

John S. Slaughter

By Ronnie McFadden

John Saul Slaughter was born in Hockerville, Oklahoma on June 9, 1918, to James and Molly Slaughter. He was one of seven children. Growing up he attended school in Aurora, Missouri. For fun he rode the plow mules around the farm that weren't really broke to ride.

Not much is known about his life in Missouri before he made his way out to California. He often told the story of how he modified his car to run on Kerosene instead of the gasoline that was being rationed due to the War. He drove that car to CA.

On June 21, 1943 he married Normalee Olive Gray (also from Aurora, MO), in Santa Rosa, CA. Her aunt and uncle had a large cattle ranch outside of Santa Rosa that could only be reached by riding horses in.

He joined the Army in June of 1944 and was stationed in Florida. He had such bad allergies, even to



John Slaughter – LA County Sheriff Posse

the woolen uniforms, that he was giving a medical discharge Feb 24, 1945. After that, he worked at the Mare Island Naval Shipyards in Vallejo, CA. He then made his way down to Southern California and became a sheet metal mechanic, eventually opening his own shop in Los Angeles in 1960.

Their daughter Sharon was born in 1946 and son Jim came along in 1949. He bought a house in Altadena on an acre of land and soon built a small barn for horses. Sharon remembers her first horse was named Queenie. He and Normalee

were also active in their church, Westminster Presbyterian Church in Pasadena, where Normalee would become a preschool teacher for many years.

His love for horses took over all his free time. He became a member of the Los Angeles County Sheriff Department's Mounted Posse. He also started a small riding club for kids that gave city kids a chance to ride and learn about horses. By the early 1970's he had a dozen and a half horses and rented a stable in Altadena where the kids could come and play and learn all about horses. He would take them out on trail rides in the Arroyo Seco Canyon.

In the late 1950's he started going to the High Sierras on trips where he would pack in friends and acquaintances as well as some of those city kids. His favorite place to go was the old Sam Lewis Pack Station at the mouth of Haiwee Canyon. The reason he liked that area so well was that the trail up into the high country was non-motorized only. Just horses and hikers. He made several trips a year and had many hunters who came back to him year after year to be packed up into that beautiful country.

After Sam Lewis and his family quit packing, the lease was taken over by a few others and in 1967 the lease once again became available and John grabbed it. The pack station was renamed "The Sierra Lady Pack Station" and the lease remained in his possession until the Forest Service revoked all the leases in the area to return the land to a designated Wilderness Area. The cabin on the desert had burned down in the Fall of 1973, just a few months before the lease ended. The cause of the fire in the unoccupied cabin was never discovered. The three cabins in the high country associated with the lease were burned by the US Forest Service. John always thought it was a shame that those sturdy, historic log cabins weren't reserved for needy hikers or riders who may need shelter.

After the pack station days ended, John kept leasing places for his horses. Kids kept adopting them and by 1990 or so he no longer had any horses. But they remained in his heart until the day he died.

In 2003 I (Roni McFadden-one of "those kids" who went on the work for John for seven years.) organized a reunion at the now deserted desert site for some of those kids and John's family. Most had not seen each other in over thirty years. John and Normalee came barreling up that rutted dirt road in their motor home and for three days the stories around the campfire took everyone back to those glorious, carefree, hot, dusty days spent at the Sam Lewis/Sierra Lady Pack Station.

In April of 2007, John's beloved Normalee passed away and we once again gathered there, this time to say farewell to her. John was mounted on his iron horse (scooter) and stories once again stirred our memories.

The last time I visited John Slaughter was the occasion of his 96th birthday. I had written a book about him and the pack station and wanted to present it to him. We visited for several hours and then I left, knowing in my heart it would be the last time I saw him. Before I left, he made me promise that when he died, I would take him back to that place he loved so much.

John Saul Slaughter passed away peacefully Nov 23, 2014. On April 22, 2018, I kept my promise and took him home to the "pack station" and turned him over to the spirits of the desert and mountains.



John Slaughter on Zorro



Roni McFaden & John Slaughter



John Slaughter