

# *Two Old Cowboys and Three Guitars..... A Bit of Back Story*

I suppose life is full of priceless moments when we have the grace to notice them. Husband Mark and I enjoyed one of those moments in time in the summer of 2013 at the famous Jersey Lilly Saloon in Ingomar, MT, a little prairie town in eastern Montana.

We've been trailing there every fall for a prairie-fix since our October honeymoon nearly 30 years ago; Mark for considerably more years.... since he could carry a hunting rifle.

This was meant to be a late-spring work trip to put a coat of paint on our new hunting camp storage shed. It's a 12-hour drive half-way across Montana from our mountain house to our prairie home. We were dogged tired. And it had been raining in eastern Montana..... for days.

We pulled into Ingomar just before dark that evening. We had water to drain out of the curb sump, gas and water to turn on, a furnace and water heater to light and mud to slog through to get to it all. Locals talk about 'taking your tracks with you' when moving around in the eastern Montana mud, and we were in it.



Wet clothes hanging everywhere in camp, we finally dried off and mucked our way up to the Jersey Lilly Saloon, hungry for some of their famous hot bean soup and warm conversation with friends we hadn't seen since the fall before.

Field work slows way down when it's raining in this country, so outlying ranchers used the interlude to drop by for the evening. A couple of retired school teachers from Forsyth drove in just for something to do; 'looking for rainbows' they said. They were soon joined by a group of prairie-dog hunters in from California who couldn't get out to hunt because of the mud.

Add to these "mudded-in" folks Joe and Bud, two old boys from just down the road who had stopped in at the Lilly on their way back from Forsyth. Bud lost his wife of 49 years a while back and Joe had kept him company for his trip into town for supplies earlier that day.

These old friends have played country music together for decades, and they were just beginning to tune up for the

evening. Bud would start humming a line or strumming a chord or two and that would spark a memory in Joe, who could play as long as he could keep the guitar pick taped up between his nerve-damaged fingers; vestiges of an oil-rig accident when he was a younger man. Every now and then he'd stop and cinch up on that tape and pick up where he'd left off.

Coincidences being what they are, Joe located an extra guitar behind the bar. That old Gibson became mine for the night. I tuned it up and we three were off and running for the next several hours.

And the rest of the story, as they say, is in the song.



**The Jersey Lilly Saloon**