



Corky Williams: Cowboy Poet of the Cariboo Chilcotin

Sage Birchwater

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A diminutive cowboy with a full beard and a Texas drawl stands onstage at Expo 86 in Vancouver telling wild and woolly stories of life in the Chilcotin backcountry. The audience is mesmerized by his poetic ballad of an alcoholic dog that rode on the back of his saddle in Anahim Lake. The performer is Luther Corky Williams.

Originally from Texas, Corky and his wife, Jeanine, moved from Los Angeles to Anahim Lake, BC, to become ranchers. Corky had grown up on a ranch along the Mexican border before heading to LA to work in the film industry. The learning curve was steep for the family as they tried to get used to sixty-below temperatures, keeping watering holes open for the cattle through four feet of river ice, contending with marauding grizzly bears, getting stuck in impossible bog holes, educating children and surviving the hoards of bloodthirsty mosquitoes.

In the West Chilcotin, a country known to be hell on dogs and women, Jeanine says she thrived. “I loved the ranching life,” she says, “but I felt the kids needed a better education.” Eventually Jeanine and the children moved to Williams Lake while Corky stayed at the ranch. After a freak accident at the Anahim Lake Stampede, he was unable to continue life as a rancher, so he decided to return to his previous career onstage and in film. Getting chosen to perform at Expo was the big break he needed. From there he got an agent in Vancouver and landed parts in television shows like CBC’s *The Beachcombers* and CTV’s *Bordertown*.

After Corky and Jeanine split up in 1990, Corky moved back to Texas to work in theatre productions with his brother Jaston Williams, and he performed on some of the major stages across the United States.

By 2007, Corky, longing for the wide-open spaces of BC’s Cariboo, moved back to Williams Lake. “After living in Texas for fifteen years, I just got a wild hair up my ass to get up and come back to Canada,” Corky says. Corky became known as one of Western Canada’s most beloved cowboy poets, performing his spoken word stories and poetry across the province.

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