



Harriet “Harry” Lou Shields – 3rd Grade Teacher, Camel Collector

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Camels on display at the Heritage Village!

Courtesy of Harry Lou Shields, who has been collecting camels for 20 years, about one-fifth of her long, energetic life. She turned 94 last month, on Oct. 28, which in 1919 was the day the National Prohibition Act was passed by Congress, banning “intoxicating beverages.”

Sitting in the display room of the Heritage Village, she looks kindly to her daughter Carol, surrounded by camels of every kind and from every corner of the world, including the Holy Land, of course, and the Czech Republic, Russia, Uruguay, Greece, India and Egypt (Heritage-Village.org),



“We had to scratch our money to get enough to ride the ferry to cross the river and see my grandparents in Woodville,” Harry Lou said. “No bridge between Jasper and Woodville back then.” One snippet of a century of memories of family and friends.

“My mother’s family was in Jasper, my father’s in Woodville,” she said. “So I grew up between the two counties.”

On the way back to Jasper, one descended the “bluff” at Town Bluff to board the ferry. The old Model T’s brakes were not known for reliability, and caution was merited. Sometimes a car could not stop and entered the lake. One ended up in a tree.

In Jasper, her grandfather Thomas Edwin Stone was a doctor who made house calls on horseback before the turn of the 20th century. He charged 25 cents to deliver a baby. The hitching post he tied his horse to stands in front of her house in Woodville, only these days a four-foot nativity camel is tied to it.

“We need to put a coat of paint on the camel,” Harry Lou said.

Content and thankful, her daughter Carol helps.

Growing up in the Great Depression, they learned to save and repurpose everything. They had seven storage buildings behind their home, filled with stuff “collected” from all over, an American Pickers haven. In the 1930s, a gallon of gas was 10 cents, a loaf of bread 5 to 8 cents, a head of lettuce 7 cents, a dozen eggs 18 cents. A 16 oz. steak ... 20 cents.

Electricity and running water – they did not have.

“It was a nice place to live. Everybody had a hard time.” But Harry Lou could not recall any of the bad times.

Her father was next to the oldest of 15 brothers and sisters, and his youngest brother was Myra Griffin’s father, and Myra is the mother of Leeza Blanchette, wife of Tyler County Judge Jacques Blanchette. There were cousins and family everywhere.

Harry Lou started at Texas Women’s University, majoring in library science, but changed to elementary education at SFA. She met James W. Shields while teaching in Magnolia Springs. They married in 1953, but he passed too young in 1970.

She taught 3rd grade for 42 years in Vidor, Newton, Kirbyville, Magnolia Springs, and the last 30 in Woodville.

The little children were so precious, and she loved doing things for them. She like to make Gingerbread cookies from a recipe handed down from her great-great-great-grandmother.

“I would bring the icing so the kids could ice their own cookies,” she said. “But, one day, a little girl had an upset tummy. So she stayed inside while all the rest of us went outside for recess. When we returned, someone had eaten all the heads off of the Gingerbread cookies.”

Maybe 40 years ago, the Tyler County Sheriff informed her it was time to wash her car. When she arrived, low



and behold, she had taught all of them in the 3rd grade, all of the jail prisoners, all of the staff, and all of deputies, including the sheriff.

Many of the memories run together, but from her kindly smile it was evident she had them all tucked away in her big heart.

She taught Citizen State Bank President Trey Allison in the 3rd grade, she recalled with a smile. “He was so long-legged. The kids had chairs that scooted to their desks, yet Trey’s chair was always tilted back. His chair would never stay down.... He’s a nice guy.”

“I remember George Jarrott,” she said, then paused. “Ahh ... I better not tell.”

She retired in 1984, took a month-long cruise to Alaska, then began work at the Allan Shivers Library and Museum, working with Wana Witson for 13 years. She still frequents the library and is good friends with Rosemary Bunch.

Lately, as the 50th anniversary of the assassination of JFK was memorialized, Wayne Smith remembered Harry Lou informing their 3rd grade class in 1963.

Though she has collected English Toast Racks, Santa Clauses, and Frozen Charlottes, her passion settled on camels almost by chance.

Her youngest daughter, Cynthia, died of cancer in 1991. She had married a Palestinian, Victor Rukab, and Vic liked camels. When Cynthia died, Vic returned to Florida.

One day while in a store, and thinking about Vic, she came across a bronze Middle Eastern camel candle holder. She had to have it. It was her first and favorite (she is holding it in the photo). Thus began her collection and admiration of camels and everything about them.

At the Heritage Village display, one can see camels made into lamps, stitched into a handbag, woven onto pillows, and formed into clocks, vases, toys, stuffed animals, pin cushions and salt and pepper shakers. Embossed on soap, fired into dinner plates and tiles, and blown into glass decanters. They are made of and into almost everything. A pencil set. Book of matches. A framed cover of the New Yorker. A camel caravan is pictured across the bottom of a 1 oz. can of Russian Caravan Tea.

Harry Lou loves everything about camels. From the single-humped Dromedary or Arabian camel, to the rarer and slightly larger double-humped Bactrian camel of Mongolia and Turkestan, they carried trade over the famous silk roads. Their large eye brows protect their eyes, and they can close their nostrils in sand storms. If you need a camel, say, for a church nativity, you can call the Texas Camel Corp at 254-675-HUMP (TexasCamelCorps.com).

Oh, look there, a grey T-shirt has a camel saying, “Woot! Woot!” below the bold letters of “Hump Day,” from the viral and hilarious Geico commercial.



Famously conservative, they have the unique ability to fluctuate their body temperature to conserve water. Normally they need water every 10 to 15 days, or every 4 to 7 days when it is very hot. They can consume several gallons a minute, rehydrating very fast. Closely knit arteries and veins allowing greater blood flow to cool their heads, pumped from their huge 11-pound hearts.

Look – what young boy years ago would be without a can of Camel Tube Patch? “The World’s Best,” they advertised.

Why? Because camels are tough and rugged.

The secret to living long?

“I do what the doctor tells me to do,” she said. “Drink one glass of sherry of every day ... for my circulation. The doctor said it was okay.”

Yes, camels are tough, rugged conservatives with very big hearts – just like Harry Lou.

