

Memories ride with CJD royalty for life

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — It may seem fleeting, but being a member or rodeo royalty is an experience that goes with a girl through young womanhood and into her later years, even lasting a lifetime.

That's certainly the case with members of past Chief Joseph Days Rodeo courts.

The rodeo began in 1946 when founder Harley Tucker got it going near his ranch three miles outside of Joseph, his daughter, Darlene Turner said. Unlike today, it was first held on the East Moraine.

"He just drove the horses up there," Turner said of her father. "I was only a little kid when all this happened."

Senior royalty

Members of a CJD Rodeo court from the furthest back to the Chieftain was able to locate included former Princess Marian Mawhin Birkmaier, who lives just outside of Joseph, and Ruby Mallon Zollman. Other members of the 1949 court were Queen Beverly Oliver Graham, who is now dead, and Princess Diane Snoderly, who was unavailable.

Birkmaier, who will be 90 in September, recalls service on the court to be simpler in 1949.

"We didn't have any riding trials and no speeches," she said. "We didn't have to do anything at the rodeo other than the grand entry."

She and the other court members often appeared in regional parades, but since the Joseph Chamber of Commerce was hurting for money, they couldn't take their horses and they rode in a convertible.

"It was exciting, time-consuming and I made a lifetime friendship with Ruby."

She recalled that well-known Hollywood character actor Walter Brennan had an important part in starting the Chief Joseph Days.

"He had a big ranch near Imnaha and wanted to promote Joseph and the rodeo," Birkmaier said. "It was a fun time and an exciting time. It was something we hadn't experienced before."

She also recalled the differences in then and now.

"We were raised in an older time. We all had horses. We were an older generation," she said. "I can remember my dad haying with horses. ... Later on, the tractors came. ... We weren't the expert horsewomen that the girls are now. We had no 4-H or anything. I rode horses to school at Alder Slope country school for eight years."

But she didn't dare ride her horse to high school.

"That would be an insult to ride a horse to high school," she said. "My dad would take me and then I'd walk home."

Since her reign, Birkmaier finished high school in 1949 in Enterprise, attended Eastern Oregon College and then came home to marry



Contributed Photo
The 1949 Chief Joseph Days Rodeo court included, at front, Queen Beverly Oliver Graham and in back, from left, Princesses Ruby Mallon Zollman, Diane Snoderly and Marian Mawhin Birkmaier.

Crow Creek rancher Mack Birkmaier.

"This guy was my high school sweetheart. We had our first date in 1946 but didn't marry until 1953," she said. "We've been ranching ever since. That's where he took me as a bride and I've been a rancher's wife ever since."

They have two sons and a daughter, as well as nine grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. The youngest son, Tom, runs the ranch.

Zollman, who is now 89, served with Birkmaier as a princess in 1949.

"In '49, the chamber didn't have a court and at last minute decided they had to have one," she said.

As a result of the last-minute decision, they didn't have usual rivalry, but got the high schools in Wallowa, Lostine, Enterprise and Joseph to have their own rivalries. She won at Joseph High School. Contestants sold tickets for a dance. She said there usually were three dances then.

"They got more money from that one dance than they usually got for three dances," Zollman said.

After serving on the court, the court was given a plane ride from the Joseph Airport — quite an adventure for 1949.

That year also was the first year Brennan chartered a plane from Joseph to Lewiston and Spokane for the court. Brennan did that for a couple years, Zollman said.

Brennan also garnered nationwide publicity for the area by flying the winner of the old radio and television show "Queen for a Day" to Joseph.

Zollman married Marlin "Bud" Zollman, with whom she had three sons, five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. The

Zollmans ran a meat market in Enterprise and were partners in meat market/slaughterhouse in Joseph, as well as running Bud's Hardware (now Joseph Hardware) for 29 years.

She stayed involved with the court for quite a while, helping with the queen's luncheon for several years and riding in the CJD parades until about 20 years ago.

The queen from furthest back the Chieftain could contact was Barbara Rounsavell Lamoreaux, who reigned in 1952. She was interviewed in early July and had hoped to attend this year's rodeo, but she died July 12 at 86.

"At the time, one of my best girlfriends from Wallowa was in it," Lamoreaux said. "I was chosen and she wasn't. It didn't affect our friendship, but I felt bad."

A queen at just 17, she graduated from Wallowa High School in 1953.

"I'd been riding ever since I was a child. I rode all the time," she said. "It was exciting for me and the audience. The afternoon of the grand entry, the girls came in from the front of the (Harley Tucker) arena and they rode in from the far corner. They opened the gate and the horse reared. She didn't fall, but normally she didn't do that."

Lamoreaux recalled the CJD court included an honorary Indian Princess Patti Murphy, who was later Queen of the West at Madison Square Garden in New York City.

"She had the most beautiful black hair and voice," Lamoreaux said. "If there ever was a queen, I thought Patti should've been it."

After her time on the CJD court, Lamoreaux worked as a switchboard operator first

See Royalty, Page B4



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain
Marian Mawhin Birkmaier, a princess in the 1949 Chief Joseph Days Rodeo court, stands in the shadow of Mount Joseph with her high school sweetheart and husband of 68 years, Mack Birkmaier.



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain
Ruby Mallon Zollman holds memorabilia from her time as a princess for the 1949 Chief Joseph Days Rodeo.

75 years of Award-Winning Rodeo

Outfitting the Outdoors in you!

See you at the Chief Joseph Day Celebrations

ODFW License Agent

Fencing • Clothing • Automotive • Purina Feed
Pet Food & Supplies • Tack • Animal Health
Livestock Equipment • Lawn & Garden
Plumbing & Electrical • Hunting & Camping
Supplies

WALLOWA COUNTY GRAIN GROWERS

OPEN 7 Days A Week!

Hurricane Creek Road • Enterprise • 541-426-3116

Celebrating 75 Years of Award-Winning Rodeo

BEST STOP BEFORE WALLOWA LAKE!

Liquor • Beer • Wine • Growler Station • Cider • Ice
Mixers • Bar Needs • Snacks • Cigars • Cigarettes
Rolling & Pipe Tobacco • Copenhagen & Grizzly!

524 S River St,
Enterprise, OR 97828
Open Monday - Saturday 10 am-6pm
541-426-4393

PLENTY OF RV, BOAT & TRAILER PARKING