

# Senior Stars: Necia DeWitt

By Karen Miller

Elgin, Oregon...a Union County farming town nestled on the North Oregon border; incorporated in 1891; named after Lady Elgin—a ship lost on Lake Michigan; and nicknamed the “Jewel of the Blue Mountains.”

What makes this little town so special?

It was here in 1924 that a real jewel was born. The second of four siblings, little Miss Necia Evers DeWitt was born to a hard working farming man and his wife—he from Vermont coming clear across the country to marry an Elgin maiden named Pearl. Seems only fit-



Necia DeWitt working around her place.

cia succeeded, along with her sisters, in locking their brother out of the room, after he bragged that they couldn't, she tells, laughing. Necia says there are only three girls left from her graduating class and they have gotten together a time or two to reminiscence.

Necia is full of stories to share, little tidbits that give us a glimpse of what rural life was like for her and her family.

Necia was the smallest in her class, but I can see she wasn't the laziest or weakest. After high school she was touted as the fastest worker as she climbed twelve to fourteen foot ladders to the tops of trees, picking the juiciest and heaviest cherries—her boss claiming she must put rocks in her cherry baskets, they were so heavy! He didn't want to “overpay” her his whopping three cents a pound!

Among Necia's other work, she raked pea stubbles with a dump rake and horses and

worked on a dairy farm milking cows by hand, where her boss paid her one dollar a day. When Necia threatened to leave, it was upped to three dollars a day, and Necia decided to stay, sometimes working up to sixteen hours a day.

To this day Necia has a hard time spending money on herself. Back then, with her hard earned money she proudly bought herself a Pioneer .22 rifle, which she still owns. She also bought herself a radio so she could listen to country western music and bought her hard working mother a gas iron, as they had no electricity.

Necia says her dad had a '28 Chevy called “Shove it or leave it,” because Necia had to get it started on a hill to get it going.

Necia also worked in the town of Joseph as a caregiver for the manager of a variety store that was owned by Walter Brennan—most of you know him as the star of the TV series “The Real McCoys” which ran from 1957-1963. Necia fondly recalls sitting around the dinner table, heartily laughing at Walter's jokes.

At the ripe old age of twenty-six, around 1950, Necia relocated back to Vernonia, getting a chance to become reacquainted with cowboy Ted DeWitt. Recalling her billy goat story from when she was around ten years old, Necia tells how one day she got off the school bus and an ornery goat took off after Ted's mother (not knowing Blanche would someday be her future mother-in-law)—Ted heroically saved his mother and that act was all it took; in 1950 when Necia returned to Vernonia, she took up with Ted and truly became a Cowboy Sweetheart when they wed later that year. Ted worked at Oregon American until 1957 when the mill shut down.

Necia and Ted bought property near Keasey in 1953 and have remained there since, cutting their own lumber to build their home. They raised three children there—son Larry born in 1952, Jerry in 1954 and daughter Kathy in 1955. Ted also worked for Pettyjohn at Detroit Lake and in 1963 became County Surveyor, earning \$2.80 an hour, much to Necia's delight. Ted retired in 1980 and passed away three days short of his 82<sup>nd</sup> birthday.

Today Necia enjoys gardening, feeding hummingbirds that eat her out of house and home, growing and picking berries, and gathering eggs from her chickens. She still cans, plays pinochle every Friday at the Senior Center, recently retired from the Senior Center Board, was involved in Extension, which she joined in 1950 and which continued to meet until recently, and Yodels every Wednesday with the Golden Oldies Band. Her yodeling incidentally was instrumental in propelling her to winning the title of “My Fair Lady” at the Columbia County Fair in 2005.

Truly, Necia enjoys singing “I'm a Cowboy Sweetheart” to the adoring crowd at the Senior Center—come listen some time, it's a real treat. You'd never guess Necia was the shy one back in her Elgin days.

Necia loves and lives life to the fullest and keeps busy at home when she isn't being Grandma to five grandkids: son Jerry and wife Valerie's Chad, Kendra, Colton and wife Nicole and Karly

DeWitt; Kathy's son Eric and wife Joy; and two great grandkids: Silas Schaumburg and Grady DeWitt.

On her place today, Necia has a forty gallon barrel that she and daughter Kathy use to spray scotch broom, which garnered praise from forestry service



Necia DeWitt winning the 2005 My Fair Lady Pageant

employees, saying they couldn't have done it better!

Necia says the only reason she has been able to maintain her house and acreage is due in a large part because of help from her daughter Kathy, who comes out every weekend. “Kathy has always been there for me and Ted,” says Necia.

Asking Necia about her travels (she and Kathy's favorite form of relaxation), and where she would recommend someone visit, Necia replied, “The underground Chinese caves in Pendleton.” Will Necia ever slow down? Not until she fulfills her bucket list: 1) flying in an airplane, 2) visiting Australia, 3) or going to Ireland, 4) or Hawaii.

Thanks Necia for sharing, and send us a postcard!

*Editors Note: Necia DeWitt has retired as author of this Senior Stars column. Thanks Necia for all your hours of interview and entertaining Vernonia's Voice readers with stories about the lives of our beloved Senior Stars.*

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