

West of the Pecos

a story by Gib Singleton

Singleton



As everyone knows, Gib is one of the world's great storytellers, both visually and verbally. Here are a few snippets he shared about his early days in Santa Fe.

Gunslinger Glory

"When I first came out to Santa Fe," Gib says, "we lived in a place out in Pecos. We got it from a local art dealer and I traded him art for rent."

"First thing I do is go out and buy a six-gun. A .45 Colt. It was beautiful, man. Chrome plated with pearl handled grips. Course, it's a single action. The most dangerous handgun design ever, because you have to cock it each time to fire. There are two positions of the hammer when you do that – half cock, which is like safe, and full cock. And sometimes you're not sure which one you've got when you're in a hurry.

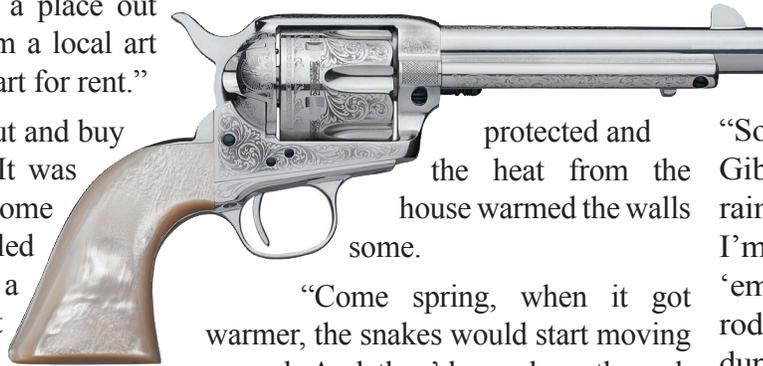
"So I go out to practice my quick draw. I'm shooting at bottles or something. Getting the stance and everything. And I know that to be fast, you have to cock the pistol as you're pulling it out of the holster. So I'm practicing, getting a little faster each time, trying to be smooth.

"And I decide, now I've got it, so I'm going for time. I pull and cock and, Blam! The sucker goes off on the way up. The slug blows the tip of my boot off. Went right between my big toe and the one next to it, and never even broke the skin.

"That was kind of the end of my quick draw days."

Raining Rattlesnakes

The Pecos place was an old double adobe. "The walls were about three feet thick," Gib says. "And they were kind of settled and cracked out, so there were a lot of gaps and voids in them. And the rattlesnakes would crawl into those holes to winter, because it was



protected and the heat from the house warmed the walls some.

"Come spring, when it got warmer, the snakes would start moving around. And they'd crawl up through the gaps and seams, and get up in the ceiling. It was a sod roof over vigas and latillas. Pretty classic New Mexico construction, right? And then sometimes they'd drop through the gaps. So you're sitting at the table eating and all of a sudden it's raining rattlesnakes.



"This old cowboy neighbor asked me one day, did we have trouble with snakes. I told him, 'Hell, it's like a parade in here every night.'

"We had these farm baskets hanging from the vigas with potatoes and onions

and stuff in them. And sometimes the snakes would fall in there. So you'd reach up into the basket to get a potato and you'd grab hold of a rattlesnake.

"That old Connecticut girl I was with didn't know what to do. I just kept a hoe next to the refrigerator to deal with them."

Tale of the Truchas

"So we're right on the Pecos River," Gib says. "And I can see these huge rainbow trout in there. Well, I decide I'm gonna catch those fish and eat 'em. I go down and buy all the gear – rods and reels and extra special super duper lures and stuff."

"And I can't catch squat."

"Well, it's becoming kind of an obsession. I mean, they're right there, looking at you in the shallows, man, but I can't catch them."

"So I go get the .45. I figure I'll shoot 'em. Well, the problem is there's a refractive thing with the water, so you see the fish over here, but he's really over there. I guess I must of blown up \$200 dollars worth of ammunition and never got a one."

"So I ask the little Mexican kids, who are catching them like crazy, what they're using for bait. And they say, 'corn'. Like the kernels you get out of a can. Man, I got \$200 or \$300 worth of gear, not counting the pistol, and they've got a stick and a line and a hook and a season's worth of bait in one can.

"Local knowledge, man. I decided to adopt their technique."