
Landing the FLYING M E Wrangler Job

Lena Geiser put down her cigarette and came out from behind the bar at the Round Up, Reno's popular hangout on West Second Street for ranch hands and cowboys. Lena greeted me with a big smile and a hug. "Welcome back, stranger. Did you get my message?"

"Just yesterday," I replied. "What's up, Lena?"

"Let's sit down," she said, motioning to a corner table. "I don't want the whole bar listening." I ordered us a couple of drinks, then she continued.

"I had a call from the Flying M E about a week ago, from a gal by the name of Allie Okie. They're going to be in the market for a dude wrangler real soon. I told her a little about you, Bill, and she said to call her as soon as you can. Emmy Wood would like to talk with you, the sooner the better."

"Holy mackerel!" I blurted out. "The famous Flying M E! I've got a real shot at the wrangler job! I can't thank you enough for calling me, Lena." I gave her a big hug.

"Hold on now, cowboy," Lena said. "You can thank me if you get the job. It's too late to call tonight," she counseled, "but I'd give them a call first thing tomorrow."

"You can count on that," I replied as Lena went back to tending bar. The Round Up was really jumping.

About that time, my cowboy friends, Utah Bob and Frank Burrows, walked in, and we played catch-up for an hour or so. Then I headed for my hotel and a good night's sleep. I wanted to be at my best for the next day.

The following morning I phoned the Flying M E about nine, and a maid answered. "Mrs. Okie is having breakfast. May I tell her who's calling?"

"Tell her it's Bill McGee, please. Lena Geiser's friend."

Mrs. Okie picked up the phone, and we must have talked for twenty minutes. Then she paused, "What's your day like, Bill? Can we meet later at the Riverside Corner Bar? I'm pretty sure Emmy has to be in court this afternoon. Hold on while I ask the cook. She'll know Emmy's schedule. Will four p.m. at the Corner Bar work for you?"

"You bet. I'll see you there."

Hiring On

At four p.m. on the dot, I entered the Corner Bar in the Riverside Hotel and spotted two women at a corner table. One was wearing frontier pants and a Western shirt; the other a tailored suit and hat.

The taller of the two, a lanky, attractive type in her late twenties, walked up to me. "You must be Bill McGee?"

"That's right, Ma'am," I replied.

"I'm Allie Okie. Very glad to meet you."

The other woman then rose to greet me. She was a handsome woman, maybe about fifty, and stood about five feet tall, with a youthful figure and very erect posture. She radiated charm and poise even before speaking.

Allie Okie made the introduction. "Bill McGee, please meet Mrs. Emmy Wood."

"Hello, dear," Emmy Wood said in a deep, whiskey voice. "It's nice to meet you. Lena thinks the world of you."

"It's a real pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Wood. I've heard so much about you and the Flying M E," I said, just a bit nervous.

"Oh, please call me Emmy. Everyone does. Did you enjoy your job with Bobby Scates at the Lake?"

"You bet I did. The camaraderie in the back-country was really special. Bob Scates and Chaska West are a couple of pros from the old school."

"Now I don't know how much Lena has told you," Emmy said, "but we need a wrangler to start by the first of November. Tell us something about yourself, dear. About all we know is that you were born and raised on a ranch in Montana."

I gave them my verbal resumé, which seemed to make a favorable impression.

"Sounds like you could fill our needs very nicely," Emmy said. "Now let us tell you what we expect from our wrangler."

Between the two of them they described the duties of a typical dude ranch position, with one exception: unlike many dude ranches, Emmy discouraged fraternization between guest and wrangler. I could see potential problems with that down the road but decided to let sleeping dogs lie.

"What are we talking about money-wise?" I asked.

"Three hundred a month plus room and board and the use of the ranch pickup," Emmy replied. "You'll also earn some good tips, Bill, especially from the frequent riders. How does that sound?"

"More than fair. When do I start?"

With that, Emmy and Allie looked at each other, then nodded.

"November 1, if you can arrange it, Bill."

"Great," I said. We shook hands and then toasted each other with our drinks. Later as I was heading for the door, Allie called out, "Call me in about a week, Bill, so we can arrange to have you picked up."

"Will do," I replied.

I left the Riverside in a festive mood. I couldn't wait to tell Lena and Laurie the good news. You've no doubt heard the expression "in the right place at the right time." Lucky me, I thought, as I rounded the corner to Second Street and headed for the Round Up. But I reminded myself it wasn't just luck that got me the job. I had planned my approach, with Lena's help, then worked the plan.

I had eleven days off until starting at the Flying M E. They seemed to whiz by. Days and evenings I mostly hung out at the Round Up with my cowboy friends, Utah Bob and Frank Burrows. We spent a lot of time with our hero figure and cowboy friend, Frank Polk, watching him carve lifelike figures out of a piece of wood with his pocket knife and listening to his stories about his romances with the ladies. Frank was old enough to be our father and we all looked up to him, some of us hoping to have his kind of luck with the ladies. (See "The Cowboy and the Lady" in this chapter.)

My late nights were reserved for Laurie, who had filed for divorce shortly before I left for Tahoe. I called Star Taxi as soon as I got back to the hotel and Laurie answered the phone.