he refers to it) of his own personal rodeo experiences on this year-long trek, Stratton not only critically examines rodeo's appeal for both rider and spectator, but uses his insights to examine the ways

in which his father was drawn into the adventure as well. For Stratton (and by extension for all who give in to this rodeo subculture), the chase becomes the link to a sense of community and an extended family found also in a collective nostalgia for what was perceived to be part of the Old West. Furthermore, Stratton successfully illuminates how rodeo continues to touch us in primal ways. Even modern big-time rodeo—along with mass media-savvy entertainment such as the Professional Bull Riders weekly televised dramas—connects us to the “untamed state” (as Stratton characterizes it) of the Old West.

I related completely to Stratton’s obsession. Writing my own book, *Rodeo in America: Wranglers, Roughstock, and Paydirt*, when I was age fifty (in part, to engage in an activity that my father—who had been an amateur rodeo cowboy while in his late teens and early twenties—could share with me), Stratton, at age fifty-one selectively travels the rodeo circuit searching for a connection with a father whom he barely knew. Stratton’s success is in finally bringing closure to his personal chase. Along the way, he provides the reader with fascinating insights into both past and present professional rodeo athletes, as well as the local characters and hangers-on who were along for the ride.

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