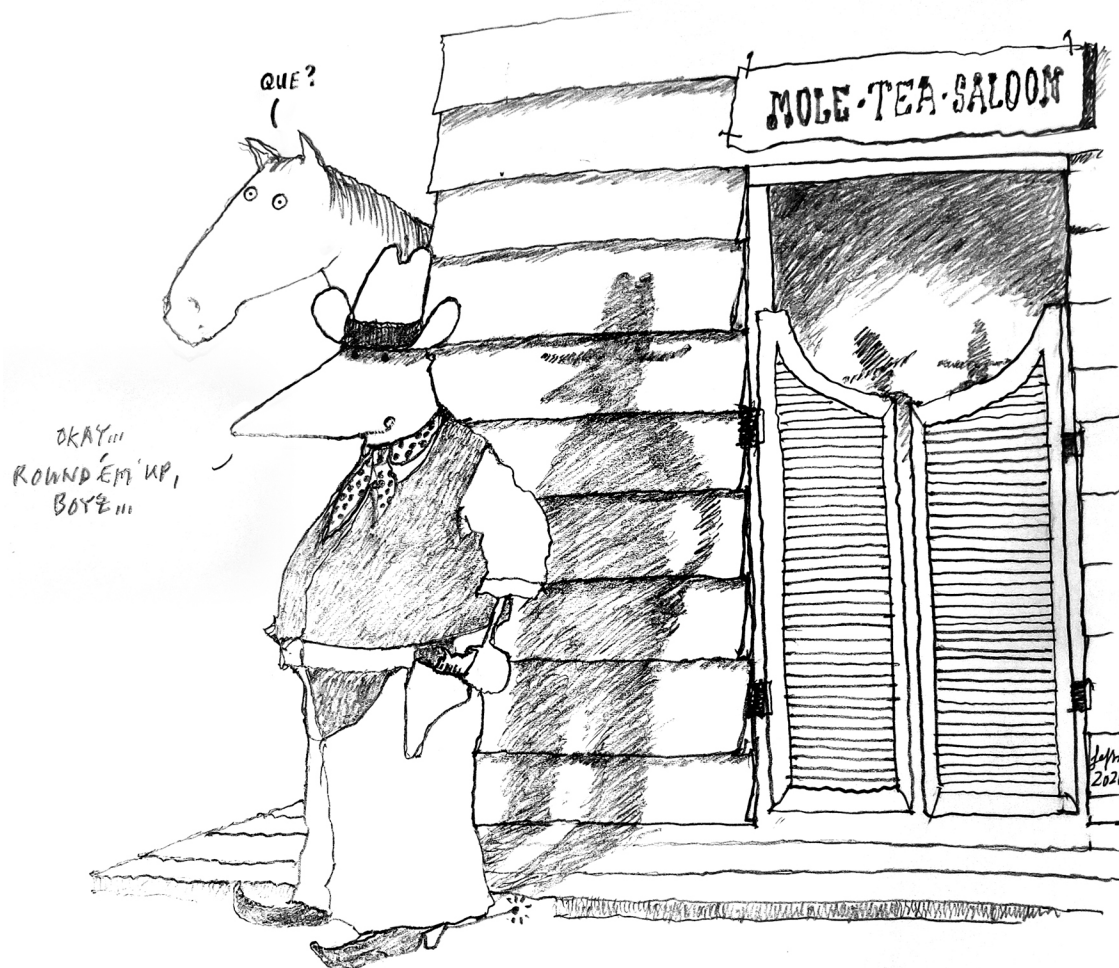


STICKY WICKET

Corona XLIV – Round 'em up

Mole

Original artwork by Pete Jeffs – www.peterjeffsart.com

Howdy, Cowpokes! This here's Ol' Mole, hunkering down for a bit to chew the fat over a bit of 'tea', and not the turpentine they sell you over yonder at the saloon. Cosey up to the fire and help yerself. We got us some things to talk about.

Zane Grey was a writer of stories on the western United States, publishing extensively in the early 1900s to great acclaim. His most famous book, *Riders of the Purple Sage* (ROTPS), published in 1912, was made into no fewer than five films, the last in 1996 (although that was a television movie, starring Ed Harris and Amy Madigan), and inspired four music groups (three ROTPS and one New ROTPS). The ROTPS groups were western swing bands in the 1930s and 40s, but the New Riders featured Jerry Garcia (and several other members of the Grateful Dead, who often sat in). But that isn't what I wanted to talk about (but we can listen to some Dead if you want to). No, I wanted to talk about the Cowboy Creed.

It goes like this. "If it's not yours, don't take it. If it's not true, don't say it. If it's not right, don't do it". It is often attributed to

Zane Grey, but I don't think he said it. He did write a book in 1934 called *The Code of the West*, and maybe that's why. In 2011, the senate of the state of Montana formally embraced another Code of the West, which has ten tenets, but not these three. Some of them are things like 'take pride in your work,' 'be tough but fair,' and 'ride for the brand'. I wonder how many Montana state senators ride for the brand (I'm not even sure what that means). But there's a good one, 'Remember, some things aren't for sale'. Unfortunately, a few senators seem to be, but I could be wrong.

I guess the Cowboy Creed is a meme. And the second and third ones are particularly important today (okay, the first one, too, but these are key): If it's not true, don't say it. If it's not right, don't do it. But a great many people in government, on television, and on social media feel justified in repeating lies and doing things that aren't right, and in so doing are endangering a large swathe of the population. Telling people not to wear masks or get vaccinated and encouraging the spread of the Terrible Pandemic.

But a few days ago, the buckaroo who is our president (the real president, not the bizarre refrigerator magnet who thinks he should still be) did something very right. If you've been following the reports, my country is experiencing hospitalization rates that are the worst so far, and vaccination rates that have dwindled. So, our president used his authority to mandate, by Occupational Health and Safety Administration rules (based on a law signed by Richard Nixon), that all companies with 100 or more employees must require those employees to either be vaccinated or to submit to a weekly COVID test. (He extended this to all government workers as well). There was a huge outcry by the usual suspects (despite the fact that every state in our country has other vaccination requirements, and the fact that all of the pundits and government officials who decried this are vaccinated themselves), but SARS-CoV2 vaccination rates have increased. We still have a long way to go. We had over a million cases in the past 7 days, and over 9000 deaths, and we still have only 55% of our population fully vaccinated. China is reportedly at 63%. 66% of folks in the United Kingdom are fully vaccinated. Ireland and Iceland are at 74%. And give it up for Malta, who have a whopping 84% fully vaccinated. (Malta, you are kicking our collective butts). (All of these numbers are at the time I'm writing this; I hope that things will keep getting better by the time you actually read this).

On the other hand, at this time of writing, only 47% of the people of Montana have been fully vaccinated, despite their Code of the West. It's worse in Idaho (40%); indeed, they are filling the ICUs in nearby Washington State (over 60%). Argentina, who famously have their own cowboys, are at 40%. (In contrast, Chile, right next door, has over 70% of their people vaccinated.) C'mon cowboys, follow the creed, follow the code!

Which brings me to Ivermectin. Sorry, it's just how my mind works. Ivermectin is a drug that is used to treat worm infections, and famously has worked to eliminate the scourge of Onchocerciasis, or

river blindness. It is routinely used to treat worm infections in herd animals, like cows and horses (see? Cowboys, cows and horses, Ivermectin). In recent weeks in my country, Ivermectin has been flying off the shelves, because some people have suggested that it is effective against severe COVID infection (there is no evidence that this is so, "if it's not true, don't say it"). Ivermectin is used acutely to eradicate parasites, but these misguided people are dosing chronically, and we have seen hospitalizations due to Ivermectin overdoses ("if it's not right, don't do it"). But it seems that some people would rather dose themselves with cow de-wormer than allow themselves to be given a vaccine that has already been safely administered *over five billion times* world-wide.

And here's the thing, these wormy cows, who scream incessantly about their freedom to not be vaccinated or masked are taking *our* freedoms. Freedom to be treated in an ICU if necessary. Freedom to gather safely. Freedom to spend some time not thinking about infection. So, yeh, "*if it's not yours, don't take it*". C'mon cowboys, follow the creed, follow the code!

Frank Zappa, a bizarre, brilliant, and incredibly talented rock and jazz guitarist and front man of The Mothers of Invention, sang "I might be moving to Montana, soon". ("Gonna be a dental floss tycoon. Raisin' it up, wax'n it down. In a little box I can sell uptown". Like I said, a bit bizarre, go listen to it –it's fun). But I won't be moving to Montana, Mr. Zappa. Maybe Malta. Nice place, Malta. I wonder if they like cowboys? ("Gonna get me a horse, just about this big... And then I'd get a cuppa coffee and give my foot a push. Just me and the pygmy pony, over by the dental floss bush. Then I might just jump back on, and ride like a cowboy into the dawn". Sorry, I've gotten the song stuck in my head now).

Oh wait, there's a Maltese film called Limestone Cowboy that looks great. Think I'll watch it tonight. Cowboys don't say goodbye, they say "See you soon". See you soon, buckaroos. And don't forget to follow the creed.