



Mule Trader: Ray Lum's Tales of Horses, Mules, and Men (Banner Book Series)

William R. Ferris

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Readers captivated by this book will be happy that Bill Ferris found Ray Lum and that he thought to turn on a tape recorder. Lum (1891-1977) was a mule skinner, a livestock trader, an auctioneer, and an American original.

This delightful book, first published in 1992 as *You Live and Learn. Then You Die and Forget It All*, preserves Lum's colorful folk dialect and captures the essence of this one-of-a-kind figure who seems to have stepped full-blooded from the pages of Mark Twain. This riveting tale-spinner was tall, heavy-set, and full of body rhythm as he talked. In his special world, he was famous for trading, for tale-telling, and for common-sense lessons that had made him a savvy bargainer and a shrewd businessman. His home and his auction barn were in Vicksburg, Mississippi, where mules were his main interest, but in trading he fanned out over twenty states and even into Mexico. A west Texas newspaper reported his fame this way, "He is known all over cow country for his honest, fair dealing and gentlemanly attitude. . . .A letter addressed to him anywhere in Texas probably would be delivered."

Over several years, Ferris recorded Lum's many long conversations that detail livestock auctioneering, cheery memories of rustic Deep South culture, and a philosophy of life that is grounded in good horse sense. Even among the most spellbinding talkers, Lum is a standout both for what he has to say and for the way he says it. Ferris's lucky, protracted encounters with him turn out to be the best of good fortune for everybody.

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