

Marshall County native shares love for 'Bonanza'

By **George Jones**

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In 1959, "Bonanza," the second longest-running television western series began its 14-season run from Sept. 12, 1959-Jan. 16, 1973.

Designed to appeal to a broad spectrum of ages and gender, the show had a definite appeal for one young Guntersville native – B.B. Hudspeth.

"I believe I was at least walking, because I remember wearing my tan suede boots when I played 'Bonanza,'" Hudspeth said.

"Whenever asked what I wanted to be when I grew up, my response was always 'Little Joe Cartwright,'" he said.

Years later, Hudspeth acquired from Michael Landon's stunt double and best friend, Hal Burton, the actual boots worn by Landon during the series.

"Michael handed the boots to Hal at the close of the 'Bonanza' series, and Hal had them for over 30 years," Hudspeth said.

The boots are now a central piece in Hudspeth's personal collection of "Bonanza" memorabilia.

The first TV western televised in color was about Ben Cartwright (played by Lorne Greene), a prosperous rancher and his three sons, Adam (Pernell Roberts), Hoss (Dan Blocker) and Little Joe (Michael Landon), who lived near Virginia City, Nev., in the mid-1800s.

Hudspeth, a graduate of Guntersville High School, has a bachelor's degree from Maryville College in Tennessee, and a master's degree from Auburn University.

At the age of 13, Hudspeth discovered he had a knack for doing character impressions.

"I always came home from school in between sports seasons and watched the Turner Broadcasting System channel," he said.

"Many of the great classic shows were aired on this channel, and I watched them for hours," Hudspeth said.

"One morning, while riding to school with my Dad, I attempted the voice of Gomer Pyle. Praise from my Dad inspired me and, a few months later, I had my first performance as Gomer Pyle at a church Valentine's banquet," he said.

A fan of the 'Bonanza' series since childhood, Hudspeth was ecstatic when he received an invitation in 2009 to be one of three presenters at the 50th anniversary event commemorating the series. It was attended by cast members, guest stars, producers, directors, stuntmen, family members of both the main cast and the show's creator, and fans of the series.

Hudspeth opened the program with a voice/character impression tribute to actors Edgar Buchanan and Henry Hull, both of whom appeared as guest stars on the series.

"Being a part of the celebration of 'Bonanza's' golden anniversary was truly something special," he said.

"I remember how surreal it was looking out into the audience during my performance and making eye contact with veteran actors Gregory Walcott and Peter Mark Richman and 'Bonanza's' associate producer Kent McCray and realizing what a blessing and opportunity I had been granted."

Bonanza Gold, the official 'Bonanza' magazine published quarterly since 2003, described Hudspeth's appearance as being similar to that of a young Adam Cartwright in its post-con-



Special to The Reporter
B.B. Hudspeth has been a fan of the television series 'Bonanza' since childhood. Above, he shows some of the 'Bonanza' memorabilia he has, including actual boots worn by Michael Landon during the series.

vention special issue.

McCray, who also served as producer of "The High Chaparral," "Little House on the Prairie" and "Highway to Heaven" series, followed Hudspeth.

Attendees of the convention received a surprise opportunity to visit the Ponderosa Ranch theme park that closed in 2004, and includes a replica of the Cartwright's home.

The visit was the icing on the cake for Hudspeth.

"It was a trip of a lifetime to me," he said.

"Senior citizens and baby boomers well remember the television show. For many, watching it together was a weekly family tradition. It has even been said American presidents altered schedules not to conflict with the airing of 'Bonanza.'"

Hudspeth anticipates seeing 'Bonanza's' popularity continue.

"The series still has a very strong fan base. It was encouraging to see many young faces in attendance at the event, a good sign to see the series to continue on

and on," he said.

On Jan. 24, Pernell Roberts, who portrayed Ben Cartwright's eldest son Adam, died. He was the last of the original Cartwrights.

"Although Little Joe has always been my favorite Cartwright, there was just something special about Pernell's character, Adam. Pernell, as an actor, was captivating. He brought such a mix of qualities to 'Bonanza.' His versatility allowed writers to capitalize on his theatrical background, musical talents, and his ability to conquer any complex or challenging role.

'Bonanza' will live on through reruns, DVDs, and the memories of individuals like Marshall County native B.B. Hudspeth.

Hudspeth, who entertains audiences as a speaker and impressionist, is married to the former Brooke Buchanan, of Guntersville. They reside in Nashville, Tenn.

Hudspeth is the son of Trinity Church of God pastor Bishop Wendell and Jo Ann Hudspeth, in Albertville.

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