

The Lybbert Way

Five Generations of Shoein' Horses

By Tyler & Judy Trafford

A gusty, autumn wind blows down from the peaks of the Rocky Mountains, whipping dry leaves and dust past Dan Lybbert's barn. Inside, a dozen of his relatives are gathering around the anvil and forge to reminisce about The Lybbert Way, the family's five-generation tradition of blacksmithing and "shoein' horses".



Generation One. "CFB" Lybbert, in late 1800's, many years after he had brought his blacksmithing trade to America from Denmark. (left)

Waldemar Lybbert, originally from Salt Lake City, served the Glenwood community as a blacksmith and a leading citizen from 1912 to 1944, shoeing horses until the winter he died, age 74. (right)

Generation Two and Three. Waldemar Lybbert and his son, Dan, in the early 1900's. Dan cranked the blower while his father shoed horses, repaired tools, and pulled teeth. (background photo)

The Lybbert Way began 157 years ago in Denmark with great grandfather Lybbert, and continues today as his great grandsons pass on their knowledge and techniques to their sons, in the Cardston area of southern Alberta.

The entire family – men, women and children – is involved in The Lybbert Way, and in passing it on they don't just share their knowledge of anvils, forges, hooves and tools: They weld deep into each new generations' hearts a belief that life is made full by a commitment to church, community, family, and work.

The Lybbert Way may be founded on generations of hammering iron and steel, but it survives because the entire family has a faith in its Mormon beliefs that is more durable than any blacksmith's anvil.

Today, Grandpa Dan, 86, opens the conversation with a story his two sons, Doral and Barton, his nephew Dan, and his grandsons, Daniel and Clinton, have heard since they were youngsters. These men are all qualified or apprenticing blacksmiths and farriers, but in their unaffected way, they prefer to say their work is just "shoein' horses".

APPRENTICED AT 12

"The first Lybbert blacksmith was Christian F. B. Lybbert," Grandpa Dan begins. "He was born in 1834 in Denmark, and apprenticed when he was twelve."

CFB, as he is referred to in the family history, served a mission for the Church, soldiered in the Danish army, and then emigrated to Salt Lake City and worked in the area for his church and community the remainder of his life.



Working Men. Three of the five generations of Lybbert blacksmiths stand by the rails outside Dan Lybbert's shoeing barn near Cardston, Alberta. Clinton, Barton, Daniel, Grandpa Dan, Dan, and Doral Lybbert (L to R) are smiling because they've been told the picture is for a Blacksmithing Calendar.

PHOTOS BY TYLER AND JUDY TRAFFORD



The Family At Work. Clinton and Doral (L to R) pause while trimming, as Barton, in the building behind, heats the forge.

WALDEMAR SET UP HIS SHOP IN GLENWOOD

In 1913, Waldemar, CFB's broad-shouldered son, moved to Canada to set up a blacksmith shop in the new, Mormon village of Glenwood, about thirty miles from Cardston, Alberta.

"He started by just setting up a windbreak to do his blacksmithing," Grandpa Dan recalls. "If my Dad needed a tool, he made it. He did everything. He sharpened plough-shares. He built wooden wagon wheels."

The site of Waldemar's first shop is within yards of the corral where many of his descendants work today. "Waldemar died at 74," Grandpa Dan continues. "He was shoeing horses until he got sick the winter he died."

A GOOD SET OF FORCEPS

There was, however, one skill in the old blacksmithing tradition that Waldemar didn't pass on to his family.

"My Dad pulled teeth," Grandpa Dan says. "He had a good set of forceps and once he got hold of a tooth he didn't let go. He kept the forceps in a glass of water in his shop."

Waldemar set a good community example, exchanging his hammer for a pen and writing regularly to all the men and women from the area who served during World War II. He was the ward clerk for the L.D.S. Church, and was the village

constable. Today, his grandson, Doral, is the village mayor.

TURNING THE BLOWER ON THE FORGE

Grandpa Dan turned the blower on the forge while Waldemar shod horses, welded, and made tools for the people of Glenwood and area. He joined the R.C.A.F. in 1942, returning home honoured with a Distinguished Flying Cross.

Grandpa Dan shod "more than a few horses," and kept alive his father's blacksmithing skills; but when the horse drawn machinery era ended, so did the need for a village blacksmith. After the war, Dan and his schoolteacher wife, Grace, opened a general store and restaurant to support the family. They still run the store.

Nephew Dan, son of Lloyd and Luella Lybbert, was the first of the next generation to take up the family trade.

"I put my first shoe on when I was 14."

"I held the lantern for my Dad when he was shoein'," Dan says, as he describes how he began his career. "I put my first shoe on when I was 14." From there, he took over the job of shoeing the horses for the family of eight boys. "They had a way of convincin' me," he says with the Dan Lybbert sense of humour that is as well-known as his skill in shoeing and training horses. At one stable he jokingly tried to pass off hoof raspings as coconut cookies.

Dan completed the Olds College black-

smith program and was soon shoeing fulltime. "You bet I learned something from the program," he says, then checks himself. Dan's been known to give a few lectures on horse anatomy and has strong opinions about breeders who raise horses with poor conformation and poor feet.

Just as Dan built up a business shoeing ranch horses around Edmonton in the 1970's, the big revival of the horse industry began, initiated by the baby boomers and their interest in recreational horses. Dan charged \$12 to shoe a horse and was soon busy night and day with show horses, jumpers, cutting horses, pleasure horses, and race horses. Somewhere in his customer records you'll find names as diverse as Gail Ross, the show jumper, and Fred Duke, the cutting horse trainer.

As Dan's business grew, he needed someone he could trust to share the work and his hard-earned reputation. He chose his easygoing cousin, Barton Lybbert.

"You can really see those red hot shoes in the dark."

Barton is all natural charm, a boy caught in a man's world, full of fluid physical grace and a quick sense of what's right. He'd live on a horse if he could find a way. Just as Dan inherited a muscular, Quarter Horse build from Waldemar, Barton inherited a long, lean Thoroughbred build from Grace, his mother. Like all the Lybberts he has a sense of humour.

Shoeing horses late at night on a ranch isn't so hard, he will tell you. "You can really see those red hot shoes in the dark."

Before joining Dan, Barton finished a university degree in animal husbandry, paying his way, of course, shoeing horses. "When I graduated, I looked around and saw I was making more money shoein' horses than the starting salary for the jobs that were available. And, I liked shoein' horses better."

Barton finished the Old College program at the top of the class, but still had to pass "the Dan test" before starting fulltime with his cousin. Barton credits Dan with having a big influence on his technique, and adds another well-known blacksmithing name, Bob Marshall, who came from Wales around 1980 and "taught us how to make really good shoes."

"DORAL HAS HELPED A LOT OF PEOPLE."

Doral, the red-headed brother of Barton, was the next in the fourth generation of Lybberts to join the family blacksmithing tradition. He's the family workhorse, powerfully built and steady. He's the one the family relies on, as does the entire village of Glenwood. In addition to being the mayor, he is also the head of the volunteer fire department and the emergency rescue



Family Blacksmithing. Father and son, Barton and Daniel Lybbert, drive the punch through a shoe in practice for an upcoming competition.

unit. "Doral has helped a lot of people," Barton says proudly.

In the winter months, "when the shoein' season is pretty much over", Doral runs the local butcher shop, The Chopping Block. He's cool and even-tempered, but like that workhorse, if you get him riled, he might rip your barn apart.

Today, Dan, after a lifetime of shoein', is in the enviable position of operating a barn to which customers bring their horses. (Basic shoeing: \$100.00) He doesn't travel. If you want Dan Lybbert to shoe your horse, you bring your horse to him. He trains and shoes a lot of reining horses, and has regular referrals from veterinarians.

Barton doesn't regret his return to Glenwood from Edmonton. He's in cattle country now, and has found work, people, and a ranching way of life that suits him perfectly. "There's not a horse I'd rather shoe than a good old ranch horse," he says, shrugging off the long hours he puts in. "They are athletes. They do it all." He pauses, then slips in a bit of hammered-down philosophy that would make CFB and Waldemar smile. "Ranch horses do real work," he says succinctly, "not made-up work."

The young family broncs, Daniel and Clinton, are the fifth generation of Lybberts to blacksmith and shoe horses. Daniel is the son of Barton, and Clinton is the son of Doral.

"I GOT DRUG ALONG WHEN I WAS REAL LITTLE."

Daniel, like his father, is long and lean; but, unlike his even-tempered father, Daniel tugs pretty hard on the lead rope.

"I got drug along when I was real little," he says of his early childhood when he travelled with his father. "When I was older I started pulling shoes, clinching, trimming."

After completing the Olds program, Daniel found that competitive blacksmithing was the perfect outlet for his apparently inexhaustible energy, and he has drawn his father into entering competitions as well.

"THE COMPETITIONS ARE A REAL ASSET."

"I like competing," Daniel says. "I'm a competitor first. I love building shoes. I only shoe horses for a hobby!"

His father takes a more practical point of view of the competitions. "We've become acquainted with world class blacksmiths. They are our friends and our resources. The competitions are a real asset to Daniel and to me." And if anybody doubts the natural talents of the Lybberts, consider this: the first year Barton and Daniel entered the Montana Professional Horse Shoeing Association Championship, they tied for first place in Division One, Best Shod Foot. The next year, Barton won the Open, Best Shod Foot division.

Clinton, as dark-complexioned and quiet as his cousin is fair-skinned and brash, will complete the Olds College course this winter. He has a good way with horses, and is always near the top in his class in this aspect. He's been shoeing with his Dad, Doral, for three years, and has been apprenticed to him for the past year.


When you finally drag a four word comment out of Clinton, you know he means it. So when he says of horse shoeing that "I really enjoy it," you know that he's committed.

"Horse shoeing and blacksmithing is definitely part of our heritage."

Barton, who is inclined to see life from a big perspective, considers horse shoeing and blacksmithing to be more than a career.

"They are definitely part of our heritage. They brought our great grandfather to Utah and our grandfather to Glenwood. They are what we grew up with and kept going with. Our heritage comes to us through our family and through our membership in our church."

And for those who have trouble reading between the lines, this means you don't ask a Lybbert to shoe your horse on a Sunday. As Doral will politely tell you, "Sunday is a day of rest and worship."

That's The Lybbert Way. 

Tyler and Judy Trafford live in Calgary and Cowley, Alberta. Tyler, a former journalist and columnist, is the author of 12 biographies and histories. His first work of fiction, *Sun On The Mountains*, takes place in the Rocky Mountain Foothills during the early 1800's, and will be published this spring by ThistleDown Press. Judy is a water colourist and exhibits her paintings primarily in the Pincher Creek and Crowsnest Pass areas.