

Ronnie Weatherman

By John McCormick

Putting to words a story about someone as important as Ronnie is difficult in that so many different things come to mind. There are so many even single sentence statements that he made over the years that have cause me to reflect, revise my thinking or revise the way I look at things. The memories are kind of like patchwork for a quilt. I hope these pieces of patch work come together to form a quilt that reflects who Ronnie was to me.

The second TBOF shoot I attended was at the Rocking Horse Ranch in Umatilla. I recall watching that hot-shot every one talked about, Ronnie Weatherman, win a shoot off with a perfect shot on a long-distance Elk through a pair of binoculars from the campsite. That is my first recollection of him.

I could write 10 pages about how Ronnie tutored me through the Presidency of the TBOF and how he and Bobbi opened the door to their home during that period. I rode the wave that Ronnie created when he was leading the club. Under his Presidency the TBOF became recognized as a leader of Traditional Archery shooting competitions. He had people coming from everywhere and maxed out the competition ranges. He supported me during my term even when he didn't agree with some of the decisions I made. His dedication to the club and the amount of time and effort he personally put in to the club was incredible.

The first time I visited Ronnie we went out to his work shop. I saw some of the designs and drawings he was working on and was very impressed. It was for a theme park and was an intricate design for an Octopus that would become a part of a visitor's lobby. I had been working in a machine shop and building precision sheet metal components for years and could not design or even build anything he had drawn. The amount of talent was impressive. It was both intelligent and artistic. As I got to know Ronnie better, there were times at work I would brag that not a single engineer I worked with could compare to him. If you looked at Ronnie's camper set-up, tree climbing steps, bows or anything else he customized, you could see his sharp mind and talent.

I bought a popular name brand bow (named after an archery legend) and it just wouldn't shoot. I tried everything and just couldn't figure it out. Like a lot of other people, I ended up over at Ronnie's looking for help. We tried a few bare shafts and he announced quite confidently and in a matter of fact way (like he was prone to do) that the shelf on my new bow was designed badly and needed to be reshaped. I was naïve enough to think that no one would sell a bow with a poorly designed shelf, so I resisted for several months. When it came down to a choice of selling the bow or giving his idea a try, I gave in. Once I ground down the shelf it solved the problem immediately and the bow was a shooter.

I found out over the years that I could ask Ronnie about any subject and he had a good answer, right off the top of his head. At first, I thought he must have spent all his spare time thinking about many different things and then forming an opinion about them so he would be prepared whenever asked about this subject or that. Then I realized that would require an impossible memory. He was just that quick and that sharp to allow him to formulate good opinions right on the spot. I had never personally met anyone able to do that. I must admit though, he knew everyone's name. Even the kids. He might have had the ability to remember that much stuff after all!

One day I was talking to Ronnie about being let down by someone who had promised to do something, but they didn't follow through. Ronnie said: "You know your problem? You expect too much of people." I have thought about that from that day forward. If you knew Ronnie, you know he did not mean that as a way of disparaging others, but that I could avoid disappointment by being more realistic. He meant that I could not put the kind of expectations I put on myself, on to other people. He was right. I have tried to keep that in mind ever since and rarely am I disappointed by anyone anymore.

The last time I was at Ronnie's house was to assist him with repairing arrows from the Boggy Creek Gang Camp archery program. He had a bunch of them to repair and promised me we would cook up some fish afterwards. We repaired as many arrows as we could and then went out to the carport to get the fish. Ronnie laughed and told me he had promised a fish fry but forgot to mention we would have to clean them first. I guess he had been out bowfishing the night before and had a cooler full of assorted fish. Now I can clean a fish well enough that I wouldn't starve if left alone with a knife and a pack of matches, but there are different levels of ability in everything. Ronnie could clean a fish so fast and well that I was embarrassed. He offered me some pointers and let me work on as many as I wanted. Then a big gar came out of the cooler. I had to admit that I had never cleaned one or even knowingly eaten one. He broke out the tin snips and showed me how to clean the first one. I struggled through a couple of more after that. Ronnie got a good oak fire going and put the seasoned and oiled fish on a rack and slow cooked them. As he cooked the fish I wondered if this had been a test for Beth since I had brought her over with me. I guess he figured if she got up and ran at any point, she wasn't a keeper. After we ate our fill, Ronnie brought out his latest pistol and asked if I wanted to shoot it. Beth was with me as I was shooting and I offered the pistol to her so she could shoot. Ronnie came over a little nervous and mentioned that his neighbor down range had some expensive horses. Now came his test. He watched her shoot a group that was better than mine.

From time to time I would have a hunt at the same WMA as Ronnie. He was always welcoming and wanted to share his camp. Myself and everyone else would generally camp in close proximity. You could always count on Ronnie to have a bunch of firewood and that thing you forgot to bring. He set up a good kitchen and a covered area for eating. He always stayed to the last, even though he was the first person to tag out. He usually provided a good venison dinner for those of us that hunted to the end trying to get a deer so that we wouldn't have to eat that can of pork and beans we had remaining. The last time I ended up in the same camp as Ronnie was also the last time I hunted a WMA. We shared a camp on my brother's property in the panhandle while hunting St. Marks. I think Ronnie tagged out on day two. Day three had a cold front passing through about mid-day. In the panhandle cold fronts come in with a lot of fan-fare. I was heading back in to the woods for the afternoon and it started raining real hard. I stumbled across a good hog so decided to end my day right there. When I got back to camp it was raining so hard you could barely see and lightening was dropping left and right. I was starting to regret taking that hog. As I was rigging a rope over a tree limb to raise the hog and start cleaning him, Ronnie showed up in a poncho with a knife. He apologized for not having another poncho. I told him he should go back to his camp and I would pay for my stupidity all alone. He stayed right there with me. That is the kind of person he was. That evening after the rains had finally stopped it started getting cold. Very cold. I went out to hunt the next day, which was the last day of the hunt. Many of the roads had been closed, so I had to walk a good distance to get to my stand. I saw a small, but not legal buck that evening and considered it a good hunt even though I did not have any deer meat. I knew I was getting back to camp late and wasn't looking forward to trying to cook my Dinty Moore beef stew on my wet camp stove

outside in the cold. When I arrived at camp Ronnie had a roaring fire going. He had cooked up a big dinner of venison, potatoes and onions all in olive oil. It was so good! We sat around the fire that evening joking about starting another fire and standing between them. I enjoyed his company that evening and every time I ever saw him. He was a good man and will be missed.