



Jonna Dodd and her grandfather Lee Roy Schwartz

# Lee Roy Schwartz

**By Jonna Dodd**

"Personal memories of Mills County, Texas, are many and as varied as the numerous rocks which have been here since a shallow ocean covered this area thousands of years ago. We have memories of goodness and happiness, of courage and fear, of losses and misfortunes. Some of our memories are as beautiful, as colorful and enchanting as the wild flowers that grace our hills, valleys, and prairies."

Mills County may seem like any other county in the State of Texas, unless you have lived, grown or been raised on these rocky grounds. Some "rocks" have been here longer than others, some more weathered and worn, but all originating from the same rock pile. Fortunately, I know someone who has been a resident of Mills County for at least fifty years, seventy-three to be exact. A perfect candidate for picking at all the information I could get.

Lee Roy Walter Schwartz has been a member of small town Priddy, Texas, since he was a toddler. As I soon found out he had quite the number of stories and memories as a child and growing up. Being the youngest of five brothers, Mr. Schwartz claimed that he kept the family on their toes while running around causing mischief until he was old enough to start school or be "sent to work" with the rest of the family.

Starting school at the age of six years old, Mr. Schwartz spoke no English. Being raised in a family where German was all his parents spoke, he learned to speak English by listening to other children who did speak the language. Although there were other students who did speak some German, they did not have bilingual teachers like in today's schools. Students were offered English classes, where they learned grammar, and mathematics classes. Lee Roy graduated at the age of 18, completing all 12 grades of school. At one time, Priddy High School

only offered nine grades. The first actual graduates of Priddy High were Eleanor Jeske-Gormatzky and Paul Limmer in the 11th grade. Mr. Schwartz can recall that the busses were different than from now. He stated that the bus was basically "bench seats that went the length of the bus." I then questioned him on the activities that he and his fellow classmates participated in. They attempted to have a football team, but were plagued by injuries and turned into basketball, which was "the sport" for small towns. Instead of having district teams to play against, they played double round-robin games. They also played baseball with surrounding small schools such as Star and Mullin. What I found very interesting was that as students, they did not have a Christmas break or spring break like in today's school. The only holiday given to local schools was a two-week break, but this break was not time for fun and games; during this time, kids went to the fields with their families to pick cotton.

I then began to question Mr. Schwartz on other things such as activities that he and his friends did and also questions on popular items during his high school years. I soon found out that having time to do activities with friends was limited. With a common week holding two days at church for choir practice and two days playing basketball, Saturdays and Wednesdays were his days off. Also, on Sundays, it was routine as a family to attend church. After church and chores were done, the kids were allowed to have at least half a day. During these days off, many kids swam or fished in tanks or creeks, played volleyball, baseball or watched a drive-in movie. Lee Roy stated that he could remember then Hensons always bringing a "traveling movie" to watch in town over the summer months. This movie is where you could find kids running to get boxes of cracker jacks with prizes! Although westerns were common for movies, this movie sighting also brought a comedy known as "Abbott and Costello."

Clothes that were popular during this time for boys were mainly jeans and nylon shirts and for the girls, dresses except for on Fridays at school, which they decided to wear jeans. The guys would wear short hair and even perm their hair at times!

As a high school student, Lee Roy drove a black 1951 Chevrolet. Mr. Schwartz also gave information that at his high school graduation, 1956, Elvis Presley was becoming popular. Other popular items during this time were manual typewriters, and soon after, electrical typewriters and self-propelled combines began to appear in the fields. As a grandchild of Mr. Schwartz, I was interested in a story he started to tell about my grandmother. He started by saying that getting televisions was popular during this time, but was a luxury item, so not every household had them. He stated, "In high school when we were dating, we didn't have a TV, but she did. That's when on nights off, I would go and watch TV at her home while I waited for her to finish getting ready."

The last question I brought upon Mr. Schwartz was to explain some differences he has seen in Mills County, or in Priddy, Texas, over the time period he has been here. His first notice he pointed out was that even though there is a more advanced type of equipment, there is a great amount of decrease in the farm land within the county. He also said there have been many changes in the businesses in Priddy. Different from now, Priddy's population was actually higher when Lee Roy was in his younger years. They once had two grocery stores, a barber shop, one

drug store (which sold fountain drinks) two car repair garages, a post office (located in the drug store) and also a bank owned by Eleanor Jeske-Gormatsky. Mr. Schwartz also told about the changes in building new school buildings as a previous member of the school board. He recalled as a member of the board, they once had to borrow money so they could build a new school building themselves. He stated back then, the school and the church were what kept the town going. Today we have many stores; we still have our school and our church, but they are not the only things that keep the town afloat. The last change Mr. Schwartz stated was the change in prices. When he was younger, eighty acres could raise a family. Today, it is hard enough with the price of housing and also the price in gas. Sitting at \$2.71 at local stores today is a great increase from just 17 cents in 1954.

Time changes faster than most believe. I learned many things from my grandfather. He has been through times that others could not even begin to explain. Not only have I learned about common tasks, but also about my family heritage and the many years of history my family has set here in Mills County.