

NEVADA

Marge Prunty, 94

I love ranching and this way of life.

For her 94th birthday, the matriarch of two of the West's oldest ranching families enjoyed a well-marbled prime rib eye for dinner. With the exception of maybe a year or so of mother's milk, Marge Bieroth Prunty has been a life-long consumer of red meat. "Beef was practically part of every meal almost every day. We raised our own, but sometimes we would break it up a bit with store-bought beef."

Marge was born Aug. 25, 1926, in Elko, Nev., already a third-generation cattle rancher. Her grandfather, Sam Bieroth, an emigrant from Germany, had started the ranching tradition in the 1880s on McDonald Creek in northern Elko County. Her father, Hugh, ranched on California Creek, a few miles from Mountain City.

"I am delighted this home ranch has been in the family for over 100 years. It's owned and run now by my nephew, Dennis [Beiroth]. My dad was the first in Nevada to introduce Black Angus cattle. Prior to that most cowboys in Nevada ran Herefords."

Mountain City became a boomtown when one of the richest copper deposits ever found happened there in the 1930s—the famous Rio Tinto mine. Demand for produce skyrocketed and her dad started a dairy.

"We kids all worked hard, before sunup milking the dairy herd and then my brother drove us to school and on the way we delivered the milk. And after school we did it again."

After attending school in Rio Tinto and graduating from Elko High School, Marge got her degree in education from the



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Grandfather Sam Bieroth and family at the McDonald Creek Ranch in the early 1920s. Marge's father, Hugh, is behind the lady in long white dress. Her mother is to Hugh's right holding Marge's brother George. Marge is still a twinkle in her daddy's eye at this point. ▶ Marge Prunty, 94 years old in August 2020, on her four-wheeler with her dog, Kip. ▶ Marge and granddaughters Kyla, left, and Becky. (Dick's daughters and heirs to the ranch.) ▶ Shorty Prunty mid-1990s. ▶ Marge and Shorty's wedding photo in 1948. ▶ Marge with sons Gary, left, and Dick.

University of Nevada in 1947. "My first teaching assignment was at the Indian reservation at Owyhee, and I still have close friends there. In fact, Indians were our favorite workers at the ranch."

It was not always work. "We loved to go to dances and they had big ones at North Fork nearly every week." She met a tall stocky cowboy at one of those dances who went by the misnomer "Shorty." Frank Prunty was another third-generation rancher and he and Marge were married on July 15, 1948, thus merging two great ranch families.

Marge and Shorty soon bought out her in-laws and took over the ranch at Charleston, Nev., which has been Marge's beloved home ranch for 72 years.

"Our first winter there was the year of 'The Great Haylift' when the Air Force dropped hay to stranded cattle. The snow and cold were terrible."

Entrepreneurs both, besides

running the ranch Shorty supplied stock for rodeos and became a major stock contractor from 1948 to 1968 while Marge educated children.

"I taught for 17 years, in Owyhee, Charleston, North Fork, Elko, and a couple of years in Jerome, Idaho. I am one of the last of the one-room schoolteachers with multiple grades in one room."

Shorty was a licensed master hunting guide and Marge was the cook. "I got up at four a.m., cooking for dozens of hunters and guides for decades." In addition to running a ranch, teaching school, and cooking for hunters and hay crews, Marge also raised two sons, Gary and Dick!

While all those jobs paid the bills, Marge's real pride and joy are the Prunty horses. Besides Hall of Fame quality rodeo stock, Prunty horses with their proven champion bloodlines are interna-

tionally known. "Our horses are in demand around the world. We

just sold one and shipped it to Italy for Heaven's sake!"

Shorty passed away in 1997 and although devastated by the loss, Marge carried on. Today the ranch remains a family operation, with son Gary and granddaughters Becky (Prunty) Lisle and Kyla (Prunty) Rianda slowly taking over its management.

Marge's contributions to the livestock industry, horse breeding and the western way of life has not gone unrecognized. She was featured in the Winter 2004 issue of *RANGE* [see "Horse Women of the Diamond A" at rangedex.com] and was grand marshal for the 2005 Silver State Stampede, Elko County's fair and rodeo.

And with a pure dash of western horse sense, Marge laughs and asks, "If red meat is supposedly so bad for you, why the hell am I still here?"

—Ira Hansen