



Ronny Kitchens

By wife, Ginny Kitchens

We were late. That may be a surprise to some people, considering we almost always get to the bullriding in plenty of time. Besides, it gives Ronny a chance to practice his NASCAR skills on the way. When we arrived at the new outdoor pen in Marble Falls, Texas, Ronny jumped out of the car to go check in and let Byron Walker know we were there.

Byron is very oral about Ronny being there in time for introductions. I was at the car getting Braden ready, when Ronny came back to change and get his riggin bag. He had the biggest smile on his face. He informed me that Byron had informed him that Jerry Nelson had brought a trailer full. And the winner of the round tonight got to match Tuff E Nuff for a \$5,000 bounty. You see, Ronny and Tuff E Nuff have danced before.

Ronny, besides growing up on all those rank East Texas bulls, has had the big bald-face brindle three previous times. In fact, Tuff E Nuff threw Ronny over the out gate in Albuquerque. He's an old bull, road broke, and Jerry still likes to haul him just because he still likes to go. This was going to be the last time they bucked him. And as Ronny headed up toward the arena, he looked at me, winked, and said, "Darlin, I just may be tough enough to ride that old bull this time." I laughed and headed up to watch with the baby and Gus. Come time for the last section of the bullriding, all of our buddies had been thrown off. It was a respectable pen of



bulls. Ronny was third to last to ride. He drew a great little brindle horned bull of Lonnie Austin's that turned back right at the latch. Ronny, in true form, spurred the hair off him, and they marked him 89 points. I was still so excited about that ride that I didn't even realize they had already bucked the last two bulls and that Ronny had won the round. And that meant he got to tangle with his old friend one last time before they closed the gate on him forever.

As he headed over to where they had the bull loaded, the announcer (our friend Shannon who does an exceptional job of talking up Ronny to the crowd) caught up with him. Shannon stuck the microphone in Ronny's face and said, "Ronny Kitchens, you've had this bull three times before in your career. He's thrown you off three times. Here we are, the pressures on, and you've got one more chance to get him covered, for \$5,000, before they retire him. Do you think you can get it done?" The crowd was silent, waiting for a response. And Kitchens, with a twinkle in his eye, answered, "You damn right!" The crowd went crazy and all I could think was, "You've stuck your foot in your mouth this time!"

Every eye in the place was on him when he called for the gate. That big ol' brindle who was notorious for never having the same trip twice and who was known for doing anything to get you off his back, did the unthinkable. He blew in the air about 150 feet and **TURNED BACK TO THE RIGHT**. Ronny then proceeded to take sweet revenge upon that animal by kicking him every round. And there is not a doubt in my mind that the big ol' bull did that just for Ronny.

The respect between the two of them was mutual. One athlete to another. What a way to go out.

Tuff E Nuff is a bucking bull and Ronny Kitchens is a bucking bull rider. When the whistle blew, the old pro headed for the out gate. Ronny gave his trademark hat throw, and before it could hit the ground, the back of the bucking chutes were empty, everyone of his friends were on the arena floor in congratulations. The crowd was going wild, and not once, until the crowd thinned out and the beer was broke out, did I think about that \$5,000. All I could think, through the goosebumps, was, "He finally got you!" By the time I got around to Ronny, Jerry Nelson himself, was handing him the flank rope and shaking his hand.

Now, you who know Ronny know the big stories, Skat Kat at the '96 finals, the time Spindocter shattered his leg, and riding Skitzo to 94.5 points at the Cup in Charlotte. I wanted to tell this story

to keep it alive. It was a ride just for the fans. It wasn't caught on film or tape. It will remain in the memories of the people who were lucky enough to be there. It wasn't the greatest ride that Ronny has ever made, but it was the ride, after all these years, that made me realize what he meant by the check being just a bonus.

Ronny, you are truly to be admired for being one of the greats. For taking every bull 8 seconds at a time. Whether it's at a weekly jackpot or under the bright lights of Vegas, wherever they're "bucking bulls and giving away money, baby!" Your electricity and excitement is passed on to your friends and fans wherever you go. It is very refreshing in this age of uncertainty, to come across somebody like yourself who is so obviously put on this earth to do what you do. It's just more proof that God is still working on things.

Thank you for being a fan's fan and a friend's friend.

Thank you for letting us be a part of your life and bringing the excitement of '8 seconds' at a time to ours.

Happy Father's Day.

We love you,

Your traveling partners.