

Bud Johnsen grew up in a small town in Minnesota. After attending school and after an enlistment in the navy, he came to Steamboat as a realtor for Woodman Corporation (Stagecoach). When Stagecoach went bankrupt, he and Sally bought land and built their home there. Today he owns and operates the Cowboy Mercantile and is a general partner in the Diamond B.J. Dance Hall. Bud's philanthropic work makes him a good subject for Three Wire Winter.

Bud began his story:

"Do I have to tell how old I am? I was born in Benson, Minnesota, quite a few years ago. Benson is a little farm town about the size of Steamboat. I guess we were a pretty nice normal, small town family, although my mother was a widow with five children. We had a good family and lots of friends. I have three brothers, Russell, David and Gary and a sister, Virginia.

"Johnsen is a Danish name, actually it was supposed to be Johansen, but when my grandfather came to this country he left out the a. We have relatives in Copenhagen, Denmark, but they're very distant. One of my great uncles came to Brush, Colorado and kept the name Johansen. He owned the Johansen Hardware

BUD JOHNSEN

**"I THINK THE
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**BY CARL SANDEFUR AND
KALLI SANDERS**

Store many many years in Brush. That's one of the reasons I came to Colorado, because I heard some talk about it for a long time.

"My dad worked for an oil company, Sinclair Oil. He was on the road all the time. Finally, he was tired of traveling and bought a restaurant. Our whole family worked there (those who were old enough), mainly my mother and sister. My mother and dad grew tired of that, because my dad couldn't stand to be cooped up inside. So he sold the restaurant and went back on the road again. He tired of that again, because he was gone all week, and he decided he wanted to be home with the family more. So Dad bought a gas station and a bulk agency, something like Weston. After he had that awhile, he became sick with leukemia; I was 10 when he died.

**"ALTHOUGH MY MOTHER WAS A WIDOW
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"My dad was always worried about something happening to one of us. In fact, my mother used to say that she was worried about having to make all those insurance payments that my dad

wanted to have, but he'd say, 'Oh no, you have to make all these payments because someday, something might happen to one of us.' Of course, he left us with a house that was paid for, but Mother still had to make the money to take care of us.

"We were poor, but we never knew it, because our mother provided for us so well. Kids didn't have to support the family so much as to provide things for our own enjoyment, like our own clothes. If we wanted a car, we had to buy it. I never did have a car; I think my brother had three before I had one. I got my first car when I was seventeen or eighteen; it was a 1952 Chevy Belair hardtop convertible. It was black with red interior and big white sidewalls. It was a beautiful car."

"My first job was shining shoes, when I was about twelve. I remember one man in particular, he was a bachelor named Dingy Hill. He came every Saturday night to get a shoeshine, but the only time he wore those shoes was on Saturday night. He gave me a 50 cent tip, and since the shine was 25 cents, I made 75 cents every Saturday night."

"I went to school well after the one room schoolhouse, although I went to school in a one room schoolhouse several times, because I'd go and stay with friends out in the country, and they went to school in a one room school house. That was a lot of fun. Actually, I think the country schools did really well on their education, because whenever those kids came into town to go to high school they were well-equipped.

"Our high school was a very modern high school. It had just about everything you could think of. I played in the band, and we were always busy with church activities. There were lots of big churches in Minnesota, Catholic, Baptist and mostly Lutheran. There are a lot of Scandinavians in Minnesota, so we did a lot of



"WELL, I GUESS WE WERE A PRETTY NICE NORMAL SMALL TOWN FAMILY."

things at church. We enjoyed ourselves with our friends. We'd go to ball games, ride the bus fifty or sixty miles to see the game. The things we did in those days were, like I said, very school oriented, like dances. I was too small for sports except for track which I did really well. I was sports editor for the paper, so I was always down on the sidelines.

"It was just getting to be Elvis Presley time. We had dances every weekend. We grew up going to dances in the country, and we went to square dances. Back then there wasn't really such a thing up in Minnesota called country music. There was country music, but it certainly wasn't anything like what they call country music now. There were very few country music



"I WAS DIRECTOR OF THE RHYTHM BAND IN SECOND GRADE."



"I USED TO RIDE EVERYTHING ON MY UNCLE'S FARMS."

stars. Mostly there was what was called modern music, which were the big bands, and they were just starting to go out at the time. Then there was rock 'n' roll.

"I didn't get in much trouble, I would get thrown out of band once in a while, but nothing really big. In the Spanish room, we had wooden floors. The teacher in there was kind of an 'interesting' lady, and when it was real quiet, we'd take marbles and roll them up to the front of the room, and they'd smack against the baseboard. We also took paper caps from a cap gun, and put them in the fold down seats in the auditorium, and when everyone sat down it would go bang, bang, bang!!!"

"I didn't have a lot of girlfriends, I had lots of friends that were girls, but mostly I went steady with one girl. That was kind of the way everyone did it in those days. Back in the fifties we did go steady for quite a while.

"After high school I went to the navy, then to college. In the navy I was an aircraft crewman. I was an aviation storekeeper which means aviation supply. I stayed here in the U.S. and I was in the navy all that time and never once got

aboard a ship. It was between the two wars.

"I went to Moorehead State College in Moorehead, Minnesota. I majored in marketing. I didn't go through four years of college, I went through two and decided that the work I was doing was something I liked. I was working in a men's clothing store, and I thought I was smart in that. So I decided that I had all the education I wanted, and that I would go ahead and work full time. That was what I had chosen to do. I regretted not finishing college. The clothes store I worked in those days was so much different than what I'm doing now, but I enjoyed it. I had a lot of fun. There wasn't anything specifically in college to study in clothing, so I said 'Aw, heck with it.' I did take marketing and accounting though.

"I got married when I got out of college and stayed in Moorehead. I started working for these

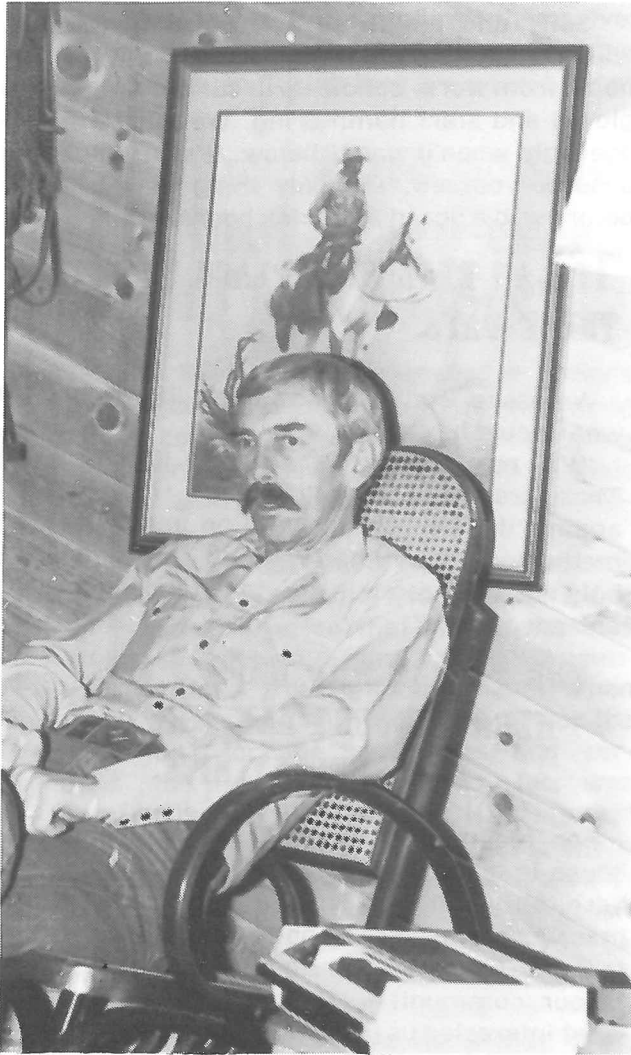


"I WAS AN AIRCRAFT CREWMAN AND AN AVIATION STOREKEEPER IN THE NAVY."

fellows in college and just continued to work for them. I'd been working in clothing stores since I was thirteen. They were all just small town stores.

"I worked in the clothing business and then I got tired of it, so a friend of mine that I'd sold clothes to said, 'You're such a good salesman, why don't you come sell real estate?' I always thought real estate would be kind of fun. So I said I would do it, and I did.

"I was the first manager of Heritage Square in Denver when they rebuilt it from the old Magic Mountain. A lot of the oldtimers in Steamboat would know of it. Magic Mountain was supposed



"I THINK STEAMBOAT HAS CHANGED FROM THE SKIING, WHAT THE BIGGER CORPORATIONS HAVE BROUGHT IN."

to be a Disneyland of the Rockies. But it really never got going. The guy that built it ran away with the money. He did a lot of advertising and everybody looked forward to it. When we were remodeling it into Heritage Square there'd be old people that would come up there saying, 'Oh we're glad to see this going again, we can get our money's worth out of it.' They just didn't realize that they had lost their money.

"I moved to Steamboat because I was given the opportunity to come here and work for the Woodman Corporation (Stagecoach). I'd worked for them before in Denver, and they wanted to send me up here. So I said, 'You bet!' and moved up here. I was still married to my first wife when I moved up here. It was pretty exciting when we first moved here, because there was a lot of things happening. I was real busy because I was working at Stagecoach which required a lot of days of work out there. They had just opened the ski area, so we had a lot of fun skiing and entertaining customers, we met a lot of people who

were moving to Steamboat at the time, plus a lot of oldtimers. It was pretty fun back in '72. I worked at Stagecoach two and one-half years until they shut down. I worked for the corporation in Denver for a year and a half, so I worked for them for quite a while."

We asked Bud how Steamboat has changed since 1972. "I think it's changed from skiing and what the bigger corporations have brought in. I think the basics of Steamboat haven't changed, there are still awfully nice people here. It's just grown a little in numbers, but it's still pretty much the same, except for the condo development and the ski area. Other than that I think it's a pretty nice town, and the people are great."

"I THINK WHAT STARTED THE DANCE HALL WAS MY REMEMBERING BACK THAT PEOPLE LIKED TO DANCE."

When asked when he started the Cowboys' Mercantile and Diamond B.J.'s. Bud replied: "Well, we thought Steamboat Springs was growing and needed another western store that sold tack and saddlery. Not another clothing store like F.M. Light's, but one that had equipment. I started the Diamond B.J. for a couple of reasons, but I think the main one was because we enjoyed dancing so much. We heard from people in town that said, 'Gee, I wish there was a place to go out and dance where there was a big dance floor, instead of a big bar.' Well, we felt the same way, and we thought, 'If there are enough people who feel this way, like us, then maybe it's a good idea.' So we decided to do it.

"Sally gave me a brand for Christmas one year as a surprise which she designed with the help of our friend, Ray Peterson, who is a professional brand inspector. We named the Diamond B.J. after our brand. We don't have any cows but that's what we branded our horses with.

"I ENJOY BOTH THE STORE AND THE DANCE HALL."

"I enjoy running the Diamond B.J. really well. I also enjoy running both the store and the dance hall, even though right now I'm at the dance hall most of the time. I've always had really good help with the store, and I've never had to worry about it. I should mention one thing; the dance hall's not just mine, it's Sally's too. She's just as much a part of the dance hall as I am."

Since Bud was a member of the Bicentennial Committee when Three Wire Winter was formed, we realized how philanthropic and community oriented he was. So we asked about his involvement.

"The main thing that I've done for the community was manager of the Chamber of Commerce. I enjoyed that. Back in those days I was paid \$12,000 a year; now they're paid \$36,000. At the time that I took that job I was working for Frank Stetson Realty, and the real estate business was just like now, you couldn't give property away. Frank and I would just sit there and look at each other every day, till someone told me about this job. So I said I'd take it for a while. I went down there and talked to the people, and I got the job and really enjoyed it.

"YES, I THINK WE ARE KIND OF TIED HERE; WE LIKE IT HERE, THAT'S WHY."

"I did that for about a year and a half. That's when I kept looking at that vacant building where the Cowboys' Mercantile is. I kept saying 'That would be a great place to put a western store.' The Ford dealer had just moved to the other edge of town, and the space was just setting there vacant. I got ahold of Bob Berkstresser, and he said he was going to remodel it into an old western looking building, and I said, 'Great, I'd like to put a western store in there,' so we did.

"I was on the Bicentennial Committee and Special Olympics. I was in Rotary for a while, until I got too busy and couldn't take two hour lunches. One thing that I did that I really liked was rodeo, I've always enjoyed that. Another thing I have fun doing is helping 4-H kids and their program. And, of course, Three Wire Winter, that goes back to the Bicentennial Committee, when we worked to get the magazine started."

"Sally and I built this house in the winter, which wasn't a smart thing to do. We would get home from work, bundle up in our snowpants and gloves and start hammering. We put a wall up one night when it was 10 below. It's hard building a house yourself. The only thing I'd ever built before was a board and brick bookshelf."

"IT'S AN EXPENSIVE PLACE TO LIVE THESE DAYS."

We asked Bud if he had to do life over again what would he change.

"I'm real happy with the way life has gone. There are some things I'd change. If I had to do it again I'd finish college and go into veterinary medicine the way I had wanted. That's about the only change I can think of, to get more schooling and education."

"THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE STAYED HERE THROUGH ALL THIS ARE AWFULLY NICE."

For the main interview we drove to Bud's house in a blizzard, but Bud and Sally's warm hospitality (and chocolate cake) started the interview off on a good note. We enjoyed getting to know Bud and Sally. Bud has contributed a lot to our community. His philanthropic work is what interested us to write a story on him, but we also found him to be a genuinely nice person, with an interesting story to tell.

ONE OF BUD'S HOBBIES IS DOING BRONZE SCULPTURES.

