

Walter Benjamin Holland

Walt Holland is a third generation Montana native having been born May 24, 1923 in Helena to William and Edna (Brown) Holland. He was the fourth child in a family of six sons and one daughter. Walt's father, William Holland, was raised at Holland Lake, north of Seeley Lake, where his family lived off trapping and breaking and selling horses they found in the mountains of northwest Montana. They made a few trips to town each year, the nearest towns being Helmville and Ovando. So Walt's father and grandfather had been making at least part of their living from working with horses clear back into the late 1800s. Walt's mother was Edna (Brown) Holland, and little history of her and family has been handed down through the generations. She had family throughout Western Montana. Two of Walt's uncles made their living for a few years traveling across Montana, stopping in local bars and betting the locals they could ride the roughest bronc they had, double. One of the uncles was killed, however, when he was kicked by a bronc as he got bucked off. The family wasn't close, and not exactly traditional, so there are a few stories and legends, but little is known about Walt's family. Montana Magazine did an article many years ago about Walt's Grandfather and Holland Lake. Early Montana survey crews lived at the Holland ranch while surveying northwest Montana. Walt's education with horses began with the ones he rode every morning and every afternoon, herding milk cows from the family home on Villard Street back and forth every day to a pasture near the County Fairgrounds (at that time it was the State Fairgrounds). Walt's father owned racehorses for much of the time while Walt was growing up. Walt didn't finish high school and tried to enlist in the Army when WWII broke out, but though he lied about his age, the Army wouldn't believe him. The copper mines in Butte weren't so diligent about checking ages, however, so he began working in the mines when he was 16. Finally, when he was almost 18, the Navy took him, and sent him off to boot camp. He never learned to swim, supposedly a requirement to join the Navy, but it was wartime, and he spent much of WWII on the USS California. The Navy trained Walt as an electrician, and his job was to attend to the big guns as they were firing, as they constantly required electrical repairs. In 1946, Walt married Laurene Miller, and they were married until 1981. He later married Nora Jerome, and they were married until her death in 2006. He has a daughter, Judy, a son, Mike and one grandson and three granddaughters. After the war, Walt worked at a number of jobs before finding work with his other passion, cars. The Helena Ford dealer hired him in 1947 as a Partsman, and by the late 1950s he was Sales Manager and a part owner of Capital Motors. In 1957, he broke off from Capital Motors and opened Helena's first Used Car Lot, Holland Auto Sales, where he sold cars, trucks, horse trailers, and you name it for 25 years. The lot became a place to hang out for farmers in the winter, cowboys between rodeos, and friends from out of town stopping by for a visit. It's where Walt gained hundreds of close friends. A handful might have bought cars and trucks from him, but he bought them all lunch regardless. In the early 1950s, Walt leased a ranch in the McClellan Creek/Crystal Creek area and bought a couple horses. He learned to rope calves, and in the mid 1950s began rodeoing. In 1959, Walt bought a small ranch in the Helena Valley, where he trained a lot of rope horses and

bulldogging horses, along with a lot of young ropers and bulldoggers. Just like his car lot, the ranch on Floweree Drive was a hangout for anyone that wanted to talk about horses, until he sold the ranch in 1997. Through the 1960s and 1970s, the ranch was a popular stopping point for rodeo cowboys traveling between the summer rodeos in Calgary, Cheyenne, Helena and Great Falls. Soon after the arena was built in the early 1960s, the Holland ranch was the place where ropers and bulldoggers spent their summer evenings, practicing and having a good time. By the mid 1970s, Walt was teaching dozens of girls to rope and many became very good ropers. One had a successful run at the National High School Finals Rodeo, riding one of Walt's horses. Many were successful ropers and bulldoggers in the Montana rodeo circuits, High School Rodeos and College Rodeos. Walt was also active in producing rodeos. When it had gone broke, he took on the job of producing the annual high school rodeo for south central Montana, and turned it into a successful organization again. He did this even though his daughter had already graduated from high school and his son had not yet reached high school age. He helped put on the Helena rodeo, and was a fixture at the time event chutes for many years. He was Co-Chairman of the Last Chance Stampede in Helena. He also helped the local girls put on the All Girl Rodeo held in the early evenings before the Stampede. Walt always had the best hay fields, his white fences always had fresh paint, and his ranch was a showcase in the Helena valley. There was no limit to his energy, and he wasn't one to sit and watch television. After retiring from the car business in 1982, Walt found he didn't have enough to do. He had always shod his own horses, and shod horses for a few friends, but at the tender young age of 62, he started shoeing horses professionally. Pretty soon, he was averaging 8 horses a day, which is a lot of work for a young Farrier, let alone a man in his 60s. He became known as the "go to" farrier for rodeo people, and while almost all other shoers travel to their customers, he was so talented and well respected the owners had to bring their horses to him. He was forced to stop shoeing at the age of 72 due to heart problems. Throughout his life, Walt has been the neighbor you called when you needed help moving cows, putting up hay, repairing your 4-wheeler, or just an ear to listen to your troubles. He never turned anyone down. Even in his late 80s, he's still often on his horse helping move cows for a friend, or crawling on the ground fixing their swather. Now his old friends are returning the favor. There are a handful of people who jump at the chance to feed his horses if he's gone, or put up his hay if he's ill. Though they loved him dearly, his grandkids were reluctant to go Christmas shopping with Walt. He couldn't walk twenty feet through the mall without stopping to visit with a neighbor or old friend. A few minutes of shopping involved hours of shooting the breeze. It's difficult to honor someone who has spent most their life helping others, but In January, 2012, Walt received the Heritage Award from the Montana Pro Rodeo Hall and Wall of Fame. It was one of his proudest moments and a long time coming.