

Gertrude "Brownie" Smith (1914 – 2004)

Gertrude "Brownie" Smith was born on May 18, 1914, in Butte, Montana to Ferdinand & Johanna (Rudder) Schmidt. Ferdinand and Johanna came to the United States from Germany. The family homesteaded land in the mountains of southwestern Montana. Brownie had two sisters: Johanna Schmidt and Hilda (Schmidt) Fox. Brownie died on July 6, 2004 at the ranch in Melrose. Brownie was a Montana Cowgirl and much, much more. Brownie married Frank Reynolds when she was 14 years old and had three sons: John, Louis and Benny Reynolds. They later divorced. In 1946 Brownie married Donald Smith, Melrose rancher, and they had two children: Donna and D.J.

During the late 40's and 50's, Don and Brownie gathered wild horses out of Hell's Canyon in the Highland Mountains south of Butte, Montana. They broke these horses and made saddle horses out of many of them, which they used on their ranch and also sold some. Also during this time they started raising Quarter Horses which they did until their deaths. Brownie's greatest love, besides her family was her horses. She loved breaking and training them, and was always mounted on a good one. She sat on a horse with regal elegance, leaving a lasting impression both visually and spiritually. She loved to ride saddle broncs but did not like riding with the hobbled stirrups. She mostly rode exhibition for \$25 a ride.

Brownie worked with horses all of her life. She carried Old glory for 30 years during the grand entry of the Labor Day Rodeo in Dillon. She also rode in a side-saddle posse for many years, a vision you would never forget, dressed in a long black skirt and jacket, black hat with a big pink plume and riding side-saddle. She was also the Jaycee Parade Grand Marshall in 1986. Brownie was a friend, neighbor and mentor, and symbolized what the west is all about.

She amplified the pioneer spirit of the American west. A normal day for her started early with chores, milking cows, separating the milk, cooking breakfast, tidying the house and off to the hayfield to top out a stack or to the calving sheds to pull a calf, or moving cattle, depending on the time of the year. She was a great cook and it didn't take her long to whip up a wonderful meal. She was also a seamstress, making the boys their western shirts and dresses for her daughter. She loved to have folks come visit and always had something for them to eat. Brownie was loved, admired, and respected by everyone who knew her, and over the years made many friends in the state of Montana and beyond.

Brownie never thought of herself as being special, but she was. She was very humble, very sincere, honest, truthful, always thinking of others, never complaining. She had a beautiful smile and gave great hugs which are really missed by her family. Even after Brownie had cancer, went through chemo and radiation twice, she never gave up. Always thinking about what she could be doing, should be doing, until her death at 90. Brownie was a tough lady with a heart of gold. A real Cowgirl to the end!