Montana State University Press publishes "The Raw Edge"

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Publication of "The Raw Edge," tales of the early life of a real cowboy, told in his own words, has been announced by the Montana State University Press. Release of the paperback book this week was timed as a contribution to the Montana Territorial Centennial celebration, according to Jack Ryan, director of the press.

The author, J. B. Armstrong, who now lives in Missoula, used a tape recorder to capture his reminiscences of his days riding the last of the open ranges in Montana and Dakota around the turn of the century.

Armstrong's son-in-law, MSU Prof. Harold Tascher, recognizing the importance of preserving this authentic record of cowboy life, encouraged the project and arranged the content of the tapes to feature particular themes, keeping Armstrong's own style and wording. The author's daughter, Ina Mai Tascher, transcribed the material and helped edit it.

The tapes yielded enough material for three books. "The Raw Edge," just off the press, takes the author from apprenticeship to a hard but satisfying life to seasoned competence as a cowhand. It will be followed later this year by "The Big North," the story of what it meant to be a cowboy in the great middle years of the open range. The third book in the series, also slated for release this year, is "Bedding the Drags," which tells what happens to a cowboy when the old way of life has passed him by.

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The first book of the trilogy is dedicated to Will Rogers, whom the author met on a couple of occasions. "Well, I feel I knew him," Armstrong says, "because I grew up much as he did. We were on the raw edge of civilization."

In his foreword to "The Raw Edge," Michael Kennedy, director of the Montana Historical Society, calls the book "authentic and honest, offsetting the too-long deluge of phony pulp writing, television and incredible movie distortions. ... For J. B. Armstrong and his fresh, invigorating, graphic text I have nothing but admiration."

Armstrong, lean and sinewy at 75, began his life as a cowboy in Texas where his father was a Tascosa cattle man. "So naturally I was a cowboy kid," he says. "Once a cowboy, always a cowboy. The life gets in your blood. And I speak the cowboy language. I have no other."

This is the language of "The Raw Edge" - language that is, in Kennedy's words, "blunt, honest, colloquially accurate."

The book is recommended and approved by the Flathead Teachers Research Corporation and contains a preface by a member of the group, Marguerite Best of Kalispell, who terms Armstrong's stories "authentic and compelling."

In their postscript, Dr. and Mrs. Tascher credit many persons with supporting the project and helping to see the manuscript through to publication. Specifically mentioned are the MSU Publications Committee, headed by Dr. George Weisel; Claud Lord, superintendent of the University Printing Department; Mrs. Virginia Johnson, who supplied editorial advice; Art Jette of the MSU Publications and News Service, who did the art work, and Kennedy and Ryan.