



Pictured above are Mildred Peters, left, and Jaycie Del Bosque, both of Priddy.

# Mildred Peters

**By Jaycie Del Bosque**

Throughout the last four years, my utmost aspiration in life has been to become the first person in my family to attend and graduate from a four-year university. Following this ambition, I intend to pursue a career as an educator for kindergarten through eighth grades, with a special attention to English at a junior high level. I would also like to explore the options of teaching high school level Spanish and journalism/yearbook.

These goals have driven me to always do my best in my scholastic endeavor. I have participated in sports, maintained a high GPA and the position of salutatorian of my graduating class, been a member of the National Honor Society for the last three years, competed in all levels of academic UIL, and participated in many other activities and organizations throughout my time at Priddy ISD. Upon my recent acceptance to Tarleton State University, I am now tremendously closer to achieving my goals; however, my financial struggle is a significant hindrance to my desire of receiving a good college education.

With a deceased father, I am only able to rely on my mother and my sister, Jackie, for parental care; yet, even though Jackie takes care of me, only my mom provides financial support for me. In addition, my mom suffers from Parkinson's disease, and has been physically unable to work

for several years. For this reason, we depend on her monthly disability checks and my monthly supplemental social security check as our sole sources of steady income.

Unfortunately, the government assistance we receive only covers our regular living costs. In order to pay for my other expenses and the dual-credit courses I am currently taking, I earn extra money by working a weekend job as a waitress and dishwasher at the Priddy Store.

Therefore, my mother and I are greatly depending on scholarship opportunities to help pay for my collegiate expenses. In applying for the Mills County Historical Commission Scholarship I have learned so much about my hometown and county's history and the amazing story of a woman who has lived here all her life, Mildred Peters. Like it is to Mildred, Mills County has always been my home, and I hope that I will be teaching in one of its schools in the near future. I have very much enjoyed my experience in applying for this scholarship, and it would be a true honor to be selected for it.

My entire life I have known a woman named Mildred Peters. To me, Mildred has always been the woman who owns the Service Feed Mill in Priddy, the grandmother of one of my oldest friends and classmates, Walker Peters, the mother-in-law of my favorite teacher, Victoria Peters, and one of my bosses at the Priddy Store, where I work as a dishwasher and server. While I get along quite well with Mildred and enjoy working for her, I must admit that I have never known much more about her life than what could be found in a short biography online. It was not until I conducted this interview that I learned what an extraordinary woman she truly is as we discussed the long, happy, and successful life she has led in our hometown of Priddy, Texas.

Mildred Hohertz Peters was born in 1939 and raised in Mills County. She attended school at Priddy ISD and graduated in 1956 as salutatorian of her class; she met her now-deceased husband, John Peters, in 1955, during her junior year of high school. Throughout her life in Priddy, she has helped raise and manage several businesses, including her own Service Feed Mill, established in 1995, Tri-County Supply, the Peters family's trucking company, and the Priddy Store. She is also a committee member of both the Zion Lutheran Church and Herman Sons Lodge Hall. With the exception of a mere four years, she has spent her whole life in Priddy. Based on her detailed memories of the town's landscape and school in past years, her active involvement in all aspects of Priddy, and her insightful opinions about the Priddy community as a whole, I believe that she knows the town better than anyone.

As we discussed her childhood in Priddy, Mildred offered many fascinating stories about how the town used to look. She told me that there used to be four grocery stores, two garages, a barber shop, a drug store, the post office, and a bank in Priddy. I even learned that her grandparents once owned the home that my family lived in until I was three, and stayed there with them from time to time when she was a little girl. I could not believe how much the town has changed!

"There was also a drive-in here when I was in high school," Mildred reminisced. "It was behind the school where the fire department is now. But, when I was really little they [the owners of the drive-in] came as a tent show and put a tent up right behind one of the grocery stores. They would be here for a couple of weeks, and we all went to watch the movies in the summer. Then, there was also a drive-in and a theater in Goldthwaite, and a theater in Comanche."

Additionally, she told me of a small restaurant in Priddy called Aunt Lou's Café where she worked in high school - "Much like you do now at the store," she added with a smile. The café was just where Kevin Hohertz' Triple H Automotive is now, and behind it was a boarding house, where the owner of the café allowed single men and women without homes to stay and dine. It comforts me to know that Priddy has always been a caring community where people do whatever they can to help each other.

Moreover, Mildred and I also talked about what Priddy's school was like when she was younger. Overall, the size of the student body has not changed very much since she was in high school. According to Mildred, even then, people always said the school would eventually shut down, yet it is still going strong almost 58 years after she graduated. However, our school's sports have certainly changed over the years.

Mildred said when she was in school everyone loved to play basketball, of course - though Priddy's original gym was not built until 1948. She mentioned the school also had volleyball then, but it did not have cross country or track; instead athletes played softball. Also, between 1955 and 1960, Priddy had football. The era of Pirate football was short-lived, however, because students too often were injured and became unable to work in the fields picking cotton and shucking corn. "Over the years," Mildred mentioned, "people talked about bringing it back, but no one ever really wanted it."

In addition to those sports that seem so alien to me, Priddy students also used to perform three-act plays, in which Mildred had leading roles for three out of her four years of high school.

As Mildred and I further examined the school and community of Priddy, I asked her if she disapproved of any changes that have occurred in it in the time she has lived in Mills County. While she believes that Priddy has remained a well-grounded community overall, she is saddened by the fact that children now are less involved in community and church-related activities. She believes that, when these sorts of activities declined in importance to our community, children began to lose a definite sense of morality, and alcohol and drugs came into play more and more as time progressed.

"When I was young, our parents would let us do things at the church or at the school," Mildred defined her options for social activities during her childhood. "Everyone my age sang in the choir at church because we could go to choir practice. We participated in Luther League, which was a youth group, social group, where we played games and had fun, and play practice because our parents would let us go to those things. But now, kids get to do many other things

that they don't want to participate in activities like that. We were out in the field working, otherwise, so school and church activities were privileges to us."

While some priorities have changed over time, I personally believe that Priddy is still a good, welcoming town for families to come to. My own family came here approximately 25 years ago from Dublin, and some of my older siblings that were troublemakers settled down and became well-behaved individuals as they became more involved in school activities. I have also observed that transfer students that come to Priddy usually end up fitting in much better socially than they did at their previous schools. I asked Mildred for her opinion on why she believes that Priddy is the right place for families and their children to accomplish these things.

"I think a lot of confidence comes to new students in Priddy because the school is much smaller than others, and they get more personal attention than what they had in larger schools," Mildred answered. "The teacher/child ratio is much smaller, and it helps them learn. Also, in Priddy, students just get to know everyone. The high school kids know all of the elementary kids, while in bigger schools students don't know anyone outside of their own classes. I just think that bigger schools don't offer that chance for children of different age groups to mingle like we do here."

Following that, I asked Mildred for what other reasons she considered Mills County a good place for people to raise their families. We talked about the security factor that Mills County has to offer. After living in Dallas for a short time, Mildred and her husband, John, believed that Priddy was the best and safest place to raise their children, and she still feels that it will always be the safest place for her family. In addition, she believes that, what makes the county the perfect place for families is that people develop lifelong friendships and always help each other - especially in time of need and struggles, but in general as well.

Early in their adulthood, Mildred and John raised three children, Ellen, Wesley, and Stuart, in Priddy. All are now very successful mechanical and agricultural businesses and activities and have raised their own children to participate in these activities, too. I asked Mildred why she believed that living in Mills County has helped her children thrive in these two fields.

"Well, they were all raised on farms and ranches," Mildred replied. "Johnny taught them mechanical things all the time. He took them out to the shop, and they all built motors and engines together. Johnny was very mechanically-inclined, and that's the way they all are now. Even Ellen was more mechanically-inclined than she was in things such as literature. She went to school at TSTI for machine shop and graduated from there because she had been raised working with things like that all her life."

As we talked more and more, I became mesmerized with the life Mildred has led in Priddy. It amazed me how much she knew about our town's history, and I wondered how she has managed to stay so actively involved in our community in her 75 years.

When I asked her if she thought she would ever get tired of being so involved, she chuckled and said, "Well, I'm getting older, but I have worked with the public all my life. I have worked in Hamilton, Goldthwaite, Comanche, and Brownwood. I have always been involved with people, and I like it; I don't like to stay at home by myself. While I don't physically do that much, I am always talking to farmers and ranchers, and I always have at all of my jobs. If I had to stay at home, I would probably go into depression without anyone to talk to."

While we were talking about work, I asked Mildred if she thought our county's small size has ever harmed anyone's life economically. It was hard for Mildred to think of even one disadvantage, but the only drawback she came up with was the lack of job availability. People generally have to look outside of the county to find work, and she wishes that we could have more industry for that reason. Nevertheless, everyone has become accustomed to this slight inconvenience and has no problem working outside the county; it is merely regarded as a manageable fact of small-town life.

Finally, as my last question for Mildred, I asked her if she would ever consider leaving Mills County.

In the most unhesitant and definite tone I have ever heard, she answered, "No. I have lived in San Saba and Dallas for a few years, and I couldn't wait to get home. When we were living in Dallas, Johnny said, 'I'm going back to Priddy. Are you coming with me?' He wasn't even raised here, but he wanted to come back to Priddy. He said people were nicer here than in Dallas. He was much more determined to come back here than I was. Overall, I really don't have anything that I don't like about always living here. Here it has always been more family-oriented than everyone going their own way; everyone sticks together. It has just been good all my life. I would never want to go anywhere else, and I'm glad that all of my children and grandchildren are here now."

Honestly, I have occasionally viewed the four ends of Priddy as the walls of a very small house that no one can ever leave, and even if people do leave, they are never gone for very long; but after I spoke with Mildred, instead of seeing only quirks, I began to appreciate all of the good things about our town and county. She made me see that even though Mills County is small, there are a lot of advantages to living here. Everyone is friends with each other, and our community is based on love and care for one another. Mildred regards her most cherished memories of living here as everyone in our community growing up knowing each other and being great friends - all memories of the times we have come together as a community to celebrate reunions, weddings, birthdays, and so many other occasions. As a result of living in such a small county, we have all become closer than anyone could ever be in a bigger place. Mills County offers an indescribable sense of home that has never and will never change. We have always been our own family outside the limits of society, and thanks to Mildred, I have come to believe that we are a better community for it.