

Bronc Rider and Saddle Reunited – 37 years later  
By Cindy Lea Bahe

An Eagle Butte bronc rider was finally reunited with his saddle from 37 years ago. Blaine Norvold had often wondered of the whereabouts of his saddle throughout the years. His memory was jogged after Norvold placed a photo of himself riding that saddle on the Bronc Riding National website, which prompted his search.

Crafted by Dean Pfeifer, a saddle maker from Fort Pierre, this saddle exchanged several hands over the years. Blaine Norvold's brother Jud traded livestock for the saddle. Jud was a self-taught bronc rider who won most SDRA rodeos at age of 17 and performed as a stunt rider in "Born to Buck" produced by Casey Tibbs in 1967. In 1972, the brothers ventured down to our country's southwest territory. Together they won nine straight rodeos on this saddle. The saddle was unique as it stood out wide in front, had been cut in half and lengthened to almost 17". It had a low cantle which kept the rider in the front to stay in the saddle. Jud had glued a piece of rabbit fur on the swells mostly for décor but the pelt also protected their knuckles. For reasons unknown, Jud sold the saddle in 1978.

Now, fast-forward to the year 2010. Norvold met up with a Navajo Indian bronc rider, Ramos Benny of New Mexico. Throughout their conversation which ranged from rodeos to broncs, Norvold talked about a saddle he used to ride in his younger days. He explained to Benny how special the saddle was and how it was so important for him to see it once again. Benny mentioned he had seen this saddle and thought it belonged to someone down in New Mexico. Benny knew it had exchanged hands several times throughout the years. He explained that Jim Harris bought it from Norvold's brother, who later sold it to Blocky Joe who may have sold it to someone else. Finding the current owner proved difficult and ended up being a five-year pursuit through countless phone calls, Facebook messages, and communicating with personal contacts. His search research finally paid off and Norvold found the current owner, Alvin Pino of Crownpoint, NM.

After several failed attempts to contact Pino, Norvold then 70, took a gamble and drove to New Mexico to meet the current saddle owner. Once Norvold found him, Pino was reluctant to show him the saddle, as he and his three children had been using the saddle for the last 30 years in rodeos and breaking horses. Pino listened to Norvold's story about the saddle which included a timeline of life changing events. A house fire destroyed all of Norvold's personal items including his rodeo buckles, photos and other artifacts and his brother Jud, the former saddle owner, died in 1982. Norvold's story inspired Pino to show the saddle to him. When Pino opened the barn door and slid the saddle off the rack Norvold knew in an instant he had found the old saddle. The saddle's appearance had changed slightly as Pino modified it by placing a saddle horn on and added new stirrups. Overwhelmed, Norvold stood silent for a while, as this was 33 years to the very day he had buried his brother. Pino sold it back to him for \$200. Norvold brought the saddle back to the South Dakota ranch and laid it on his brother's grave to let their spirits reunite. The saddle is now on display at the Casey Tibbs Rodeo Center Museum, in Fort Pierre.

Norvold had previously coordinated a saddle reunion in Fort Pierre with Pino and his daughter Kohl Pino on August 20, 2016. That gathering never happened as Pino, 61, died unexpectedly two days prior the reunion.

One could say, after 37 years, the saddle was finally home.