

## DORRO SOKOL: Sisters icon had ranching in her blood

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cattleranching on her 320 acres, but soon learned that the former mint farm was “not a good environment for raising cattle.” There was no protection from the chill and winds. Winds leveled one of her hay barns and 39 pine trees in two different storms. So, Sokol revamped the ranch to grow hay. Near the turn of this century, she converted 70 acres within the urban growth boundary into Pine Meadow Village.

Sokol began herding horses on her Shetland pony at the age of 4 on her family’s ranch in San Paula, California, east of Santa Barbara. She graduated from Stanford University with a degree in physical therapy, working in that career while her husband, Don, matriculated Stanford Law School.

The couple had ranching in their blood, so they moved a young family to the historic Oxbow Ranch in Prairie City, Oregon, where their four children learned to herd cattle on Shetland ponies, descendants of their mother’s ponies. They had 2,000 cattle on 16,000 deeded acres, and 140,000 total acres with leases of public lands.

Every summer, they herded cattle 20 miles to summer range. In one roundup, their driver, who was assigned to haul the riders and horses home, “didn’t show up. He got lost. We spent 21 hours in the saddle that day, riding all the way home.”

Her physical therapy degree came in handy on the cattle ranch, where she applied that knowledge in inventing a splint for newborn calves that had hip dysplasia.

“I used Coke bottles as

splints,” she said, “tractioning the hind legs into a stretch that helped them stand and nurse. Otherwise, they’d have died.”

She proudly stated that this is a standard of veterinary medicine today, with casting replacing Coke bottles.

While she raised four children (Eva, Doug, Cris and Mary), Sokol also herded and branded cattle, vaccinated, pulled calves and did C-section deliveries along with haying.

Her husband was a pilot, having served in the Army Air Corps. When the Sokols decided to move to the Oxbow, an airplane made the civilized world accessible. If they were going to be in an airplane, she told him, she wanted to know how to get



PHOTO PROVIDED

Dorro Sokol.

“The decision to buy some land and relocate here with 20 cows was easy.”  
— Dorro Sokol

it down, so she earned her pilot’s license, too.

The family flew to Bend for medical and dental services and to shop in Wetles Clothing Store in downtown Bend. When Mt. Bachelor Ski Area was about three years

old, they began flying the kids there to ski. They flew to Baja, “where there wasn’t yet a road,” to Canada, and even the Bahamas. They traveled all over the West.

She spoke fondly of the airplanes she has owned: a Comanche, a Travel Air, and her prize, a Beechcraft twin-engine Bonanza, which is now in an air museum in Nampa, Idaho. She flew her plane for the last time when she was 85 years old.

Sokol’s passion for aviation never dimmed. Just weeks ago, she made a \$10,000 donation to the Sisters Schools Foundation for the purpose of promoting women in the Sisters High School Outlaw Aviation program.

Cris Converse said that she met with Benny and Julie Benson of Sisters Eagle Airport in the last weeks of her life to talk about the aviation program and other flight-related matters. Sokol knew her time was short, and her thoughts were in the skies above Sisters.

“She said she’d be up there flying soon,” Converse recalled.

Dorro purchased the acreage in Sisters after her first marriage ended.

“I had been friends with Dorothy and Harold Barclay for many years, a friendship that developed because we were all pilots,” she recalled. “My daughter, Eva, stayed with the Barclays during Sisters Rodeo, when she was the Grant County Rodeo Queen. The decision to buy some land and relocate here with 20 cows was easy.”

It fit her ranching life.

“I’ve never wanted to live in a town,” she said. “I like ranching and everything about that life.”

Sokol became a member of Women’s Oregon Trail Riders in the late 1960s, riding all over Oregon and in Idaho, Montana, Nevada and Northern California. She rode



PHOTO PROVIDED

Dorro Sokol and some of her family enjoying the Sisters Rodeo.

the last time with that group in her late 70s.

“I quit riding and began hiking,” she said. “I didn’t want to haul long distances or ride someone else’s horse.”

In Sisters, she served on the Sisters Planning Commission for 10 years as the out-of-town commissioner. She was also a member of Bend Rotary Club, until she became a charter member of Sisters Rotary Club in 1990. She served as Sisters Rotary president in 2001-2002.

Sokol was a dedicated sponsor of the High Desert Museum, Sisters Folk Festival, Sisters Rotary, Deschutes River Conservancy and the Oregon Community Foundation. Her history with Sisters Rodeo began at the original site of the rodeo, which was where Hoyt’s Hardware is now located.

Most folks who have been in Sisters for a while have at least one Dorro Sokol story. Her drive, frankness, and fiery personality were an example and inspiration to many people.

“When she walked into a room, she *commanded* it,” said one longtime Sisters resident.

The remembrances of her mother from longtime Sisters residents have been a blessing for Cris.

“The things people are saying are so special,” she said.

Despite declining health, Dorro remained as active as she could.

“Just before the snow, she was riding her Polaris (ATV) with her dog,” Converse said.

Pine Meadow Ranch was a special place to Sokol, and she enjoyed sharing it. Many Sisters kids were invited over to swim in her pool.

Even as the sun set on her long and eclectic life, she looked out from her sunroom over the ranch and told her daughter Cris:

“All I ever wanted in life was to have a ranch and to live with mountains and a ranch. And I got it. I’ve been lucky my whole life. This is the most beautiful place in the world.”

Cris noted that to the very end, Sisters and Pine Meadow Ranch meant the world to her mother.

“She never took it for granted. She was grateful for it every single day.”

A celebration of Dorro Sokol’s life will be held some time this summer. Contributions in her name may be made to Outlaw Aviation through the Sisters Schools Foundation: [http://www.sisters.k12.or.us/pages/Sisters\\_SD/Sisters\\_Schools\\_Foundation](http://www.sisters.k12.or.us/pages/Sisters_SD/Sisters_Schools_Foundation).

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