

# A Country Education

*Extracurricular activities, thanks to the sheriff, for kids in Denio, Nevada.*

*By Carolyn Dufurrena*

**T**he high-desert hamlet of Denio, Nev., a village of perhaps 50 souls, is tucked in the shadow of the Pueblo Mountains on the Oregon state line, 100 miles north of the Humboldt County seat of Winnemucca. Denio has the distinction of housing the community post office furthest from a railroad in the United States, an artifact of some importance in the last century. Besides the post office, there's the Community Hall, a roping arena, and a two-room elementary school.

The teachers who work in Denio are by necessity independent creatures, accustomed to handling business and minor emergencies on their own. The principal is 100 miles away. So is the sheriff, except for the window during the second semester when the DARE program comes to town. Drug Abuse Resistance Education, the program started in the 1980s by Nancy Reagan, still flourishes in this rural county. It's a good thing, bringing the presence of law enforcement to a community where the school and the bar were on the same party line well into the first Bush administration.

Two sheriff's deputies came to school every couple of weeks for the afternoon during the DARE program. We invited the kids from the neighboring school in Fields, Ore., about 25 miles to the north, so we had a houseful, about 25 students ranging in age from five to 14, plus a few teachers. We'd talk about the dangers of smoking and drinking and marijuana, and about how to solve problems nonviolently. The kids were always very polite. Many of them were already familiar with those issues.

The Community Hall housed all extracurricular activities, chief among them twice-a-week basketball practice and library. We went once a week to exchange our books and enjoy a visit with the local librarian. Afterward, the kids walked over to the Diamond Inn Bar next door to meet their parents, who'd been waiting for them for a while. The kids had the opportunity to watch the way their folks handled second-hand smoke and recreational alcohol and occasionally solve problems nonviolently, and occasionally not. So it went all winter; by



PHOTOS COURTESY CAROLYN DUFURRENA

*Denio graduation, 1994. Jeanette Kretschmer, third from the left in the back row, is the lone eighth grader graduating. Jeanette went on to get an MS in mechanical engineering from the University of Nevada, Reno, and built bomb-sniffing robots for a while. BELOW: 1993-era Nevada history project. Students built a Paiute-style hut from tules which they harvested from an artesian-spring-fed meadow a few miles north of Denio School. They rode in the back of the teacher's aide's pickup and used their own pocketknives, with parental permission, to cut the reeds. The state fire marshal eventually made us tear this down. It was a fire hazard, too close to the concrete school building for safety.*



spring everyone was bursting to get outside.

The end of the semester approached, with celebrations looming. At the end of the DARE program, the deputies came out with hats, stickers and DARE-logoed pencils. The students wrote a little speech, made a poster, and we had refreshments afterwards.

Except for those who were already at the bar, Denio was too far for the parents to come for this minor ritual, especially in the middle of the busy month of May. The sheriffs said they'd bring hot dogs and orange soda for a noontime picnic. They had planned a little talk and a demonstration,

they said, for the Community Hall. We had the usual couple of dozen kids in attendance, and three teachers, including my student teacher from Winnemucca.

I asked the DARE officers what we could set up ahead of time. They needed three long tables. I wondered what they could fit in their cruiser that would take up three long tables, but I sent the older boys over to get ready. When the deputies arrived at school, we listened to the speeches, admired the posters, and then piled into the two little yellow school buses and drove over to the Community Hall.

The hall was dark and cool, in contrast to the hot spring morning. The kids filed in and sat on the floor. There before them, crammed onto the three long tables, was the most comprehensive assemblage of weaponry any of us had ever seen. Seized from evidence? Police issue? “No,” smiled friendly Deputy Mike. “These are our own weapons.” They held up the assault rifles, the semi-automatic handguns, the God-knows-what with unpronounceable foreign-sounding names—I’m not much of a gun person myself. The kids were awed.

As conversation waned, Deputy Mike looked significantly across at his colleague.

“Well,” he suggested, “let’s take these to the dump and shoot ’em!” Now I was awed—and

pretty sure I was going to lose my job. On the other hand, what were the chances that my boss would find out? And, after all, we *did* have the law on our side.

While I considered the ramifications, the kids pleaded. Finally, we loaded the little buses with a couple of those long tables, the kids piled on, and we followed the cruiser out through the sage-covered sand dunes to the Denio town dump. They set up facing a motley collection of abandoned appliances. We lined the kids up, youngest to oldest, in two neat rows behind the tables. They mostly just got to shoot the .22, one at a time, at the refrigerators.

We blazed away for a while, blowing many small holes in refrigerators and stoves, until one of the deputies inquired, “Do any

of the teachers have a gun they’d like to practice with?”

Are you kidding I thought to myself, when my student teacher smiled sweetly and said, “Why, yes, I have a forty-five.”

What? I wondered. “Where is it?” I asked her.

“Why, under the front seat of my pickup,” she said, opening the truck door and extracting a chrome-plated monster that would have made Dirty Harry jealous.

“Is it loaded?” I asked her.

“Well, of course it’s loaded. Why would I carry a gun that wasn’t loaded?”

Why indeed.

She stepped up to the mark, and loudly and efficiently destroyed the last of the television sets. I turned around to see the priceless expressions on the faces of several junior-high-age boys, known for causing a ruckus



The entire student population (13) recites at year-end program, 1995. The author’s son, sole graduate Sam Dufurrena, is in the front.

now and then. She would never have any trouble with any of them ever again.

We loaded the buses and headed back to school, where we ate all the hot dogs and drank all the orange soda. Today this would never happen in our nervous and out-of-balance world. But country kids still grow up knowing about guns, how dangerous they are, and how to use them safely. And for me, that day stands as a highlight of what law enforcement and the school system can do when they get together to educate our children. ■

*Carolyn Dufurrena taught school in Denio during the 1990s. Some of her students are now teachers. They remember this day with fondness.*



## The Seven Stages of Aging on Horseback

By Cindy Hale

**Stage 1:** Fall off pony. Bounce. Laugh. Climb back on. Repeat.

**Stage 2:** Fall off horse. Run after horse, cussing. Climb back on by shimmying up horse’s neck. Ride until sundown.

**Stage 3:** Fall off horse. Use sleeve of shirt to stanch bleeding. Have friend help you get back on horse. Take two Advil and apply ice packs when you get home. Ride next day.

**Stage 4:** Fall off horse. Refuse advice to call ambulance; drive self to urgent care clinic. Entertain nursing staff with tales of previous daredevil stunts on horseback. Back to riding before cast comes off.

**Stage 5:** Fall off horse. Temporarily forget name of horse and name of husband. Flirt shamelessly with paramedics when they arrive. Spend week in hospital while titanium pins are screwed in place. Start riding again before doctor gives official okay.

**Stage 6:** Fall off horse. Fail to see any humor when hunky paramedic says, “You again?” Gain firsthand knowledge of advances in medical technology thanks to stint in ICU. Convince self that permanent limp isn’t that noticeable. Promise husband you’ll give up riding. One week later purchase older, slower, shorter horse.

**Stage 7:** Slip off horse. Relieved when artificial joints and implanted medical devices seem unaffected. Tell husband that scrapes and bruises are due to gardening accident. Pretend you don’t see husband roll his eyes and mutter as he walks away. Give apple to horse. ■

*Cindy Hale lives in Norcal, Calif. She wrote this after she and a friend lamented about how their bodies don’t withstand the insult of getting tossed from the saddle anymore. This ran in Horse Illustrated in January 2011.*