



## Steven Law

by Richard D. Jensen

Steven Law doesn't always look like a "Western novelist." The darkly handsome Kansan has an intense appearance, dressed in his turtleneck shirt and sporting a well-trimmed beard.



But don't judge this book by its cover.

Law, who served as chair of the Springfield, Missouri, WWA Convention, is the grandson and son

of cattlemen. He grew up in Centerville, Iowa, where his father dabbled in cattle-raising. His grandfather raised cows on a 500-acre spread in Missouri. Law grew up watching his grandfather run the ranch, work cattle, and bale hay. His treasured memories include helping out at the age of ten, driving the family pickup and the tractor, helping his grandfather with the chores. "My grandpa was my hero," he says.

Law's love of the ranching culture gained added resonance in the late 1970s as he watched his father and grandfather struggle to hang on to their respective ranches when the cattle market soured. He mowed lawns to raise extra money and spent his free time reading Louis L'Amour Westerns and John Jakes' *Kent Family Chronicles*. All

of this shaped his view of the Old and New West, and his self-image as well.

"I loved being on the ranch. I loved the cowboy image. The culture is real to me because I lived it in my youth and the fond memories of it are what drive me," Law said.

It was during this trying time that Law, a teenager in high school, discovered a love for writing and photography while working on the school newspaper and yearbook. He didn't think that either could be the basis for a career. "It was too much fun."

Law headed to the University of Missouri-Kansas City, where he studied business administration. As he was finishing his last semester, Law had an epiphany. He wanted to be a writer. He wrote his first novel, then threw it away in disgust. He calls it his "practice novel."

After some diligent research into the writings of J. Frank Dobie and other Western historians, Law wrote his first Western novel. *Old Blue* is a novel about Charles Goodnight's pet longhorn steer, which bedded down with the hands and ate biscuits and beans. Published in 1999, the book was reissued as a young adult novel in 2006 as *The Legend of Old Blue*.

His latest novel, *Rodeo Summer*, was published in 2006 by Goldminds Publishing.

In 2000, Law started ReadWest.com, which has helped increase awareness of the Western genre. In 2000, the site published *Opening Day*, a short story by David Marion Wilkinson, which won the Spur Award for Best Western Short Fiction.

Steve, the host of the 2007 WWA Convention in Springfield, Missouri, is determined to attract new readership to literature of the American West.

"The Western genre has so many

possibilities for the business end of book publishing but no one has the ambition to do anything with it. Nobody, that is, with the power of commercial distribution. They just want to keep publishing their Louis L'Amour and operate on cruise control," Law said. "The category of Western novel has a defined audience, but that's just a little part of what encompasses the entire genre. New sub-genres can develop and grow."

Law says that Westerns need to attract women readers, who make up the bulk of book buyers. "I'm finding that my contemporary novel, *Rodeo Summer*, is being read predominantly by women, at a four to one ratio, and many of those readers are in the twenty to forty age groups. Who can say that about a category Western? We need to expand our audience if we are going to grow. And we need to grow."

Most importantly, Law said what's needed is expanded public awareness of the variety of subjects that encompass Western writing. "I believe we have a problem in what some perceive as Western writing. The genre encompasses more than just the category Western novel, and some of our members don't see that. It's possible that they don't want to. I know that recently someone wanted to enter a documentary film on bull riding in the Spur contest and one of the judges said that it wasn't 'Western.' Now that is a problem."

"I believe the Western is an infinite canvas."

*Richard D. Jensen is the author of seven books. His latest, Lazarus - Man In Black # 1: The Gates of Hell, was published in December, 2006 by Pipers Willow. His website is [www.cowboynovels.com/](http://www.cowboynovels.com/).*