

# Don Colard points to hard work as key to longevity

## Celebrates his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday

by Kathleen Spring

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If you love to hear tales of the early days of bronco busting, running away from home at 15 to work on a ranch, and pranks with elementary school friends, then you need to meet Don Colard. Even at 90, his sharp memory recalls in depth tales of early Lyons.

Driving around town, you might see Don putting up his ladder to trim up some tree branches that are irritating him because of their length, or because an elderly widow needed some help with her fruit trees. Or, go out to his 20 acres of former grazing land near town, and at 5:30 a.m. you can find him pulling out noxious weeds and brush for a few hours before coming inside for lunch. And, many claim he has the best ear and talent for guitar music of any senior in the area.

His early years in Lyons were no less ambitious. It may be due to the fact that his parents Annie and Arthur Colard, who came to Lyons in 1917, brought up three girls and eight boys. There was a lot of rough-housing and competition going on among the athletic boys. His dad was a rancher and taught them everything he knew, which led to many of Don's early jobs.

To show just a snippet of Don's remarkable memory, ask him what he did when he was 15 years old, and he will detail for you every job he took on and where he stayed over the next three years. It was the Depression, and his parents were having a hard time, which caused an uncomfortable home life. Rather than stick it out and graduate from Silverdale school on the Little Thompson, he ran away from home, with his brother Vernon.

The boys went through Estes Park, not knowing where they would settle. They had hoped to join their oldest brother who was working on a dairy; but Clare could not help them. He bought them some clothes and gave them a couple of meals, and sent them off. They went over Trail Ridge to Granby, and ended up in Grand Junction working for farmers. They did some weeding and were referred from farm to farm. Their final stop for the rest of summer was an irrigated farm.

They ended up in the fall, and for the next year, working near Raton, New Mexico. His brother eventually got a job at the local dairy, and when school started Don started pedaling milk.

"The owner said to me, I don't think you need me around here," said Don, "and I thought what's he talking about? His dad and him went off west for the native hay, taking it to New Mexico for mules for the coal mines. I was left on the cow ranch, 12 head of cows, milking twice a day, for a year. Come spring I hooked up six head of horses and put in the crops. He never offered me anything for the extra work. And, I got tired of his wife's cooking, so I left."

He returned to Colorado at 18 years of age to work on his dad's place. But he kept the wild life in him by riding broncos and bulls at the stock shows, including Denver Stock Show, until he was 24 and went into the military service

“I’ve been riding rodeos since I was 15 years old,” said Don. “I’d often ride three horses in three days. In those days, no one had a sponsor. You had to find your own money to go to the shows.”

In the late 1930s, when he was around 20, he used this experience to work in stables in Estes Park including the Dunraven and Columbine Lodge. He took care of the horses and worked as a trail guide.

At 24 years old, the military took him to Texas, Mississippi, California and the Pacific Islands. In late 1945, his troops were sent to Japan as occupational troops after World War II.

“When I got back, all the girls I knew were already married,” said Don. “I was working in Denver, and my sister introduced me to Betty Johnson, who was working with her. We were married for 30 years.” Their two kids, Linda and Debra, live in Longmont.

After leaving Denver, he worked on the Buckhorn tunnel, near Grand Lake, and Prospect tunnel, near Estes Park. Then, it was back to the ranch for Don. He joined his oldest newly married brother, Clare, on the family ranch. Their granddad had bought it in 1925, and sold it to their dad in 1942, and then Clare bought it. When people talk about Lyons’ history, Clare’s name is often brought up. Brother Jerry was working on the lower ranch, which was part of the family holdings since 1917. The family had moved on it, from Denver, when Don was six months old.

Don was in the cattle business from 1949 to 1957. It was hard to get feed, so he worked days on construction and nights on the farm crops, often until midnight. He eventually had to leave, even though he had equipment loans that he still would have to pay off.

After he left, he worked on a series of jobs that used his mechanical abilities, which included insulating through a firm in Denver and then automotive mechanic. Next he worked for John Deere, Longmont, as a truck driver going cross country, and repairing equipment and rebuilding combines.

“My brothers Vern and Ray had a saw mill in Estes Park, and then Vern moved it to Lyons,” said Don “I had started out with only a little hand saw, but then I learned how to run a chain saw. We had piles of wood as big as this house. Trees in Pinewood Springs were three to four feet in diameter.”

In 1960, he found permanent work at Rocky Flats as a chemical processing operator, which he later found out was a more dangerous job than he was told. He remained there for 18 years, earning college credit for numerous advanced classes he voluntarily took for his job.

Once he settled into this office job, music played a big part in his life. Chris Jenkins, an important man in the Lyons sandstone history, played along Don on his guitar. Three different fiddlers join them across the years. In his retirement, he has played at senior centers as far away as Dacona and Ft. Collins. Don continues to play the guitar and harmonica with the Golden Gang band at the monthly birthday celebrations

One of Don's favorite jobs was raising his grandson Lonnie Billings. When Lonnie grew up and took on an United Parcel Service (UPS) job, lifting packages, he was unimpressed by his co-workers. Don relates that Lonnie told them, "I'm going to bring my granddad in and show you guys how to work."

Out of the 11 siblings, only Don and his brother Ray, now in Ft. Collins, remain. Clare's wife Mary helped clean up the Lyons cemetery and start the association, also working on the Historical Society, which brought the family name into prominence. Don was named Mr. Good Old Days this year.

When an old friend stops by, they will find his home spotless, and his yard, which has impressive specimens of Lyons sandstone, is also well kept. Even at 90, Don keeps himself in fit shape, still having a cowboy's lean muscular body. He never eats desert. He welcomes friends to have a seat, and with a little encouragement, he will start on a tale, which they will likely long remember.

"My oldest brother Clare bought and sold horses. At sales you can get some bad ones, and some were green that nobody wanted to break," begins Don.

"It didn't take long for him (Clare) to realize that I had something with breaking horses that he didn't have. He'd leave it to me, and then come and say, 'Well, you got that one going? Well, ride it up because I think I've got it sold.' I'd go through Pinewood Springs to Estes Park.

"One horse he wanted to sell cheap to this lady. I think my brother was a little scared of him because he was a well-built horse. I took him for a long ride; and then, I told him, you don't want to sell this horse for that money. Ride him first. That's one good horse. He and some others rode him, and they had to agree with me."