

## Freddie Griffin

### A Remarkable Cowman

By Bob Stone

Freddie Griffin is a modest man highly respected among Florida cowmen—so modest he initially refused to be the subject of a feature article in this magazine. After a lot of prodding and persuading by several friends, he finally agreed to it. Thanks Freddie, for sharing some of the story of your colorful life in Florida woods and cowpens and your insights into the skills of a dedicated cowman.

Freddie Franklin Griffin was born in Brooksville in 1940 to James W. Griffin (1919-1982) and Annie Jane Crum Griffin (1919-1963). His paternal grandfather, Henry Franklin Griffin (1882-1958), whom Freddie remembers as a carpenter, had moved to Brooksville from Mercer County Pennsylvania. Freddie's mother was the daughter of Freddie Franklin Crum (1885-1947), a well-known cattleman from Hernando County who was influential in cultivating a passion in young Freddie for working with cattle. His father, John Washington Crum (1852-1896), was granted a land patent for a Florida homestead of 161 acres in 1890. According to his page on the Find a Grave Web site, he was shot and killed while returning home from a Democratic delegate meeting at Brooksville on June 10, 1896.

Freddie's dad, James Griffin, was engaged in a number of agricultural endeavors and businesses as well as local politics. He owned about 5,000 head of beef cattle, which he grazed on 2,000 acres of his own land near Brooksville and large tracts he leased for as little as ten cents per acre. "We had cows all over that country," recalled Freddie. During the brucellosis epidemic, ranchers were required to have the blood of all cattle tested. "When the bleeding came along a lot of people couldn't pen their cows, so dad bought a lot of problem cows."

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In addition to large-scale cattle ranching, his father also raised citrus, owned and operated a rock mine, a paving company, a slaughterhouse, and four or five wholesale meat markets, and, according to Freddie, one of the largest hand-hewed crosstie businesses in the southeast. “We never did have too many permanent employees, usually just me and a black man.” Consequently, young Freddie learned a variety of job skills and worked hard. “If you were raised out there you could do a man’s work when you were about twelve. I come up in a time when work was survival, it wasn’t no fun and games,” he declared. The numerable skills and work ethic he learned as a boy served him well in his adult work life. “Outside of stealing, I’ve done just about everything a man could think of.”

Freddie’s father became involved in politics, serving as a Hernando County commissioner from 1953-1959. “He was worth a million dollars cash money in 1958, but died broke in 1982,” recalled Freddie. His mom tragically took her life in 1963.

In about 1950, the manager of Lykes Ranch quit and Freddie’s father was hired to manage the cattle until they could find a permanent manager. The “temporary” job lasted about ten years. During that period, Freddie worked for his dad at the Lykes Ranch and helped him with his own cattle in Brooksville. Although not certain, Freddie believes his dad introduced cutting the sharp-sharp earmark to the Lykes Ranch. He explained that it is impossible to alter, very easy to read—even from a distance when driving by in a truck at speed—but among the most difficult marks to cut. “It took a long time for me and my son, Scott, to master, but I can cut both ears in about three seconds.”

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In March 1961, Freddie went to work for Lykes full time. He told his wife he would make foreman in six months and he did. "I quit Lykes in 1966, bought a pulpwood truck and a chainsaw and started hauling pulpwood." Initially he did much of the work by hand, then began to buy equipment, mechanizing the operation. "My dad warned me, 'Son you are going to keep on until you don't work for yourself, you'll be working for an equipment company.' He was right. I did that for four or five years and finally sold the business to my cousin for a dollar just to get out of it."

Freddie served a hitch in the U. S. Army during the Vietnam War and was stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Bored with his assigned duties, he took over a crew that cleaned buildings, turning it into an efficient work force. When his hitch was up his supervisor offered him a job, but Freddie was not at all interested; he was eager to return to Florida. "I promised God if I ever got out of the Army I wouldn't gripe no more."

In 1975, he called Charlie Lykes, an old friend of the family whom Freddie considers "the finest man who ever walked the earth," and was hired as a foreman at the Lykes Ranch for \$700 a month and housing. "When I first moved there, them cows were wild. It was a mess," he recalled. "It took about two years to get the cattle fully under control, which was largely accomplished with dogs." He was promoted to supervisor, a position he held until he retired in 2012, after thirty-seven years of continuous service at the Lykes Ranch.

Although the son of a carpenter, Freddie's father learned to be a highly skilled cowman. He left home when he was sixteen and lived with the Crum family and learned a lot about cattle from his father-in-law, Fred Crum. Citing his father as an example, Freddie stated, "You don't have to be raised in it, what you have to have is 'the want.'" Once he became a full-time cowman Freddie focused on being the best. "You've got to want that from the bottom of your heart. You've

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got to eat, sleep and breathe it, and want to be the best you can be at it. I don't want to tell you I'm good, but I've got to know that I am." That said, he is quick to point out that his ways work for him but may not be the way others do it; it is just what has worked for him.

Freddie married three times. He has four sons from previous marriages: Steve, Freddie (known as "Bull"), Mike, and Scott. In 1986, he married Terry Moore, who brought two more sons into the family, Joshua and Jarrett. "God sent me that woman to save my life," he declared. "And that ranch allowed me to raise six sons with common sense. My boys know some things that some people will never know." When Freddie retired, Scott took over much of his father's old job at the Lykes Ranch.

Freddie is highly skilled in the use of cow-dogs. "When I left Brooksville I took two of my dad's dogs." He selectively bred his dogs to those of friends who had a reputation owning good cow-dogs. "I had about fourteen when I retired from Lykes, but I gave some to my kids. Now I have six." His sons continue the line of dogs Freddie bred from his father's line. "Stamina, energy and hard-headed," are the qualities Freddie looks for in a dog. He is a firm believer in the old adage that you can teach a dog to come back, but you can't teach one to go. Dogs are the best way to deal with wild or unruly cattle, in his opinion. "You can train cows with dogs. You can't train them with a rope. Rope a cow today and you'll have to rope it tomorrow. You don't use your rope unless it is absolutely necessary," he stated with conviction. His fallback position with unruly cattle: "When all else fails, hold them up with the dogs."

When roping, Freddie always ties-off hard and fast—a time-honored traditional practice among Florida cowmen—and requires his crew to do the same. "You ain't going to help me if you don't. I never did have to use a rope as much as some of these guys," he continued. "That's why I had them dogs."

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Compared to their western counterparts, Florida cowboys spend less time on horseback than they do on the ground working in cow pens. Freddie is adamant about the merits of lace-up boots as opposed to slip-on cowboy boots—something he learned as a youngster. “My daddy wouldn’t hire a man with cowboy boots. Wearing them slip-on boots, they don’t intend to walk nowhere. And if he rolled Prince Albert he ain’t about to get a job. Every time you look at him he’s propped up there rolling a cigarette. I tell my men, ‘You ain’t gonna be on that horse too long. You are going to be walking around.’”

Freddie retired from Lykes Ranch in 2012. How does a 77-year-old retired cowman spend his time? He day-works about forty-nine or fifty weeks a year. Freddie is as conscientious as ever about his cow-work. “I’ll wake up at two a.m. and might lay there till three-thirty. I’ve got things to do here before I leave. One of them is to read the Bible and pray to God to make me a success at what I do that day. If I am anything at all, it is because of God. I thank Him daily for my health and ability to do what I do.”

Ranch manager Flint Johns eloquently expressed his respect for Freddie’s service at Lykes Brothers:

“I cannot think of a current or former Lykes Bros. employee who is more highly regarded and respected from top to bottom in the Lykes organization than Fred Griffin. Fred served the company loyally for forty years. During his tenure at Lykes he mentored and helped train at least three ranch managers, managed several hundred thousand head of cattle and the thousands of acres they grazed, and was instrumental in modernizing the cattle and ranch operations. His dedication, work ethic, know-how, resourcefulness and horsemanship make him a ‘cowman’ unequalled in the industry. I am thankful to have worked with him and consider him one of my greatest mentors and friends.”

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Over the years, Freddie has day-worked for many ranches including the Seminole Tribe, Hilliard Brothers, Alico, Babcock and Lightsey Cattle Company, and continues to be in high demand. Many ranchers schedule their work around his availability. Cary Lightsey expressed high praise for Freddie. "I wish I could have hired him thirty years ago. He learns his techniques from experience and never forgets them; he'll use those techniques all day long. We normally start at five a.m. He'll get down to the horse barn at four, feed the horses, then go back to his truck and read the Bible until five. He does that every morning. And he is tough. One time working here he was bitten on the ribs by a venomous brown recluse spider and never said a word about it to anyone. He toughed it out for five days before I noticed the swelling beneath his shirt. He had a fever, too. To his objection, we took him to the hospital. The doctor who treated him ordered him to rest at home for five days. The next morning he was here ready to work. Our grandkids, ages five to fourteen, help us. They love to work with 'Mr. Freddie' and will do anything for him. When you have Freddie on your cow crew you don't just have a good day-worker, you've got a man with a lot of experience and you learn a lot. By observing Freddie I have improved the way we work. He's seventy-seven now and I see him still helping us when he is ninety. He is a remarkable person."

Freddie loves to work. "I don't play golf and I don't drink whiskey," he stated. "Working is my hobby. I don't think any man alive has done exactly what he wanted to do most of the time as much as me. I've done just about what I've wanted to do. I couldn't be any happier."

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*This article is one in a series commissioned by the Florida Cattlemen's Foundation in its mission to preserve the history and culture of the Florida beef cattle industry. To learn how you can help support the Foundation through a tax-deductible donation, visit [www.floridacattlemen.org](http://www.floridacattlemen.org) or contact chairman Tommy Harper at 352-214-5250 or Jim Handley at 407-846-6221*

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## Photo Captions and Credits

Photo	Caption and Credit
Griffin 1	Freddie Griffin. Photo by Bob Stone.
Griffin 2	Freddie Griffin on his horse, K.J. Photo by Bob Stone.
Griffin 3	Freddie's maternal great-grandfather, John Washington Crum, and his wife, Ann Pyles Crum, circa 1880s. J. W. Crum was assassinated while returning from a Democratic delegate meeting in Brooksville in 1896. Courtesy Hernando Historical Museum.
Griffin 4	Freddie and dad, after Sunday school, Brooksville, circa 1948. Courtesy Freddie Griffin.
Griffin 5	Freddie with Charlie Lykes, Brooksville, circa 1947. Courtesy of Freddie Griffin.
Griffin 6	Freddie with grandfather, Fred Crum, Brooksville, circa 1945. Courtesy Freddie Griffin.
Griffin 7	Freddie herding cattle at the Lykes Ranch. Photo by Linda McCarthy, Senior Ecologist, courtesy Lykes Brothers, Inc.