

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

Happy trails, birthday to Jane Lykken Hoff, 103

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For the past century, Jane Lykken Hoff has been here on the desert, riding horses. Yes, that's right, for 100 years. Jane is remarkable for many reasons, not just her longevity: she has been involved with countless community causes, has been a fixture at the Palm Springs Historical Society and is a living legend. Despite her many birthdays, she has an extraordinarily youthful and cheerful attitude.

What Jane has witnessed over the past century in the valley is as remarkable as she is. Born in 1920, she is like a desert Queen Elizabeth II, (her slightly younger contemporary.) She's seen a lot.

But Jane isn't just witness to a century of activity, she is an integral part of desert history. She has an unparalleled positive outlook on life and is a particularly gifted horsewoman.

She started riding almost concurrently with learning to walk. From a vantage point of a century later, she remembers that there wasn't much else to do in the desert back when. She owned roller skates, but the only sidewalk was that in front of the Desert Inn. "The town was only two blocks long and one block wide." Horseback riding made a lot more sense.

The few established hotels in the 1920s all sent guests out to horseback ride into the Indian Canyons, or across the miles of open sand dunes dotted with verbena and globe mallow, popcorn flower and brittlebush. There were no fences and no need for trails. One could navigate by looking back across the low of the valley to the little town, punctuated by the El Mirador tower.

The horses knew their way home anyway. Frank Bogert, Palm Springs' mayor cowboy who lived to be 99 years old and was 10 years Jane's senior, wrote about Jane in his book "View from the Saddle" and recorded that one of Jane's earliest memories was the thrill of seeing horses running freely through town. Quoting her, "After visitors went riding,

the stables just turned the horses loose to make their way home ... and they did."

Jane's father, Carl Lykken, owned and operated the town's first general store, "a multipurpose venture" that offered groceries, hardware, notions, clothes, greeting cards, shoes and dry goods. It served as the town's first post office and later the Western Union Telegraph office. "It was the primary gathering place for Palm Springs' early residents." Years later Jane recalled, "If you couldn't get it at Lykken's, you didn't get it here."

Jane and the Lykken family lived a little two-story house rented from Cornelia White just south of 180 N. Palm Canyon, adjacent to the store. It had a little lawn, and some pepper trees and nice front porch. A fence separated the yard from Palm Canyon Drive. Jane mused that the fence was to keep her in; and the horses and donkeys wandering the town, out.

One day, her mother found her hanging from a clump of Bermuda grass trying not to fall in the house's cesspool. Soon after, the family moved to Lime Street, now Baristo, at the corner of Indian Canyon.

It was an interesting neighborhood. Minister Mixell had six children across the street. Stephen Willard, the desert photographer was next door, and Lois Kellogg, the eccentric heiress, built up the rest of the block with her "Pool's Folly." But new construction of the Del Tahquitz Hotel began blocking the view of the mountain, and the Lykken family looked elsewhere to live.

There was no kindergarten those days, so Jane started to Frances Stevens School for first grade. She "never thought too much of school." She thought more about horses, ever since her first ride back when she was 2. It had been her birthday present. She recalled that she didn't get her first horse until she was 13, but she "had him in mind all those years."

She rode the bus one hour to Banning and an hour home for high school. The year she graduated the ride was no longer necessary as Palm Springs High School had finally opened.



Jane Lykken Hoff. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

But Jane isn't just witness to a century of activity, she is an integral part of desert history.

In 1930, her father and a group of friends, mostly errant businessmen, organized a weekly outing, calling themselves the Desert Riders. They would saddle up early in the morning and ride out to meet a chuck wagon for breakfast, skipping work to have a little fun. It was a social gathering full of good cheer and company.

For Palm Springs Life Magazine years later, Jane remembered the fried eggs, bacon and hot cakes, that the "food, cooked over a flame, always tasted so much better outside." The rides came to include a cowboy singer and an occasional rope trick, but mostly it was about the wide-open spaces, riding on the desert.

Membership in the Desert Riders was prized and was by invitation only. There was a strict two-ride limit on guests. Important business leaders, early pioneers, society mavens and celebrities all

sought membership. Robert Taylor, William Holden, Clark Gable, Henry Fonda and Cary Grant all joined. Movie stars Charlie Farrell and Ralph Bellamy, creators of the Racquet Club, were long-time members. Trav Rogers, owner of Rogers Stables and proprietor of the "Mink and Manure Club" and Tony Burke, the indefatigable photographer and publicist of the El Mirador hotel, were members for decades.

By 1972, Jane was "round-up boss" of the Desert Riders. Being elected to serve in the leadership was extremely prestigious. She would go on to be president of the group. (Jane also belonged to Los Compadres and was its first woman president as well.)

In spring that year, she led a string of riders out to dedicate a new trail. The club was no longer just about a little socializing having realized that the booming development of the valley would cause the extinction of horseback riding if trails weren't marked and maintained.

At the dedication site, Trail Boss Art Smith was waiting with a case of champagne. The new trail was to be named for longtime member Charlie Berns, owner of the famous 21 Club in New York. Prominent citizens and cowboys alike raised a glass.

That afternoon high in the hills there was a big surprise. All those attending sang "Happy Birthday" to Jane. She was presented with an outsized birthday card with all the names of the members written on it. From high on the new mountain trail the party moved to the Racquet Club for a charity luncheon. The money raised would be used to build the new Lykken Trail to honor Jane's father and founder of the Desert Riders. The group would eventually name a choice picnic spot in Eagle Canyon Jane's Hoffbrau in her honor.

This week the honors again belong to Jane, who celebrated her 103rd birthday. Happy birthday, Jane! No one has had more happy trails.

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