



# THE COWBOY SONG

CONJURING THE ROCKIES IN THE LOWCOUNTRY

by Jayce McConnell

**I** WAS BORN IN UTAH. MY mother is from Idaho. My father is from Washington. As a child, I spent many summer days splashing in the chilly Conant Creek outside of Ashton, Idaho. On cool summer nights, I listened to my grandfather, Papa Duke, pick his Gibson, singing country-and-western ballads.

While his tube amps warmed, my grandmother Nadine would peel fresh-from-the-earth potatoes for dinner. She taught me a

passion for cooking meals for others that has stuck with me to this day. After supper, my grandfather would treat us to songs we all knew by heart, songs we had written into our lives. Until I moved to Mississippi, and then South Carolina, I thought the “Jackson” Johnny Cash sang about was Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Context, I suppose.

Surrounded by loved ones, in the embrace of the Rockies, those songs were swell codas to days of

Natalie Nelson

huckleberry picking and skipping rocks over that frigid creek. I don’t get to see Papa Duke much these days. But when I do, the guitar still comes out, and he still plays requests. “Little Joe the Wrangler,” “The Strawberry Roan,” “Ghost Riders in the Sky,” and on and on.

Being in the booze business, I have always wanted to shake up some kind of libation that nods to those crisp Idaho evenings, to the ice-cold creek water in which I was baptized, and to the South I now claim. Fresh huckleberries are hard to come by here in Charleston, where I bartend today. (I buy mine frozen, canned, or jarred.) Comparable to blueberries, huckleberries’ sweet

earthiness makes them irresistible in cocktails.

This drink pairs well with fried chicken, cooked in cast iron; potatoes, plucked fresh from the ground and mashed full of butter; and Hank Williams on vinyl—the more scratches and pops, the better. Most folks out in Idaho have never had a proper Southern mint julep. Idaho has about as many dry counties as we have here in the South, so it can be tough to find a refreshing cocktail to keep the summer heat at bay. (Admittedly, that heat is mild and dry compared to the Lowcountry.) This mountain-born cocktail elevates the mint julep, if you know what I mean. 🍷

<b>INGREDIENTS</b>	shaved ice. In a shaker, combine all ingredients, add two ice cubes, cap, and shake briefly. (We call this “whipping” a cocktail; basically it emulsifies the ingredients into a homogenous mixture without diluting it too much.) Strain into the cup and top with more ice. Garnish with a freshly smacked mint sprig. You can drizzle some more syrup over the top if you like it a little sweeter.	<b>HUCKLEBERRY SYRUP</b>
1.5 oz. whiskey (I use High West Campfire from Utah for this recipe)		If you’re using fresh or frozen berries, simmer one cup berries with 2 ½ cups simple syrup for 5 minutes. Then blend until smooth, strain through a fine mesh strainer, and refrigerate. If you’re using jam or preserves, thin the jam by stirring in a little boiling water. Add sugar to taste if needed, and strain and refrigerate as above.
.75 oz. huckleberry syrup		
.5 oz. fresh lemon juice		
3–4 dashes Peychaud’s bitters		
1 sprig fresh mint		
Fill a julep cup (or rocks glass, if you don’t have one) with crushed or		

Jayce McConnell is the head bartender at Edmund’s Oast in Charleston, South Carolina.