

Buffalo Tales

MARCH/APRIL 2009

GROWING UP TOUGH

By: *Mary Lee Pesek*

The farm of John and Myrl Pesek located one mile west of Ravenna, Nebraska in Buffalo County was a hub of constant activity. A famous professional wrestler and greyhound breeder in addition to operation a large farm and livestock operation, John's enterprises kept many people very busy.

John and Myrl (Mahoney) Pesek were the parents of seven children. Elizabeth, Jack, Virginia, Mary Lee, Kevin (Mick), Catherine and Steve. As the fourth child, I, Mary Lee enjoyed my placement as the youngest of the oldest three, and the oldest of the last four. AT a very tender age, my Dad had us go into his gymnasium where all of us were taught the art of self defense. There was full sized mat, boxing gloves, rowing machine, a huge sand-filled burlap affair suspended by a pulley that we pushed or "bridged" to gain strength. Hand grips, heavy leather balls and a row of iron hand hold grips installed in the ceiling of the gym to pull ourselves along to the next grip swinging in monkey fashion to strengthen our arms. Then he would have us wrestle or box each other in contests showing various wrestling holds to us. The girls were trained along with the boys.

My oldest brother Jack enjoyed teasing and tormenting us younger kids. Comfort in the discomfort of us was an abiding family recreation for him. He was constantly scaring us with various imaginary monsters and creatures that his fertile mind created. If we were

riding a tricycle, he would run up and put a stick in the spokes of the trike wheels and upset us, or hide behind a door and leap out screaming to startle the daylight out of us. One of his famous recurring monster was "Old Three-toes" the man-eating lion from darkest Africa. He would make tracks in the sand definitely showing only three toes and order us to track the lion to his lair. We donned our pith helmets, carrying our wooden guns and obediently followed the trail until he'd roar out of his hiding place and maul each of us. Our imaginary volleys of gunfire never killed the beast but only wounded him.

In seeking revenge, my younger brother Mick and I planned ways to retaliate. We once took Jack's special model airplanes he had worked months to build and flew them all over his bedroom. Suddenly the tri-plane of WWI Ace Baron Bon Richofen and Captain Brown collided in mid air damaging the fragile planes. We hurriedly put them back atop the armoire where he had hidden them from us and waited for the expected tirade. We were tormented mightily for that bit of destruction.

My Dad's busy, frequent wrestling tours and greyhound racing at the major cities would have him away for long periods of time. During his absence my mother would have to run the large farm, greyhound, livestock operation. Though there were hired men and some times domestic help she had to supervise her large rambunctious family. She was forced to referee

our many skirmishes. I can hear her voice yet as she admonished us—"Now the littlest ones are going to get hurt and I want this fighting to stop." To which we would respond, "Oh no. Mom we'll be o.k." Not too long later, the cries of some one injured would signal it was time for her to rush in, brandishing the broom to scatter us and break up the conflict.

We had many pets, but a favorite of mine was a small rat terrier named "Duke." He would often sleep at the foot of my day bed. Jack crept up on his hands and knees to scare me. Suddenly Duke sprang to protect me and jumped in Jack's face fiercely barking. Jack quickly stood up yelling "Duke, Duke it's me." We had a good laugh that Duke had interrupted that onslaught.

Mom would often lament that her kids were forever playing with fire or in the water, climbing up high or digging our many caves we constructed. Mick



MICK
LIZ
PAUL

and I were inseparable. My sister Liz said we were more meddlesome and ornery than the Katzenjammer kids of cartoon fame. We were forever in her cosmetics putting our fingers in her tubes of lipstick, drawing on her mirrors with the lipstick, spraying on her perfume her boy friend had given her, and going through her dresser drawer of possessions searching for her love letters. If she were baking a cake - our grimy fingers got into the cake dough. She once rapped my head with a large spoon and a great knot welled up on my skull and she felt very remorseful. "You just forced me to do it" she wailed.

One occasion my elder sister Virginia rushed into the kitchen

anxiously shouting, "Mom. Mom come quick. Mickey is on the top of the windmill platform ledge and won't come down!" We scrambled out doors to peer up in the sky and sure enough there was little Mick. If the older kids tried to go after him - he would threaten to jump. Mom ordered all of us to leave and stop being his frightened audience. Her words, "he got up there, he will get down." We anxiously waited until he grew tired and made his way down the steps. Jack seized him as he neared the bottom and gave him a severe spanking.

The livestock tank of water provided our early swimming exploits. None of the baby barnyard animals escaped being tossed into the swim. We enjoyed watching the baby pigs swim so furiously. Of course, the dogs were the best swimmers,

while the cats detested the water. If a kid failed to respond to Mom's call she would dash to the tank to see if one of us had drowned.

My older sib-

lings were all very athletic and excellent swimmers and divers. Naturally the younger ones followed suit. We became fleet of foot in our many attempts to escape Jack. There was always some race contest being waged.

Mick and I constructed and elaborate cave. The roof was an upturned feed lot bunk and we dug a small entrance to the bigger deeper hole under the bunk. We knew Jack would be too big to enter the small entrance. So we dared him to "get us" and then scurried like rabbits down our entryway. He knew better than to disturb the dirt atop the bunk for fear of suffocating us so then he paused and said, "is it dark down there?" Ans. "oh no we

have a lantern down here.” as we giggled in satisfaction. Jack: “Oh my God you don’t have a lantern going down there, it will suck all the oxygen out and you won’t be able to breathe.” I peered over at Mick’s face and he was swallowing very hard, looking scared, while my breath seemed more labored to me. We quickly blew out the flame, waiting a long time for our tormentor to leave. When we felt it safe, we crawled out and of course there he was – waiting.

The “fun and games” came to an abrupt halt upon our Dad’s return. There were no slackers allowed in our family. At an early age we were exposed to hard work. Everyone had their chores and responsibilities and woe to you if you shirked your duties. If there was no immediate work Dad would invent some make work scheme.

The kids bedrooms were upstairs and he would come to the foot of the stairs and bellow up “kids come forth.” We’d reluctantly descend and stand in age order attention as he would ask “what are you going to do today?” The answers varied. Liz – cook dinner; Jack – disk the north 80; Virginia – I’m driving the stacker team where the hired men are putting up hay on the other place; Mary Lee – feeding and tending the Canada geese and milking the cows; Mick – feeding and exercising the greyhounds; Cassie – milking the cows and sweeping the kitchen. Finally he would bend down to the smallest sibling, and ask “and what are you going to be doing Stevie?” To which he responded – picking up cobs in the pig pen.

There were many visitors to our farm and kids from town often waked out to get into the action, too. Boredom was never a problem.

In retrospect, I well never, never understand how my long suffering dear mother tolerated all

this but she did so in a splendid and spirited manner.

Mary Lee Pesek is a life-time member of the Buffalo County Historical Society.

DID YOU KNOW...?
 ...that the Trails & Rails Museum sits on the original Mormon Trail. 11th Street that runs through Kearney follows the path the Mormons took to Utah. See your words in print!
 What is your favorite memory of... planting? Be it a small garden or 150 acres, what do you remember the best?
 E-mail us at:
bchs.buffalotales@hotmail.com

August, 2009: at the Trails & Rails Museum!

New Harmonies
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Buffalo County Historical Society

Trails & Rails Museum is jointly operated by the Buffalo County Historical Society
 710 W 11th St, PO Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848-0523
www.bchs.us bchs@bchs.us (308) 234-3041

INTRODUCING:
LYN HOFFMAN,
EDUCATION COORDINATOR



Lyn Hoffman is the newly hired Education Coordinator at the Trails & Rails Museum. Midtown Communication donated a one-time gift to BCHS specifically to hire an Education Coordinator for one year. The job of an Education Coordinator is to organize educational activities for both adults and children, both at the museum and within area communities. The Education Coordinator is also in charge of implementing and organizing new education activities including: summer camps, workshops, and hands-on activities for BCHS booths at events in and around Kearney.

Lyn has worked as a seasonal tour guide at Trails & Rails Museum since 2006 before joining the full-time staff. Previous em-

ployment includes working seven years as a Special Education Para-Educator for the Riverdale Public School and Kearney School systems. Prior to her years as a para., she worked for three and a half years as the Youth Staff Coordinator/Live-in House Parent at Campus House, Inc in Kearney.

Lyn's goals for her time as the Education Coordinator, will be the same goals listed in the BCHS strategic/business plan. Her main goal is to draw more visitors to the museum by making the Trails & Rails Museum a more interactive encounter with history. By using hands-on activities and discoveries in all of the buildings for both children and adults she hopes to make their visits more enjoyable and active. She is also planning larger and more entertaining events such as a Trails Game to show visitors what life was like on the prairie and also Murder Mystery night parties, using Buffalo County history to enhance the plot.

Lyn earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology with an Emphasis in Leadership Studies from Fort Hays State University in Hays, KS. She has been a resident of Kearney for eleven years where she currently lives with her husband, Marc, and their cat, Payton.

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Dr. Mark R. Ellis, Editor
 Katherine Wielechowski, Production Manager
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Individual	\$35.00
Family	\$40.00
Institutional Membership	\$50.00
Supporting Membership	\$75.00

We have replaced the word 'Basic' to 'Family'.

Directors

Term expiring June 1, 2009: Janice Martin, Lee Sanks, Mary Kenney, Gary Straatmann
 Term expiring June 1, 2010: Jim Cudaback, Janice McGregor, Sharon Mason, Jolene Ward
 Term expiring June 1, 2011: Dr. Mark Ellis, Sharon Martin, Duane Muhlbach, Barb Riege

Officers (1 year term)

President	Sharon Mason
Vice-President	Barb Riege
Secretary	Janice McGregor
Treasurer	Jim Cudaback

2009 BUFFALO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Friday, January 2 from 3-4 pm: Girl Scout Cookie Train exhibit

Saturday, February 21 from 2-5 pm: Cake Fundraiser

Sunday April 19 from 1-3 pm-BCHS Annual Meeting

May Date/Time TBA: Youth Chautauqua Birthday Party for Mrs. David Anderson born May 11, 1849 (2009=160th)

Saturday, May 30: 24th Annual Wagons West Celebration- Music from 10-7 pm and Exhibitors from 10-6 pm

Sunday, June 14: 2nd Annual 1/2 Marathon: Buffalo County Stampede-reg. is at 6 am race begins at 7

June Date/Time TBA: Youth Chautauqua Birthday Party for Mrs. William Nutter born June 16th, 1835 (2009=174th)

Friday, July 3 from 9-10:30: Members Only Night (watch city's fireworks)

Saturday, July 11 from 10-6 pm: Family Farm Days

Thursday, July 23 from 6:30-9 pm: 3rd Annual Trivia Contest

AUGUST –dates and special correlating events TBD: Smithsonian Harmonies

August Date/Time TBA: Youth Chautauqua Birthday Party for Ms. Fannie Graves born August 1885 (2009=124th)

Saturday, August 15 from 10-3 pm: 5th Annual Genealogy Open House with spotlight on One-Room School w/ a picnic!

October: Date/Time TBA: Youth Chautauqua Birthday Party for Maud Marston Burrows in 1864 (2009=145th)

Friday, Dec. 4 from 6-8 pm: MEMBER'S ONLY preview of Christmas Tree Walk

Sat. Dec. 5 through Sun. Dec. 13 from 1-5 pm daily: Open to the public: 22nd Annual Christmas Tree Walk***Special Night: Friday Dec. 11 from 1-7 pm

December Date/Time TBA: Youth Chautauqua Birthday Party for Sarah Oliver born Dec. 1, 1832 (2009=177th)

Volunteers, chairpersons, and sponsors are still needed. Please contact the office for more information on supporting your Buffalo County Historical Society!

PO Box 523, 710 W. 11th St., Kearney, NE 68845
(308) 234-3041 www.bchs.us bchs@bchs.us

We hope you enjoy these stories about Buffalo County. We would love to have a stock pile of Buffalo Tales ready, so they can go out in a more timely manner. Please submit your memories and stories to us by e-mailing them to bchs.buffalotales@hotmail.com or sending them to our post office box: BCHS, PO Box 523 Kearney NE 68848.

We appreciate your support!

Director's Report

-The Boyd House porch floor has been redone by two very determined, hard working volunteers: Jim Miller and John Robbins. We are really appreciative off their efforts and the porch looks wonderful!

-The Kiwanis finished the Boyd House painting project in 2008 and will start on painting the Church building soon. As a reminder, the paint was purchased through Kearney Keno grant funds and the Dobeytown Kiwanis are donating all of the labor. They spent a lot of time on the Boyd Ranch House and it really shows. Please help us thank them!



Trails & Rails Museum
Buffalo County Historical Society
710 West 11th Street Box 523
Kearney, NE 68848-0523

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www.bchs.us

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