

## Book Review

### **Gerry, Get your Gun, Gerry Bracewell, 2016 reviewed by Charlie, UK Jan 26<sup>th</sup> 2020**

*Gerry, Get your Gun* is a staple book for everyone at the ranch whether we come as students, community partners or guests. In 1945, Gerry Bracewell became the first female licensed hunting guide in British Columbia. Gerry wrote her memoirs at the age of 93 and her experiences in the wilderness and breaking her way into a male-dominated industry inspire us all.

Gerry begins her story with growing up in Alberta. Here she played outside with her younger brother, making fires, digging holes and building shelters. If Gerry imagined it, she found a way to do it.

This mind-set was continued when Gerry left Alberta for BC at the age of sixteen. She started off working in Vancouver, but soon she had moved to the Chilcotin Mountains. Here, she met Isobel (Issy) Moore. At the Circle X Ranch Gerry learned to herd cattle. Issy showed Gerry how to ride the range and check on the cattle. Together, they built a log cabin and Issy taught Gerry how to cache food so bears wouldn't eat it. This all led to driving the cattle to town on the beef drive.

Already, Gerry was breaking her way into a male dominated industry, with Issy as her mentor and friend. This was the same mentality we all have at the ranch. If there was something that needed doing, we learned how to do it and got the job done. It didn't matter if we were male, female, new to the ranch or highly experienced.

Gerry quickly learned the skills to survive in the wilderness and met her second mentor in BC, Issy's father, KB Moore. KB taught Gerry how to trap. They did this for predator control to reduce the impact of cougars and wolves on the cattle. The hides were also profitable, helping to augment their winter income.

From here, Gerry learned to shoot a .22 rifle that she used to hunt deer.

Now she knew how to shoot, Gerry became licensed as KB's assistant hunt guide and joined him and two guests on her first moose hunt. As a guide, she needed to know more than how to shoot, though. Gerry had to know how to skin and field dress the animals and how to prepare the meat. But before that could happen, she needed to find the animals. To do that, she had to know their habitats and behaviours. Did they spend most of their time in forest, meadows or high above tree line? Were they alone or in groups? How did the mating season affect their behaviour? What time of day were they most active?

Gerry learned all these skills and more. She observed KB's hunting and asked the right questions. She learned so much that when KB retired in 1945, she took over his guide outfitting territory and became a Class A guide, the highest level that permitted her to guide hunters after any big game animals that were in season in her territory. Not only was Gerry the first licensed female hunt guide in BC, she was also the first to own a guide outfitting territory.

Gerry was a hunt guide for fifty years where she had to face predators and yodelled to keep them away from her and her horses. She knew the terrain in great detail and all the best places to find animals.

But these weren't Gerry's biggest challenge. As the first female licensed guide in BC, she was faced with sexism and disbelief by her male colleagues and guests. None of these people had ever seen a female hunt guide before – how could they have done when Gerry was the first?

Gerry's name didn't give her clients any clues she was female, they had no idea she would be their guide until they met her in person.

Some of the clients and fellow guests laughed in disbelief. Some openly showed their lack of belief in Gerry's guiding abilities. Some talked women down.

None of this stopped Gerry. She believed in herself and so she didn't need anyone else's approval. She knew she was a good hunt guide and deserving of respect. She stayed true to herself and called guides and guests alike out when they were sexist or rude to her. Gerry was very successful as a guide and this clearly showed to everyone she could do it, it didn't matter that she was female.

This attitude is seen in all of us at the ranch. Here, we do everything that needs doing. We guide our guests on wilderness experiences through the mountains. We shoe and pack our own horses. We go logging, drive the skidder to bring firewood and move hay bales. We split wood for the fire. We change tires on the trucks. We keep our water system from the creek maintained. Whatever needs doing, we can do it. It is exactly what Gerry would do.

But Gerry wasn't only a hunt guide, cattle rancher and log cabin builder. She also became a philanthropist as she campaigned for a better school system in Tatlayoko. Gerry was the only female at the school board meeting in Williams Lake where she stood up and spoke first. She shared detailed blueprints for the school she wanted built and received the funding to do so. As a result of her initiative and perseverance, the Tatlayoko Lake School was built. Gerry secured a school bus and three teachers and the school taught kids up to Grade Ten.

Gerry is a clear example of our ranch phrase, "We do the impossible every day." For every problem, Gerry has a solution. For every challenge, Gerry has a plan. *Gerry, Get Your Gun* is an amazing snapshot of her life as a trailblazer. To learn more about Gerry, visit her website [gerrybracewell.com](http://gerrybracewell.com) or check out Marilen's story [Female Empowerment](#) that will be published at [trails-to-empowerment.org](http://trails-to-empowerment.org) on International Women's Day, March 8<sup>th</sup> 2020.