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Original Watermenâ€”www.originalwatermen.comâ€”the premiere source of the best board shorts, trunks, tees, hats, hoodies, jackets, and other apparel would like to take a moment to acknowledge all people who strive for singular excellence whether in the water or on land. Earning your salt begins with a passion that comes from somewhere deep within the self. I discovered this truth on a trip to visit relatives who were decidedly not watermen, but had earned their salt nonetheless. One relative in particularâ€”a cousin about my ageâ€”gave me a lesson in humility.

If you try to associate my cousin Caleb and water, the most likely result is that you'd imagine he needs a bath. Caleb grew up on the back of a horse in back-country Idaho. He comes from a line of men for whom the term watermen might refer the guys who fill the troughs for livestock on a farm. For them most of the water they deal with comes out of their bodies, soaks into their clothes, and then sucks up dust.

We grew up in different worlds, but both of us have our heroes. Mine are the legendary big wave surfers. His are the top bull riders of the professional rodeo circuit. At a recent family reunion at the old family homestead in Idaho I finally realized just how much alike we really are. We both like great storiesâ€”the kind that you want to pass on to your children. We both like to boast about our accomplishments. The notches on my belt are meant to evoke the great watermen, his great bull riders. I have to admit that I thought my heroes were better than hisâ€”that is, until I went to my first rodeo the week of the reunion.

Caleb, it turns out, is a ranked bull rider, and at 28 something of a veteran of the rodeo circuit. He got me a seat next to the bucking chute so I could see the action up close. When I saw the crew ready the bull I was suddenly intimidated. The bull was huge and each step shook the ground, rattling my seat. I then watched Caleb climb onto the bull and strap himself to the massive beast with one hand. Was he crazy? I get nervous on a big day at Pipe or Mavericks, but for Caleb every day is a big day. The crew tightened the belt on the bull. He snorted and bucked hard against the chute, jarring the heavy steel framework. I flinched a little and hoped no one noticed. The rodeo clown caught my attention and was now in the ring right below me. There he was an unknown soul in greasepaint about to go opposite the horns of the beast, though his courage would remain largely unsung. This scene became to me the watermen equivalent to Waimea on a really big day. For Caleb and the clowns this was routine.

Bam! The chute flew open and the great fury drove itself into the arena. For a moment it wasn't my cousin on the back of that monster; it was a terminator. I glanced at the timer up on scoreboard counting down from eight. It was the longest eight seconds I could imagine. I tried to picture myself out in the water where every wave I faced was a giant, every drop-in a white-knuckle ride. For those eight seconds I rose to the occasion. I knew that I would not sink back from the giant wave. I knew I had the skill to ride my own monstrous beast. I knew I had it in me to be one of the true watermen the way Caleb is a true bull rider.

The counter reached zero and Caleb managed to leap off the bull without getting flung like a ragdoll to the ground and stomped. Two clowns screamed and waved until the bull began to wander away from Caleb, who then made his way out of the arena. From that moment on I never saw my cousin quite the same way again.

Rise to the occasion to become numbered among the true watermen. Along the way, come to

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