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### Ken Case

January 1984

North Las Vegas, Nevada

Ken Case had the dubious distinction, he thought, of being called the "Atomic Cowboy," both by his fellow workers at the Test Site and by the press. Hired on a horse as a deputy sheriff by 1954, he literally became a cowboy for the Atomic Energy Commission, riding a herd of cattle and horses over ground zero after a nuclear detonation so that the effects of radiation on wildlife could be measured by scientists at Los Alamos.

This series of animal experiments continued for seven years. He showed me yellowed photographs from the fifties of himself in that capacity, the complete Marlboro Man, in the saddle and holding up a cattle branding iron with AEC initials measuring almost a foot high. There would be no mistaking a radioactive cow on the range with a 12 -inch brand burned into her hide. In another testing era photo he pointed to himself on horseback, and particularly to the dust raised by both horses and cattle. "They got cancer and we got cancer," he said, "only the animals were so much closer to the ground that they died faster."

Case himself had many feet of his intestines removed, and his spleen, and at the time of his interview the cancer had spread through most of the organs of his body. His wife was also dying of cancer, and she had also endured for years the fusion of the disks of her spine, another health effect of high radiation exposure. They both lived in a trailer in North Las Vegas, and among the bric-a-brac hanging on the wall were photographs of two atomic bombs that Case had witnessed at close range, among many others, while he worked at the Test Site. One hung above a plate with a poem

"To Mother" on it, glazed with pink roses. He was a kindly bear of a man, and he and his equally endearing wife were, as religious Mormons, preparing themselves for Eternity-they knew they hadn't long to wait.