

ABSTRACT

THESIS: The Man in High Heels

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PAGES: 137

My grandfathers and my two great uncles, my old men, were heroes to me. Growing up in the cushy suburbs of Cincinnati, I knew I wanted to be a man like they were men. I wanted to invent and build to solve problems, to hunt and fish, to know how to do hard labor, and to live like they lived. In this immersion journalism project I seek to reconcile the differences between my lack of self-reliance, the skills I deemed necessary to be considered a man, and the skills my old men possessed, by attempting to live like they lived. I worked at Smoke Rise Ranch as a ranch hand for three weeks, and let loose twenty-one yearling heifers. I went hunting for deer, but never fired my gun. I built a very fine quilt rack after first failing miserably. These efforts at attaining a connection with my old men fill these pages as lighthearted anecdotes of incompetence and struggle, moments of triumph, and my recognition of my heroes' flaws: it is not easy to deconstruct a hero. It is a narrative of choices, of attempting to define the kind of man I want to be for my family in light of the kind of men they were. Some names have been changed.