Author of 100 westerns is honored by his peers

By JULIE HUTCHINSON
Camera Staff Writer

There are many ways to measure a man's greatness, and Wayne Overholser has flirted with a few.

In his 82 years, the Boulder resident has published 100 western novels and 400 stories. He has seen them translated into nine languages, recorded for the blind and republished by high-brow university presses. He has sold the rights to several to Hollywood, and has rubbed elbows with the late Louis L'Amour.

But perhaps the truest measure of a man is his reputation among his peers. In that case, Overholser ranks as one of the great writers of westerns.

Later this month, the Western Writers of America will bestow on him the "Saddleman" award. The honor is given annually to a person who represents Western ideals of independence, integrity and resourcefulness. In the past, it has gone to the likes of western writer L'Amour and John Wayne.

It's more likely that Overholser will poke a little fun at himself, however, and tell you about his self-described near-misses with greatness.

There was the book he sold to Warner Brothers, "The Violent Land." Heartthrob James Dean was signed to star in the movie version, but he died in a car accident in 1955 at 24.

But there are the small pleasures, now that Overholser has pretty much set aside his vintage Royal typewriter. There are walks in the park, visits with family and the violets that bloom in the window of the den lined with hundreds of his books.

Overholser hasn't written much since the death three years ago of his wife, Evaleth, although he published a book of love poems in her memory.

There were days when he was writing westerns, Overholser, will tell you, when "I was really going good, working with no conscious thought. I typed them down just as hard as I could."

He yearned to write since he was a boy, listening to the stories of his dad and grandad, who came west in covered wagons. Overholser taught history in junior high for 19 years before quitting to write full time.

He pulled up stakes in Oregon then, and headed for Colorado with his growing family in 1946. Colorado beckoned with "new settings for stories. I had mined Oregon dry," he said.

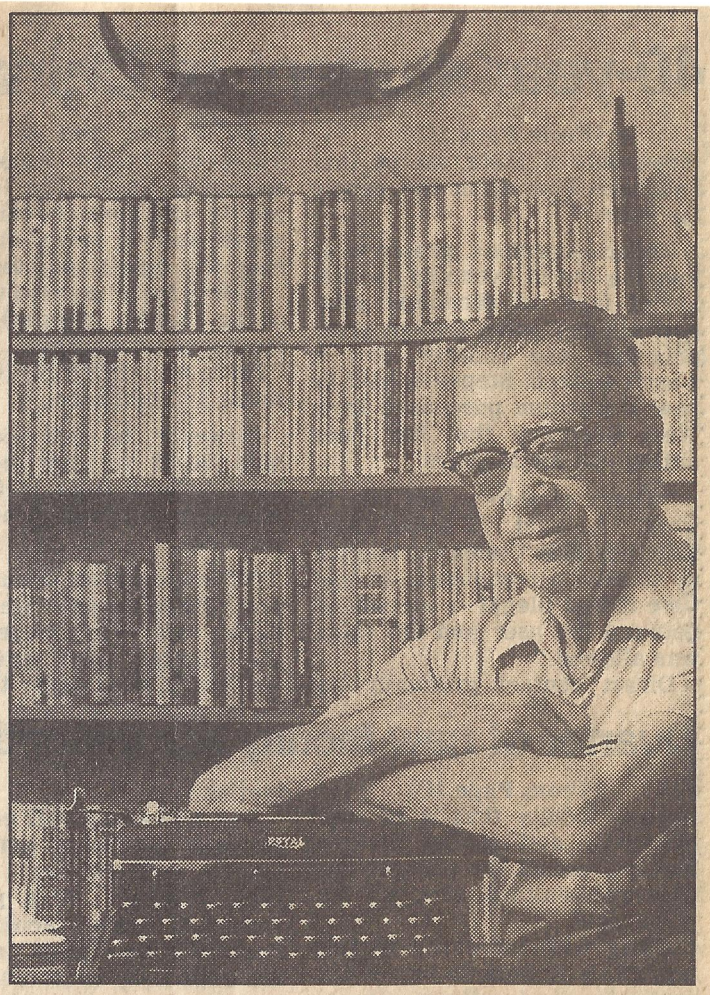
"I don't think I realized fully at the time the risk I was taking. We just went on the assumption that we were going to make it," he said.

His eyesight is "pretty much shot," he said, but these days he listens to recorded books. One of the first he heard was his own — he can't remember which — but he liked hearing it again.

"Years after I write a book, I almost forget what it is," he said. "It was almost like hearing a new story again."

One of his three sons, Stephen, has inherited his father's gift and already has written 11 western books.

But the legacy Overholser leaves is greater than the sum of his books, or the talent of his offspring. He leaves a world of friends and colleagues who read his books — and still ask for more.



Camera staff photo by Jay Quadracci

AUTHOR OF 100 WESTERNS: Wayne D. Overholser of Boulder will be honored this month by the Western Writers of America.

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