

THE RIO GRANDE REVIEW

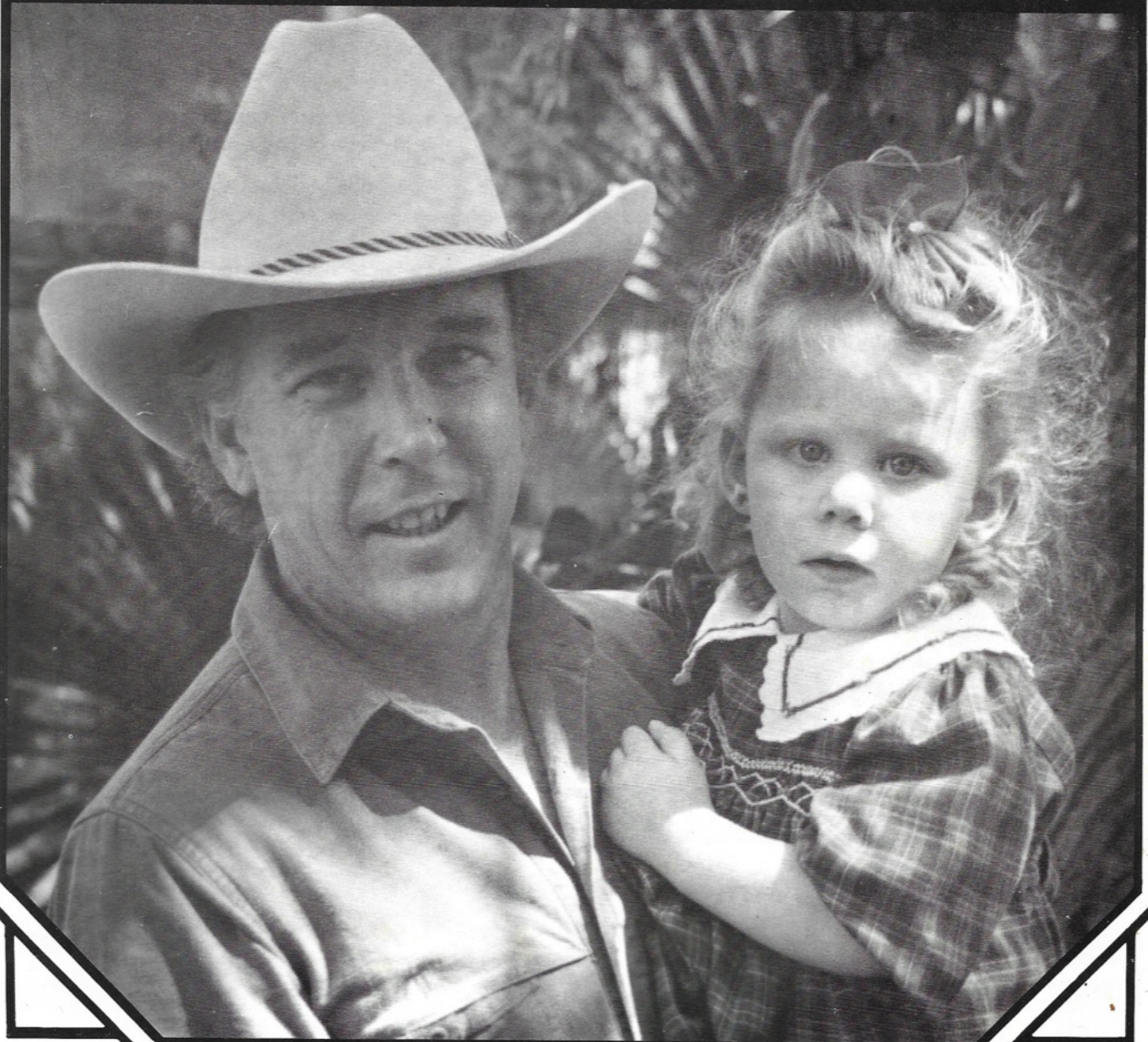
COVERING BROWNSVILLE, MATAMOROS AND THE LOWER VALLEY

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AN INTERVIEW WITH STEVE WALKER

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A Naturalist and a Southerner

An interview with the "Vamonos" man--Steve Walker

by Bill Young

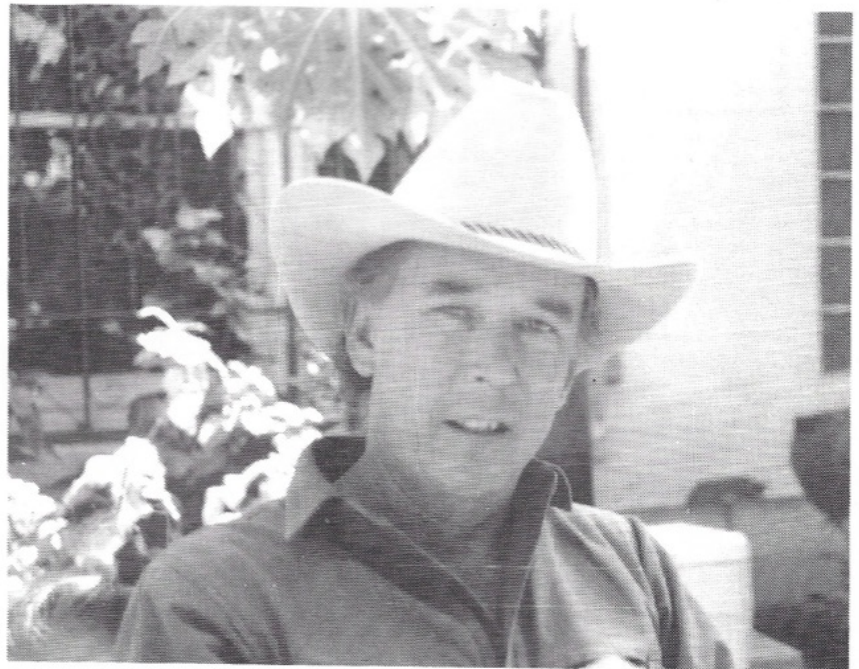
When Steve Walker says "Vamonos", he means it! If you take him up on his "let's go" invitation each Saturday afternoon at 6:30 pm on KRGV-TV5, you never know where you'll wind up.

Walker, an Austin native who grew up in Brownsville, says he's not necessarily an ecologist, and refuses to be classified in the bleeding heart category when it comes to wildlife and gamefish that swim the depths of local waters. Watching him work, however, leaves one with a greater appreciation for the environment around us and the creatures—people included—that inhabit it.

By his own reckoning, the stories he does each week involve either hunting, fishing, archeology, or the folks who are the catalysts to the stories. In the more than 80 half-hour shows Walker has done, he has taken us nearly 100 miles into the Gulf of Mexico, south of San Luis Potosi, Mexico, to the cliffs along the Rio Grande in Starr County, and all points in between.

"I haven't had a problem finding things to do," says Walker.

One of the things he found to do was a story from the Ejido Pancho Villa in Tamaulipas State,



south of San Fernando. There, Walker says, the farmers adhere to the ages-old custom of catching and eating wood rats, which Walker claims taste better than frog legs.

"It's a good example," he explains, "of a hunter-gatherer society that still exists just a short distance from the border." He admits that the wood rat story drew howls of protest from some people in Mexico who said it portrayed Mexicans in a bad light.

Tamaulipas is a treasure trove of material for Walker, who says one of his favorites was video taping the Coahuiltecan Indian drawings on cliffs near Cuillas, Tamaulipas. The designs are different from most Indian art in that they are exclusively

geometric in nature; "lines and other shapes," says Walker.

The Coahuiltecan Indians seem to have had an affinity for the number 13, Walker goes on. Most figures and drawings are done in groups of 13.

Walker's attachment to Mexico is easy to understand. He worked for years as a hunting guide to El Tejon Ranch. He also owns and operates a mule ranch in Zaragosa, Nuevo Leon. He keeps about 100 head of mules.

"Everything I have accomplished," confesses Walker, "is because of what I've done in Mexico. That includes the show I'm doing now."

He says he owes Mexico a debt that probably can never be repaid.

"I have gotten more from Mexico than I have given back," he says. "That's for sure."

Walker says he's saddened by the massive clearing of land that is going on in Mexico. Tamaulipas, he says, used to be a wilderness. No more. All the brush has been cleared and the wildlife is in retreat.

Before the major clearing was completed, Walker once took a 31-day horseback trip along the eastern Tamaulipas coast. "I just sort of wandered along," he recalls.

There is no doubt Walker is an admirer and proponent of Mexico, but there is also no doubt that his real allegiance lies in his home state—Texas. Walker says wild game in Texas is one of the state's greatest assets.

"We have a great resource in Texas," says Walker. "We are a private property-oriented state and people protect their property and the game that is on it. This has both sentimental and economic value to us all."

"For example," he goes on, "the deer population is so great that the human factor is necessary to keep the population in check. I'm from the 'shoot'em and skin'em school', but we have to have regulation on both the game and the people who hunt the game."

It's true that Walker does free many of the fish he catches, but he candidly admits he also keeps and eats some, too. In fact, he says his least favorite story involves an offshore fishing trip and rough weather that came up about 30 miles off shore.

"We were hanging on for dear life," says Walker, "but more

importantly, we were hanging on to our camera gear . . . praying it wouldn't go overboard." He came home with no story that day.

Walker's contention that he isn't a dyed-in-the-wool ecologist doesn't fly too well in the face of the fact that he helped engineer the creating of an official city bird for Brownsville. The red-headed parrot is now Brownsville's official bird and is protected by municipal ordinance.

Walker worked with the ecology class at Homer Hanna High School and along with them, convinced the City Commission that the exotic bird needed protection.

When he isn't conspiring to save the red-headed parrot, Walker is looking for the different, the unusual, and the interesting. He says he's had the good fortune to have worked with the likes of John D. Weich, a man Walker describes as a true outdoorsman, a master woodsman, and a pure hunter. Weich, he says, taught him much.

One of the earliest surveyors in this area was A.E. Anderson, whose surveys incidentally uncovered one of the largest

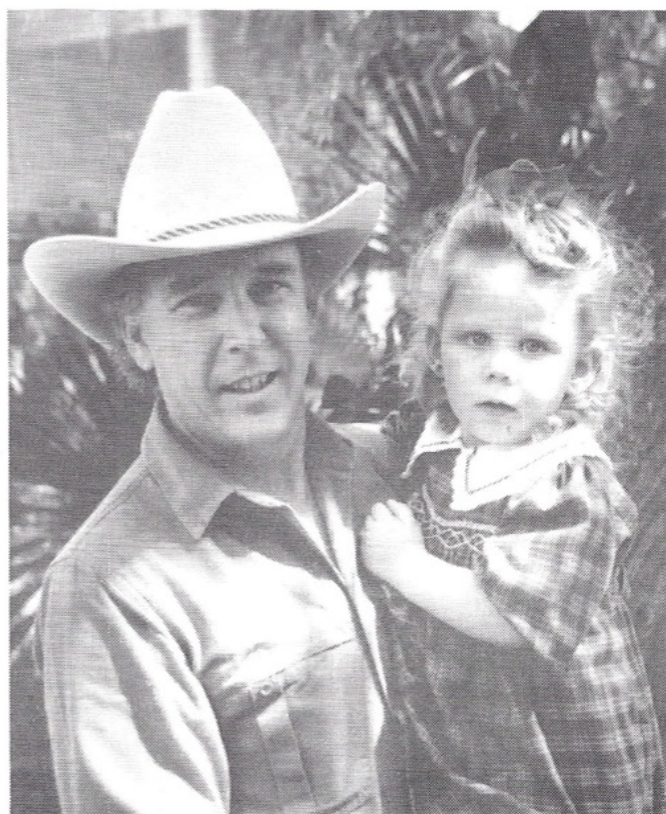
collections of Indian artifacts ever amassed. Many of the sites located by Anderson are protected secrets. Some have Indian spiritual significance and must be left alone. Walker, however, has done stories on Anderson's artifacts and remains in awe of the man and his discoveries.

When he isn't admonishing his viewers to "vamonos", Walker is a family man who loves the company of his wife, Jane—an award-winning teacher in Brownsville—and his three children, Katie, 7, Jessica, 2-1/2, and Seth, 10 months.

Walker says he's very well aware of how fickle the world of television can be. He's been on the air four years in a format he's been told has a life span of five or six years. Still, he marvels at the following he's developed.

See **VAMONOS**
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Walker and
2½-year-old
daughter, Jessica.



VAMONOS

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“It’s amazing to me,” he says. “All I can surmise is that people are interested in their environment and their past, and I try to tell them all I can about those things.”

Whatever happens in the future, Walker says he will remain in Brownsville. “I’m sure I’ll be

able to find something to do when the time comes.”

For a “naturalist and Southerner”—gleaned from his love of the work of Nobel and Pulitzer Prize winning author William Faulkner—that shouldn’t be too big an order to fill. 