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Cows And Creativity



From left to right, Back row Dean, Karl, Larry. Front row. Dori, Emily, Anna

"In the beginning, 35 years ago, my husband Larry and I set out to build up a herd of commercial cows," says Emilie Mattson of Rolla, in BC's Peace River country.

"Little did we know at the time how demanding, yet how rich, our lives would become over the years. We now run about 200 to 230 head of breeding cows while also juggling a varied range of other interests and activities; children, grandchildren, community events and my artistic projects. Life is never dull here!!"

"Our grown sons, Dean, age 32, and Karl, age 28, both live here on the ranch as well, along with their partners and children. Larry keeps the ranching part of our lives on track," Mattson explains. "The rest of us, I must confess, sometimes have a few different things on our agendas! We have evolved into an eclectic group of five artists who, although we come from the same location, creatively express ourselves very differently. We consider ourselves 'country folk' and our day to day life experiences are expressed in our work."

Emilie Mattson, age 55, paints in oils, plus creates some very innovative mixed media sculptures. Her work has grown and evolved considerably since she was first featured in Beef in B.C. in 1992.

Since 1990 she has had her work in 18 various group shows, from the Peace area to central B.C. to Vancouver and Victoria and is becoming well respected in the arts community.

In 1996 she was commissioned to create a 13 x 117 foot wall mural at the Rolla Community Hall and in 2001 was selected to create a worker's memorial sculpture, co-sponsored by the city of Dawson Creek and CUPE Local 2403.

Several of her works have been selected for permanent gallery collections and she has also been asked to jury or adjudicate art shows.

Emilie Mattson grew up in the McBride area and was just 20 years old when she and her husband Larry moved to Rolla and took up cattle ranching.

She had always had a strong interest in art and in 1994, at age 40, decided to build her large Sweetwater Studio on the ranch, doing much of the carpentry work herself, with the help of son Dean.

Dean's partner Dori Braun says of the studio, "This is a very well used space, especially in the winter months. There is always someone working on their latest art project or the children busy drawing or playing with clay."

Along with his carpentry skills, Dean Mattson paints in acrylics and is also a recognized local singer/songwriter. Growing up he worked with his dad planting crops, harvesting and caring for the livestock. He started drawing as a child and at age twenty attended Emily Carr School of the Arts in Vancouver, then returned to the Rolla area and began to paint powerful, boldly coloured pictures. Dean's paintings have been shown in several art galleries in northern B.C. and there are always many people anxious to see and purchase his latest creation! He has also recently been building old-fashioned furniture using wood he salvages from old buildings and barns in the area. Dean is also a member of the Peace River

Blossom On MATTSON RANCH



Top: Pale horse painting. Mixed media painting. By Karl Mattson.
Left: Black & Brown ornate lamps with tassel shades. Wheelthrown and handbuilt lamp bases with antique tins attached as shades. By Dori Braun



"Dance, Dance", Fired clay, 12" x 15" x 15" by Emilie Mattson



"Denim & Bangles", Fired clay, 12" x 10" x 16" by Emilie Mattson



"Man Under Tree", acrylic on canvas, 16" x 48" by Dean Mattson

Songwriters Association and along with his brother Karl write and perform songs that are filled with vivid images and stories of their experiences growing up and living this northern rural area.

Karl is a musician plus a visual artist who works in oil and tar on canvas and does mixed media sculpture. He works as a tree planter in the summer and is his father's 'right-hand man' during calving season on the ranch. An avid canoeist, he has paddled the Coppermine River as far north as the Arctic Ocean!

Karl's partner, Anna Strapko, expresses her creative talents through working with stained glass and, more recently, with recycled glass. She has spent the last 9 summers as an educator for the Dawson Creek recycling plant.

Dean's partner, Dori Braun, arrived in the Peace River area in the spring of 1962 as a small baby when her parents moved their family of six children there from Swift Current, Sask.

She says, "We homesteaded on a quarter section, south of Pouce Coupe and my dad built a 12 x 8 foot cabin we lived in for the first four years." Braun became interested in pottery while still a child, taking her first course at Northern Lights College as soon as she was old enough. She says, "Many courses and three years later I was teaching pottery! I have since taught pottery to adults and children, for the past twenty years, and last year I decided to take a break from teaching pottery so that I might focus more directly on my own art work and family."

"We are also home-schooling some our children and being surrounded with the other artistic people who live and work here on the ranch, makes this a very supportive environment. I create and sell conventional dishware and also some very unique items like drums, flutes, mirrors and sculptures. One of my latest and most popular creations is a wheel thrown lamp base onto which I attach antique tins as lampshades."



"The Outfitters", oil, 24" x 36" by Emilie Mattson

Braun is also a musician/singer/songwriter and is a founding member of the Peace River Songwriters Association, which meets every second Tuesday in Dawson Creek. "I write and perform my own songs, which are stories of life in northern B.C. Three years ago I was chosen as a delegate by the B.C. Festival of the Arts to attend their songwriting workshop in Nelson, B.C."

"Dean and Karl Mattson, and myself, produced our first CD together two years ago entitled Rolla Unincorporated. Currently I am working on material for a solo CD"

"This is a farming community we live in and my songs are how I express my experience of this lifestyle; its joys and trials are the things that inspire me!"

"Our Peace River Songwriters

Association is comprised of talented local songwriters and musicians who contribute many different styles and genres of music. Our members meet every second Tuesday night at the Kiwanis Arts Centre in Dawson Creek. They offer support and encouragement to each other and work at understanding and honing the fine art of songwriting. The Association has close ties to the community and, as a group of singly, they are often to be found performing for local charities or community functions."

A compilation CD with original songs from many of the members is in the planning stage, and some of the members are presently working on or planning to record CDs for release or demos. New members are always welcome and more information can be obtained by calling Linda at (250) 843-2345. You can visit their website at www.geocities.com/prsongwritersassoc or phone Dori Braun at (250) 759-4316 or email: pottery88@hotmail.com. Anyone interested in contacting Emilie Mattson or any of the members of her family can call her at (250) 759-4552 or write to her at: P.O. Box 123, Rolla, B.C. V0C 2G0.

Susan Zais