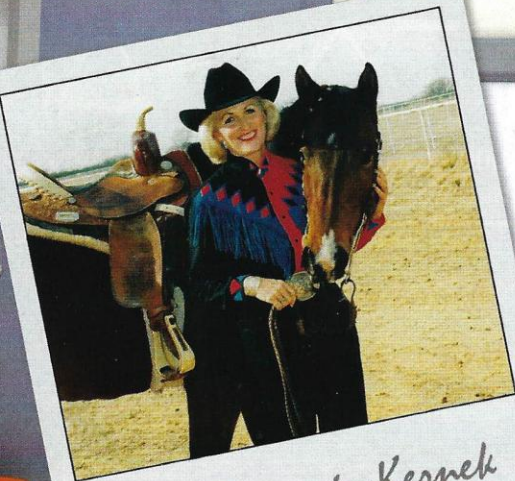


PHOTO  
FILES D-G



Joyce Loomis-Kerneck

Loomis-Kerneck

# Finding Peace

*Through a lifetime of mountain-top successes and abyss-deep losses, Joyce Loomis-Kerneck learned not only how to find her peaceful place, but how to help others find theirs.*

*by Diane Rice*

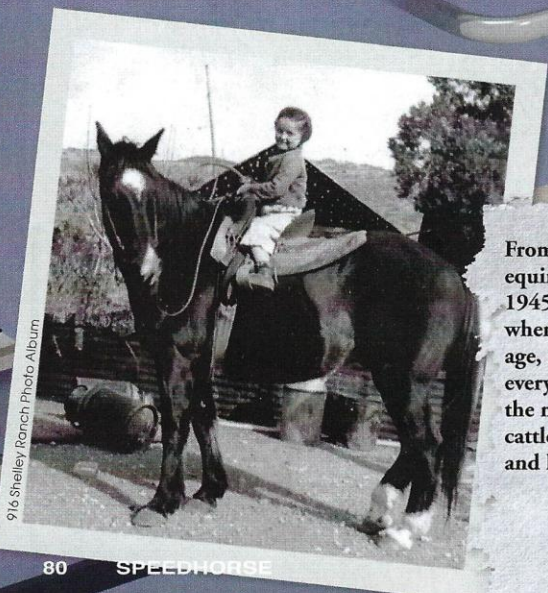
PHOTOS

Joyce Loomis-Kerneck knows very well that looks can be deceiving. "I've shared my story with many through the years and it never ceases to amaze me how people would say, 'I had no idea you were ever depressed! You have so much!'" she says.

The second of three children born to cattle rancher/sheriff Lawrence Shelley and his wife, Rosemary, Joyce grew up on the family's 916 Ranch in the Mogollan Mountains near Cliff, New Mexico, established in 1884 by her great-grandfather, Peter Shelley. Her older brother, Lawrence Hollis Shelley, aka Buster, and her younger brother, Terrell—who still minds the ranch with his son, Jerrell—were typical ranch kids: fixing water gaps and fences, and taking care of the dogs, cattle, milk cows and horses. "We learned to work hard and get our homework done as well as all the chores," says Joyce.

But within her seemingly idyllic life, darkness hovered. Her mother, who in her public life organized the food for the county fair, taught women how to can and sew, and whose seamstress skills won Best Dressed Cowgirl honors for Joyce every year she competed at the NFR, also battled alcohol addiction. "Sometimes, she'd disappear for months at a time," Joyce says. "We learned to overcome and take care of ourselves and each other. We drove ourselves to the highway to catch the school bus — 18 miles of dirt road — when we could barely see over the dash. I smile when I think of how sometimes we'd leave the road and chase antelope."

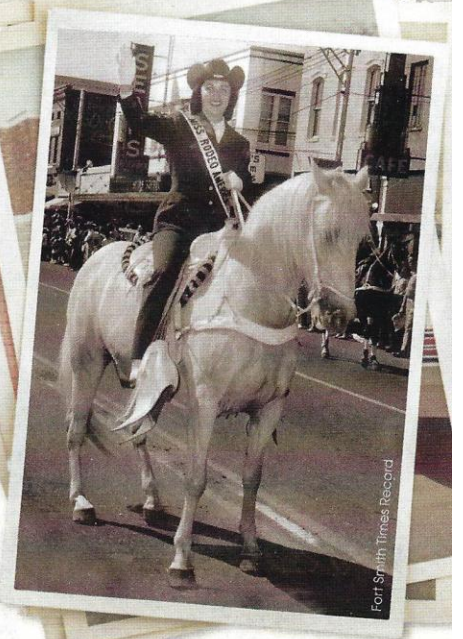
**From early on, Joyce loved everything equine. She is pictured here circa 1945 at the 916 Shelley Ranch where she grew up. From a young age, she ran around barrels with every horse she could find, including the mules her dad used to work cattle in the mountains, pack salt, and hunt mountain lions and bears.**



916 Shelley Ranch Photo Album



Joyce (center) in 1962 with her father and mother, Lawrence and Rosemary Shelley (left), and Toy Tatsch and Darlene Anderson (right) as she is welcomed back as 1963 Miss Rodeo America.



Joyce rides in a parade during her reign as 1963 Miss Rodeo America.

## Her Road to Recognition

From early on, Joyce loved everything equine, especially barrel racing. As a child, she pored over back issues of *Western Horseman* that a neighbor gave her. Her dad got her some barrels, and she ran every equine she could find around them, including the mules her dad used to work cattle in the mountains, pack salt, and hunt mountain lions and bears. A family friend gave her a palomino she called Pal, and at age 14, she won her first barrel racing buckle at a local fair.

She attended New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, where she competed on the rodeo team in roping, goat tying and, of course, barrel racing. Then, she saw a flyer advertising the Miss Rodeo New Mexico pageant. With encouragement from a friend, Joyce decided to enter. "The prize," she says, "was a set of luggage, and I wanted to win it!" She did win, which advanced her to the Miss Rodeo America competition in Las Vegas. Her goal was to win the horsemanship, which she did — along with the 1963 Miss Rodeo America title. Her demons, however, remained.

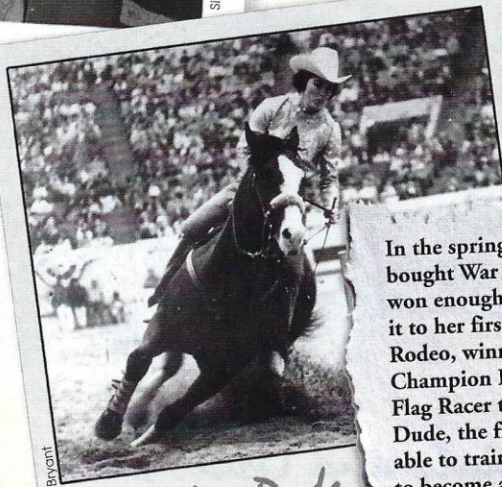
"Becoming Miss Rodeo America was the beginning of a blessed rodeo career that led to my heart's desire to live my life training horses," she says. "That part of my life helped me through the losses that life brought my way. Little did I know that every win, and the highs that followed, were temporary."

Her title led to a year in Las Vegas, traveling to promote rodeo, which allowed her to meet, observe and learn from a multitude of barrel racers. She met and married Rodeo Hall of Famer Barry

Burk in 1964, and they had a son, Dee Lawrence "Opie" Burk. During their seven years together, Joyce met many of the top horsemen of the time. Again, she watched, asked questions, and learned from their methods.

She began earning roping and all-around titles, yet always had her eye out for a barrel horse. In the spring of 1969, she bought War Leo Dude. "I won enough on him to make my first National Finals Rodeo that year," she says. "The same year, I won World Champion Ribbon Roper and Flag Racer. He was the first horse that I trained and that I was able to hang onto and not sell." He went on to become a WPRA (formerly GRA) World Champion Barrel Racer and won the National Finals Rodeo.

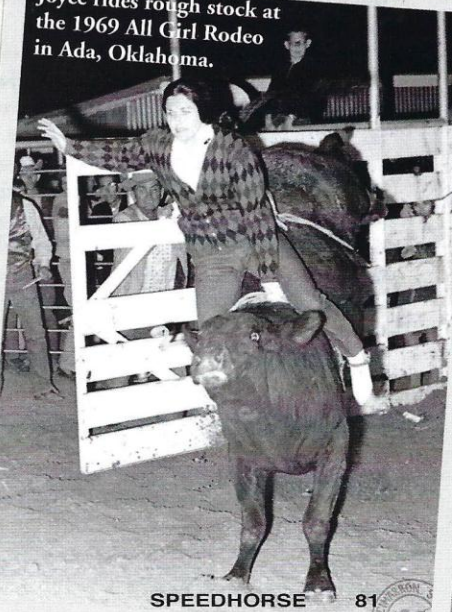
"When I married Barry, his father, Dee Burk, gave me a son of Leo Tag — Leo Thistle — and he became my first World Champion and an NFR winner for Missy Long in 1969. By 1970, I had four horses at the NFR that I'd trained. I turned out calves for Slim Whaley, who trained rope horses for the top ropers, and he'd give me tips. Through this era, I was influenced by so many great horsemen: George Tyler, Matlock Rose, Dean Oliver and more—all family friends of the Burks—and I was like a sponge."



War Leo Dude  
1969

In the spring of 1969, Joyce bought War Leo Dude and won enough on him to make it to her first National Finals Rodeo, winning 1969 World Champion Ribbon Roper and Flag Racer titles. War Leo Dude, the first horse she was able to train and keep, went on to become a World Champion Barrel Racer and won the National Finals Rodeo.

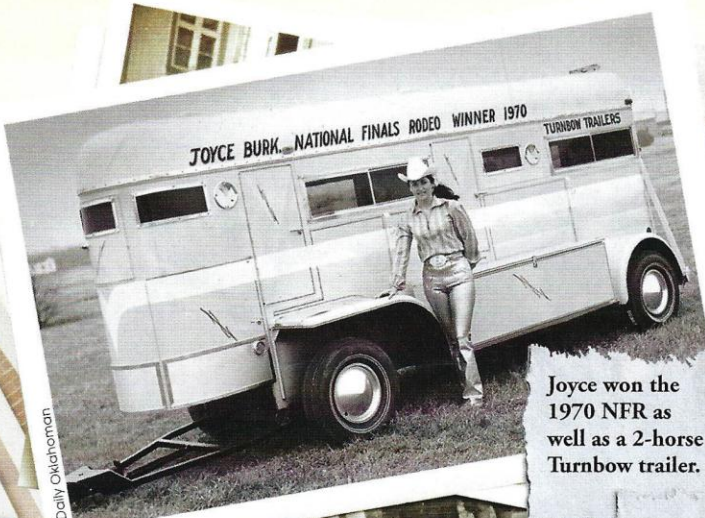
Joyce rides rough stock at the 1969 All Girl Rodeo in Ada, Oklahoma.



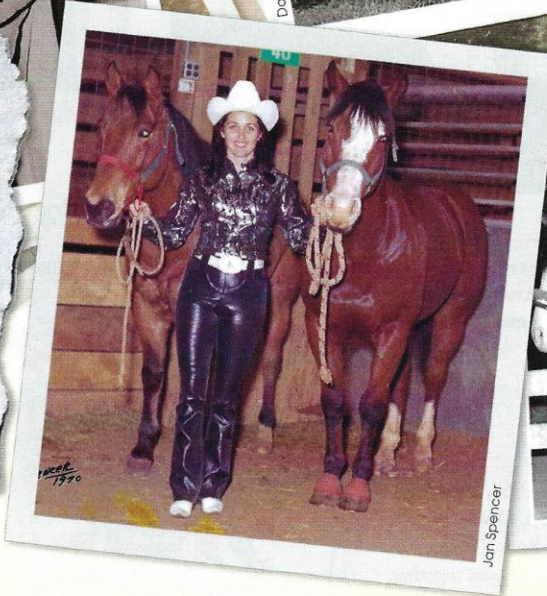


Above: Joyce Kernek received the award for 1970 National Finals Rodeo Best Dressed Champion from Mel Lambert. With her mother as her seamstress, Joyce won Best Dressed Cowgirl honors every year she competed at the National Finals Rodeo.

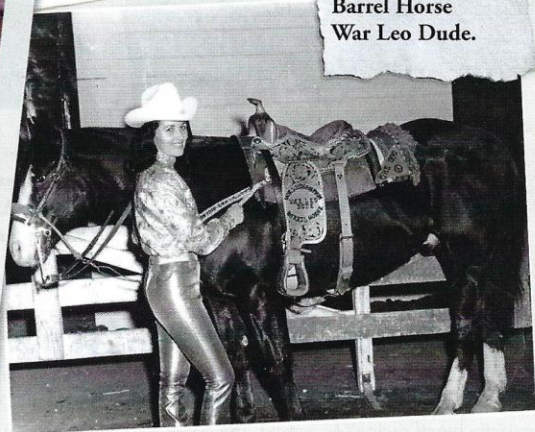
Right: Joyce with her two World Champions - Engle and War Leo Dude.



Joyce won the 1970 NFR as well as a 2-horse Turnbow trailer.



Joyce and her 1971 World Champion Barrel Horse War Leo Dude.



Denver Post

## Great Trials and Great Blessings

After her marriage to Barry broke up, Joyce married NRHA Hall of Famer Bob Loomis in 1971. The next year, her father committed suicide and the year after that, her brother Buster died in a car wreck at age 32.

Back at the 916 Ranch, when she was troubled, Joyce would climb up to a steep bluff across from Mogollan Creek and the house she grew up in. "When you reach the top from one side, you can hang your legs off the other side," she said. "That bluff was my place to go when I needed to be as close to heaven as I could reach. Many times, I stood on that bluff and reached both hands up to God and asked Him to help me." But, more than 1,000 miles lay between her and that bluff in those beloved mountains when she needed the help she'd previously found there.

In deep depression, she says she realized she was in a battle she didn't know how to win. She'd always been able to shake her depression by riding longer hours and more horses, but now, nine months pregnant in 1975, that wasn't an option.

"I dropped my son off at church one Sunday morning and when I picked him up, he told me that he'd gotten saved," she says. "I drove down to that church to see what they were telling him and the pastor invited me to a revival. The speaker talked about horses in the book of Revelation. That revival lasted 14 days and I didn't miss a single night. Pastor Harlan Cooke became a mentor to me spiritually and taught me the difference between religion and a relationship with Jesus Christ.

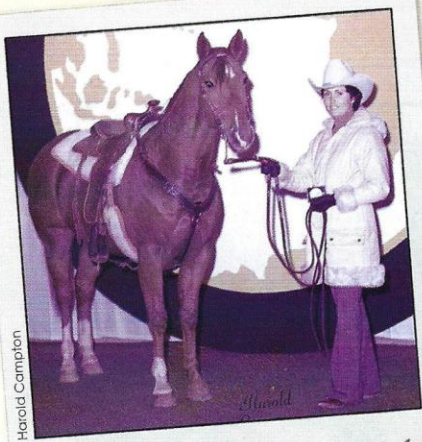
"I hadn't understood that our minds must be renewed and that we can't do that through psychology," she adds. "My mother had perfect attendance in church for seven years, but I'd seen God as someone who couldn't help me because of the struggle she'd had with alcoholism. I learned how wrong I was!"

Joyce accepted Jesus as her Savior in 1975 and started a new journey. "My church family became a part of my life right from the beginning" she said. "Now I had new tools and a new church family to help with my

journey. I'd need them all many times in the days to come."

Two months later, her daughter, Bobbie Jo, was born, but her heart stopped three days later while they were preparing to go home from the hospital. "The hospital wouldn't release her for 11 days," Joyce says, "but, I never felt alone again after those days of watching my new church family come to the hospital at all hours to pray for her until she was released."

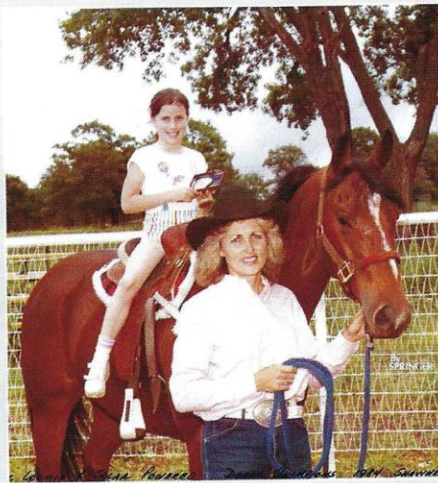
During the 23 years Joyce and Bob were married, Joyce began competing in AQHA shows and established a full-time horse operation at Pioneer Stables in Lincoln, Nebraska. She bought Man O War Leo as an ex-cutter. "He was another son of War Leo," she says of the gelding on whom in 1974 she won the inaugural AQHA World Show's Senior Barrel Horse Championship and Honor Roll in Louisville, Kentucky. "We began hauling youth competitors and training their horses, and we began receiving interns from all over the world."



Harold Compton

Man O War Leo & Joyce in 1974

Joyce began competing in AQHA shows and established a full-time horse operation at Pioneer Stables in Lincoln, Nebraska. She bought ex-cutter Man O War Leo, and won the inaugural 1974 AQHA World Show's Senior Barrel Horse Championship and Honor Roll aboard the gelding.



Joyce with daughter Bobbie Jo Loomis-Wells in 1984 aboard Solar Powered, that year's Derby Champion. Bobbie Jo went on to follow in her mother's footsteps and became a successful barrel racer as well as Miss Rodeo USA.



Foto Perigo Allison Silva

Joyce conducted clinics in many countries and, at the request of horsemen in Brazil in 2007, helped form the Barrel Futurities of America in that country. As a director of the WPRA and NRHA, she helped organize Brazil's trainer's association, the ABTA Treinadores. In 2011, she became their first Hall of Fame inductee.

## Obstacles and Potholes

Joyce's life began to change in ways she—and others—couldn't have imagined. Kathie O'Brien of Purcell, Oklahoma, retired trainer, rancher and barrel racer and Miss Rodeo America runner-up the year before Joyce's win, recalls Joyce's change of heart. "She became a Christian before I did," Kathie relates. "I was kind of watching, and not quite getting it. We went to a barrel race together—we'd gone to a lot of barrel races before and when she didn't win, she'd handle it a lot better than I did, but she didn't like it. And I remember we were at this barrel race and she ran right before me and knocked over two barrels. She came out and when she passed by me she said, 'Oh well, praise the Lord anyway!' She wouldn't have said that before! I already knew that whatever had happened to her was the real deal, but then I *really* knew!"

With two kids in tow, Joyce traveled the circuit. "The rodeo and futurity world is full of kids and mine had a great time growing up," says Joyce. "I kept snacks and cartoons in my motor home and it was a meeting place of kids! It was a challenge being at everything they did in school, but my kids always came first. I made the finals at Fort Smith the year Opie graduated, so I left my colt with Dale Youree and drove home to the graduation."

In 1984, tragedy struck again when Joyce's mother died in an alcohol-related car crash. "This was a tremendous blow to my faith," she admits. "I'd prayed that she could be healed from her addiction. She was the most talented person I've ever known and I loved her so much.

She was such an influence on my life—so beautiful, but I had to learn that not every answer we pray for is *yes*."

"The road to success is filled with obstacles and pot holes," she adds. "It's not a paved, easy highway." But because of Joyce's faith and her church family, she was able to fill those pot holes and forge ahead. When her marriage to Bob ended in 1993, she moved back to the mountains until 1995 when she bought a place near Purcell, Oklahoma. She then spent six months in Brazil and started over.

In 1998, she met and married non-horseman George Kerek, adding his daughter, Julie (now Smith) and her three kids to her own two kids and three grandkids. "George is my greatest support and help in all we do," she says of the former St. Louis Cardinals baseball team member and insurance agency owner who learned from his new wife just what an impact the horse industry has had on the city where he previously served as president of the Purcell Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Club.

Now married for 18 years, the couple keeps about five horses on their Kerek Ranch in Wayne: a broodmare and baby, two horses for the grandkids, and one for Joyce to ride and give lessons on. "George keeps the arena worked and ready for students and anyone else who wants to work their horses," she says appreciatively.

Over the years, she's added clinician, author, magazine writer, and dean of the Christian Horseman College in Benbrook, Texas, to her resume's list of experience. Speaking at events,

such as Equitana USA, and teaching at the Total Barrel Racing Experience, she found that as much as she loved learning, she also found great satisfaction in teaching others. "I love working with people and being a piece of their progress toward success," she says.

She also gave clinics in many countries outside the U.S. At the request of horsemen in Brazil, she called on her experience in helping to form the Barrel Futurities of America and as a director for the WPRA and the NRHA to help organize that country's trainers' association, the ABTA Treinadores, in 2007. In 2011, she became their first Hall of Fame inductee.

Her clinics also led to requests for internships, and over the years she's mentored, housed and fed students from Brazil, Canada, Italy, Czech Republic, and many U.S. colleges, including the Mid-America Technology Center in her present hometown of Wayne, Oklahoma.

As a result of her wide array of experiences, she was featured on the Animal Planet TV Network the year she was named Top Breeder of Barrel Horses and for breeding and raising Slo-startfastfinish, the Top Broodmare of 2009. She was also inducted into the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Museum and the Oklahoma Quarter Horse Association Halls of Fame. Yet, she didn't neglect her faith. In her "spare time," she helped establish Cowboy Church services at both the AQHA and AQHYA World Shows.

The friends Joyce gained through the years express admiration not only for her ability to get the most from her horses, but also for her ability



and desire to leave a legacy through teaching. Probably the most valuable to Joyce is the legacy she's left for her children and grandkids. "She's taught them many things, from how to ride, how to cook and can, and how to write thank-you notes—really neat things that kids aren't taught these days," says Joyce's longtime friend and prayer partner, Kathy Smith of Purcell, Oklahoma. "She's also taught them to trust in Jesus. She has the desire to help others in horsemanship and in their walk with the Lord."

Bobbie Jo followed in Joyce's footsteps and became a successful barrel racer and Miss Rodeo USA, and now, with her husband Coby Wells and their children, Cobi Jo and Gatlin, runs the renowned Smokin' Joe's Rib Ranch in Davis, Oklahoma.

Opie has a broadcasting license and has worked with people struggling with addictions and with battered women and children, and has one son, Dalton, who has surmounted autism to earn his GED.

George's daughter, Julie Smith, teaches school and has three children in school: Trey and Makenna King and Kyla Hunter. All three learned to ride at Kernek Ranch.

"Joyce has given people help through the avenue of horses," says Joyce's friend of about 30 years, engineering manager and barrel-horse breeder Fran Smith-Roemer of Lincoln, Nebraska. "And I don't mean just helping them with horses. I mean helping them with their lives. One of her quotes that has stuck with me is, 'Take care of the little things and the big things will take care of themselves.' That applies in horses and in all parts of our lives."

Over the years, Joyce has added clinician, author, magazine writer, and dean of the Christian Horseman College in Benbrook, Texas, to her list of experience. She has found great satisfaction teaching others at the Total Barrel Racing Experience, and she currently conducts youth clinics with her most recent being an amateur clinic held in January of 2016.



*"Keep your mind renewed, ride good horses and cultivate a support team with great and positive friends . . ."*

## Causes Dear to Her Heart

On one of her many trips to Brazil, Joyce met a pastor through one of her interns and formed Little Lambs as an adjunct to his Feed The Sheep ministry in the favelas (slums). She takes donations from U.S. barrel racers and Christians, and they match them in Brazil. So far, they've built one church and are working on buildings to bring mothers and children out of the slums, to educate them and to help them find jobs.

Joyce still does clinics, and in January 2017, will return to Brazil to build on the project she's worked on to strengthen skills and relationships between youth, parents, competitors and trainers.

She also works with Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants, in which she became active when her son received a 12-year sentence for selling the prescription drug hydrocodone. "Our laws give mandatory sentences for some offenses and light sentences for others," she says. "A man murdered his baby

and only got three years. Oklahoma is number one in incarcerated women and number two in incarcerated men. I had no idea how these people were treated until I stood in a line for hours every Saturday morning in hopes of having 15 minutes with my son behind a glass.

"I learned a lot from families standing in that same line," she continues. "The place was filthy, with cockroaches, ants and mold. My son was in a small cell with seven other men and they didn't see the light of day for almost eight months. There was no place to exercise. When the Oklahoma economy went down this year, every prison program was cut, along with all our school programs. These programs offered rehabilitation and hopes of working your sentence down. *Something* has to be done. I've been to several meetings and have seen how the bills are written and rejected because of the 'pork' [unrelated perks] attached to them."

## Her Philoraphy

Joyce counts all her life's experiences as a journey in learning to live the best she can, with the Savior as her model. "My grandmother Hattie taught me all the old hymns on an old pump organ that she had," Joyce says. "She'd sing every verse. She had peace and it was that peace that I'd search for a long time. I found that no matter how many championships you win, no matter how many great horses you train, you cannot find peace through those things. The day after I'd won the World Championship and the NFR and Best-Dressed and everything I'd ever dreamed of, I realized that I hadn't acquired the peace and joy that I thought would be mine when I won all those things.

"Depression can come on us in times when we become overwhelmed with circumstances of sorrow, or chip away at us with smaller losses and daily tiring things," adds Joyce. "The bottom line is this: It's a battle that you *can* win! You can't win it by abusing alcohol or drugs. You can't win it by becoming a worka-

holic. You can't win it by getting a new mate, a new horse or becoming a champion.

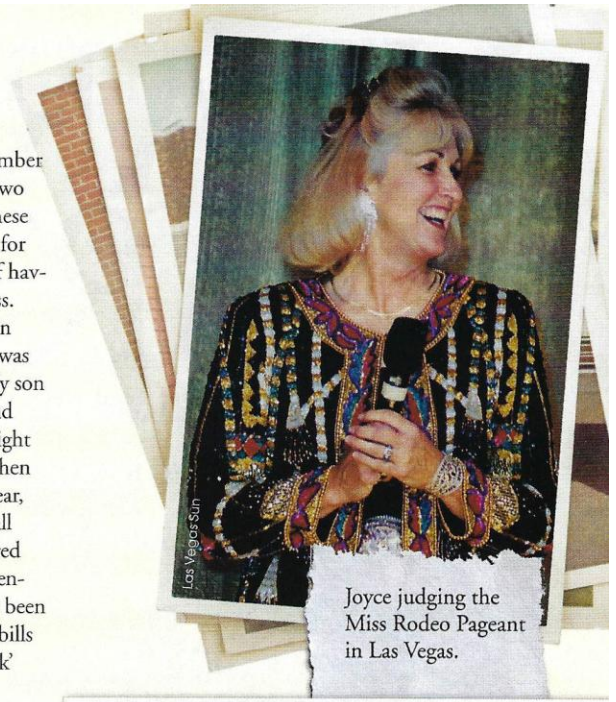
"You *can* win with the Holy Spirit guiding you into a balanced life," she adds. "Keep your mind renewed, ride good horses, and cultivate a support team with great and positive friends. Attending a church that preaches a strong word is a must for me.

"One of my beliefs is that we can prevent suicide by being open and helping others," she continues. "I experienced the loss of a cousin while in college, two uncles, my father, and my mother's second husband to suicide. The horse business has lost amazing people to suicide. It is not an answer."

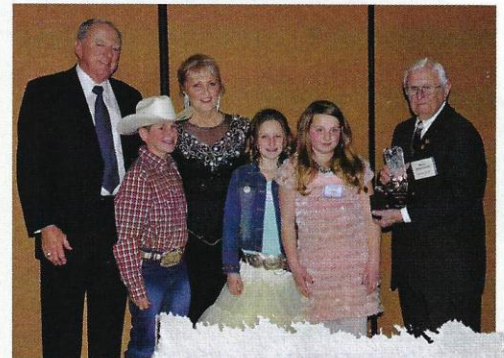
"I'm imagining swinging my legs off my bluff even though it's 1,000 miles from me," she concludes. "I'll stand up and lift both hands to heaven and thank Him for the life He's given me that was far beyond my dreams. I'll also ask God to help those who are without hope today. He sent me help and He will do the same for you! Never give up!" 🐾



Joyce and George Kernek in Israel. Joyce and George, a former St. Louis Cardinals baseball player, have been married for 18 years.



Joyce judging the Miss Rodeo Pageant in Las Vegas.



Joyce was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 2013. She is shown here with husband George, Gatlin & Cobi Jo Wells, Coralee Castle, and Bud Breeding.



Joyce aboard 1995 AQHA Champion Aged Stallion Rare Bar.

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