



By Dan DeWeese, Editor at Large

## Jack B. Weil, 1928-2008

Last year, Jack B. Weil quietly retired from his post as Vice President of Rockmount Ranch Wear after 53 years with the Denver-based Western shirtmaker. Jack was the “middle Weil” of the widely celebrated three-generation team that ran Rockmount since his son, Steve, joined Jack and his father, Jack A., in the early 1980s. Over the years, Jack A.—now familiarly known as “Papa Jack”—and Steve have gotten all of the media attention, but this column is about Jack B., or just Jack, as most of us who knew him called him.

Jack passed away from esophageal cancer January 23. He was 79, and although he will never reach the centagenarian celebrity of his father, by his own account, Jack lived a rich and full life. He joined Rockmount in 1954 after studying art and design in college and then serving in the army. One of his first achievements was to help introduce Western shirts to markets east of the Mississippi River.

As a salesman traveling for Rockmount, he developed contacts in the fabric district in New York City, which became a primary source for piece goods used in the shirts he designed when he took over that role from his father in the '60s. His life on the road also afforded him opportunities to visit art museums and galleries where he developed an interest in modern art.

Jack was the chief designer at Rockmount for 35 years. Among his accomplishments at Rockmount was pioneering matching clothes for men, women and children. He also developed the trademarked RRW cuff tab and the company's familiar diamond-shaped snaps. His most famous design was a shirt worn by John Travolta in the 1980 movie, “Urban Cowboy.”

Jack was one of my oldest friends in the industry. I met him in a crowded elevator at a trade show in 1983 when I had just joined Tack 'n Togs and was new to the industry. Out of nowhere, this red-headed stranger with a bushy mustache boisterously introduced himself and announced who I was to everybody in the elevator. Thereafter, whenever I walked into a showroom or booth where Jack was holding court, he would interrupt whatever he was doing and loudly announce, “Say, everybody, this is my good friend, Dan DeWeese. Dan is the editor of Tack 'n Togs, and he's a really good guy.” I suspect that he did that with a lot of people, but do not doubt the sincerity of the gesture, whoever it was for. Jack made friends easily, and vigorously strove to keep them.

I learned early on that Jack was a collector of art and antiques, and that he loved to travel. He frequently flew to Europe or Asia, and always seemed to return with some

art treasure or interesting artifact. He also found collectibles in the United States. I was with Jack when he picked up a couple of those treasures. One was an intricately carved tusk depicting Chinese fishermen with loose crab traps inside the tusk. We were both in New York City for the annual gathering of the Traveling Hat Salesman Association one January in the early '80s and went for a stroll in Manhattan. It was cold and a stiff wind was blowing, and we were buttoned up in top coats and wearing boots and black felt cowboy hats. As we were walking down the sidewalk a man in the doorway of an imported antiques store shouted at us in a thick, Mideastern accent, “Hey, Texas, come in. I have something to show you.”

“C'mon, let's check it out,” Jack said to me. Then he warned me, “Watch out, you won't get out of this place without buying something.”

Twenty minutes later Jack and I emerged into the brisk afternoon. I was empty handed, but Jack was carrying the tusk wrapped in newspaper.

“You're the one who was supposed to have bought something, not me,” he said. “I should know better.”

As it turned out, he did know better. The tusk, which cost him about half of my annual salary at the time, was later appraised for more than twice the amount he paid for it.

Anybody lucky enough to be invited to the historic three-story mansion that Jack called home was always astounded by the profusion of museum-quality art on his walls, and by the statuary, the antiques, the artifacts and the tropical plants. Fortunately, a lot of people did get to see his collections because Jack loved to entertain and frequently opened his home to clients and friends who came to Denver for business. In addition, he was active in the Colorado Republican Party and hosted countless receptions and fundraisers for the party and favored candidates.

A less-known side of Jack's life was his own artistic talent. Late last year, his lifelong dream of seeing his abstract artwork featured in a one-man show was realized at a Denver gallery. I do not doubt that it was one of his proudest moments. But I also know that he was most proud of his family and of the Weil family legacy in the Western apparel industry. It is a legacy that is an instrumental part of the past and future of the Western lifestyle and of which Jack was an integral part.

To paraphrase a well-worn political retort in this very political season, I knew Jack Weil. Jack was a friend of mine. Jack B. Weil was not just my friend, he was a friend and shaper of the Western apparel industry, and I mourn his loss. 🍷