

The Birth of Pecos Bill

A Texas Tall Tale

retold by

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Well now Pecos Bill was born in the usual way to a real nice cowpoke and his wife who were journeying west with their eighteen children. Bill's Ma knew right from the start that he was something else. He started talkin' before he was a month old, did his teething on his Pa's bowie knife and rode his first horse jest as soon as he learned to sit up on his own. When he started to crawl, Pecos Bill would slither out of the wagon while his Mama was cookin' supper and wrestle with the bear cubs and other wild animals that roamed the prairies.

Yep, the whole family was expecting great things of little Bill; until they lost him in the drink. Seems they took the wagons over the Pecos River while Pecos Bill was taking a nap and he got bounced out of the back and swept downstream afore anyone missed him. If he hadn't taught himself to swim right-quick, he would have been a goner!

Right about the time Pecos Bill was drying out and trying to get a fix on where he was, a Mama Coyote came along and decided to adopt the poor waif and raise him with the rest of her pups. So Pecos Bill spent the first fifteen years of his life running around with the coyote pack, howling to the moon, chasing prey across the prairies, and having the time of his life.

Pecos Bill plumb forgot all about his real family, until the day he turned sixteen and his older brother came along. He was punchin' a herd of long-horn cattle and had brought them down to drink from the Pecos River. The ol' cowpoke took one look at Pecos Bill and knew he'd found his long-lost brother, on account of he looked jest like their Ma, who'd died of a broken heart after they lost little Bill in the river.

"See here, ain't you Pecos Bill, my little brother?" demanded the cowpoke of Pecos Bill when he came jumping over a giant log to run about in the field and howl at the full moon.

"Don't think so," said Pecos Bill. "I'm a coyote! Listen to me howl!" Pecos Bill let out a horrendous shout and scampered about the field on all fours. He scared the herd so bad that the long horns almost stampeded.

"You stop that!" Bill's brother shouted after he got the cattle calmed down. "And tell me this; how come you ain't got a long bushy tail if you're a coyote."

That was a tricky question. Pecos Bill thought about it for a long time.

"I got fleas," he volunteered. "And I howl at the moon!"

"Everybody in Texas has fleas and howls at the moon. That ain't no excuse," said his big brother. "Any how, you can walk upright like a normal person and you can talk too. That ain't what a coyote does."

"I guess you're right," said Pecos Bill.

"Course I'm right. I'm your big brother and I outta know," snapped the cowpoke. "It's about time you stopped foolin' around on the prairie and became a cowboy like all the rest of us."

That made good sense to Pecos Bill. So he bid farewell to the coyote pack and went out west with his brother to learn to be a cowboy. Soon as he learned the ropes some, Pecos Bill began to realize that the cowboys needed some new tricks to help them cope with them stubborn longhorns. The cowboys kept getting the cows mixed up, which made the owners mad, so Pecos Bill invented the branding iron so they could put a mark on each cow telling everybody who owned it. Then he noticed that the other cowboys were having trouble making the wilder cows behave. Now whenever Pecos Bill saw a cow misbehavin', he'd jump on its back and ride it until it had bucked and kicked itself into behaving better. But the other cowboys weren't so skilled as Bill, so he invented the lasso to help them tame the wild cows.

Pecos Bill's brother was right proud of him. "Not bad for a kid raised by coyotes," he told his baby brother. "In another couple of years, you'll be the toughest cowboy in the world."

And he was right!