

# DOROTHY MCCAULEY: ADVENTURER

SKYDIVING TOPS  
94-YEAR-OLD'S  
BUCKET LIST



Contributed photo

Dorothy McCauley and granddaughter Rhonda Gowan take a camel ride near Ayers Rock in Australia.

By KATHY ANEY  
East Oregonian

Outside Dorothy McCauley's front door is a sign that reads "Live & Love to the Fullest."

This is McCauley's mantra. Last month, the 94-year-old Pendleton woman sat high on a camel and rode into an Australian sunset. She snorkeled the Great Barrier Reef, swam at Bondi Beach and explored a labyrinth of caves.

Kerry Baird, owner and principal broker of Turn Here Realty & Travel in Pendleton, led the tour.

"We rode camels at Ayers Rock where Dorothy was said to be the oldest to ever take the camel ride. She was ready to go," Baird said. "From petting crocodiles to talking to the big kangaroos, Dorothy was ready and willing."

According to McCauley, riding a camel isn't so tough.

"They're not hard to ride," she said. "You get in rhythm with them like a horse."

McCauley seems blessed with a never-ending supply of chutzpah.

"I'm not scared by much," McCauley said.

McCauley's granddaughter, Rhonda Gowin, went along on the trip. She said her grandmother is up for anything, a living example of the sign by her front door.

"She lives life to the fullest in every moment," Gowin said.

The nonagenarian has outlived one husband and a significant other and doesn't seem to be slowing down.

Recently, she sat on the sofa in her apartment at Oregon Trail Manor. Life has been good, though not always easy, she said. McCauley's girlhood was sometimes hardscrabble. She grew up in a close, boisterous family with four brothers and four sisters. When her father couldn't find work, the clan moved from South Dakota to Shelton, Washington.

"We lived in a huge tent in a field," McCauley recalled. "Dad worked in the mill."

The family eventually moved to a house when Dorothy was 4. The place had enough land for a huge garden and cows. She remembers tending the garden and sharing cow-milking duties with her siblings.

At Shelton High School, a relationship sparked between Dorothy and Charles McCau-

ley. They married in 1943. When Charles left to fight in World War II as a Marine, Dorothy logged with her father.

"I drove a horse and team," she said. "I hooked onto logs and dragged them to the landing."

When Charles returned, the couple moved wherever Charles' logging career took him. Dorothy clerked at stores, bartended and worked as a nursing home aide. Later, she was employed at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton doing electrical work.

"To this day, I can take anything apart and put it back together again — and it works," she said.

In her 50s, both Charles and Dorothy worked at the Boeing plant in Fife, Washington.

Charles got cancer at age 62. When his doctor estimated that Charles had only two years left, Dorothy decided otherwise. She retired from Boeing and spent her time transforming their diet, accompanying her husband to the local athletic club for exercise sessions and instigating trips to Arizona in their travel trailer to escape the winter chill. The change in life-

style seemed to work.

"He had two years to live, but I kept him alive for eight," McCauley said.

After Charles' death, she met Donald Tilon in Yuma, Arizona. Romance blossomed. The couple never officially tied the knot, but spent rich years together. After moving to his hometown of Pendleton in 1998, McCauley traveled with Tilon to Mexico and almost every state. In 2016, Dorothy lost Donald to Alzheimer's disease.

McCauley broke away from the past as a knock sounded on her apartment door. Her friend Maxine Haines turned the knob and peeked in. McCauley broke into a grin. The women are kindred spirits. They are traveling companions. Neither believe in acting their age, whatever that is.

According to Haines, McCauley is always ready to do anything.

"She's my four-wheeling partner," Haines said. "We love mud puddles."

They laughed as they recounted roaring into a mud puddle and splashing Haines' son. Yes, they admitted, they did it on purpose.

"We have a ball," Haines

said. "She's a go-getter."

On this day, they planned to go to the Pendleton Senior Center where they both volunteer. Both work in the store there, prepare the beverages for meals, clean tables or whatever is needed.

Genetics may play a part in McCauley's longevity. A photo on her dresser shows her posing with three siblings who are all in their 90s. Her mother lived to age 98.

She also stays physically active.

"I've always exercised," she said. "I walk in the gym, work on the weight machines and do water aerobics."

Her attitude provides the icing on the cake. Gowin marvels about her grandmother's easygoing attitude and passion for adventure. When Gowin's husband got a Harley, McCauley asked for a ride. She inner tubes behind the family's boat, loves ziplining and has her eye on a mile-long zip line in Colorado sometime soon. She'd like to parachute from a plane.

"She wants to go skydiving," Gowin said. "If the doctor gives the OK, she'll do it."

"I've always wanted to skydive," McCauley said. "That's on my bucket list."



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Dorothy McCauley holds a koala bear during a recent trip to Australia.



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Dorothy McCauley and granddaughter Rhonda Gowan pose for a photo in front of Ayers Rock in Australia.



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Dorothy McCauley shares a laugh with her brother, Russell Stuck at his 99th birthday in November.