



Susie Gittens Killam

1982 Miss Rodeo Canada

Interview with Pauline Briggs – February. 16, 2016



Question: Under what name did you run for Miss Rodeo Canada?
Susie Gittens.

Question: Do you have any nicknames:

Over the years I've had a couple of nicknames but the one I was teased about the most was "George."

Question: What can you tell me about yourself?

A native Albertan, I was born at the Calgary General Hospital in 1961 and attended school in both Okotoks and Calgary. I graduated as a Registered Nurse in 1986 from Red Deer College and later completed a Bachelors of Science in Nursing from the University of Ottawa. My friends and family tell me I am a people person who is friendly and kind and always smiling.

Question: Tell me about your family? Do you have any siblings?

Today, I live just outside of Calgary on the old family farm located close to my Mom and brother. My Mom still lives in the old homestead and is a retired driving instructor. My step-dad retired from cattle foot trimming and resides in Black Diamond.

I have two full brothers, as well as two half-brothers and one half-sister. All are avid supporters of rodeo, especially the Calgary Stampede. *[Photo: Susie (center) and brothers]*



My husband recently retired from the RCMP after 35 years and I work part time as a Chronic Disease Management nurse. We have two wonderful children. Our son Garrett is a journeyman electrician and our daughter Jenna-Jean is completing her second year of Law School.

We have two Quarter Horses, Cashman and Beau and a donkey named Chico.

Question: Are you related to any famous rodeo personality?

My paternal grandfather is George Hamilton, a Metis cowboy from Calgary (descendant-of the famous Gabriel Dumont from the Louis Riel Rebellion). He rode saddle bronc in 1908 winning the “Southern Alberta Bronc Championship.” He scored the highest marks on a mare called “Dixie Queen,” a feat he accomplished six more times. My grandfather was also a contestant in the first Calgary Stampede in 1912.

Question: How did you get involved in the professional sport of rodeo today?

My husband and I were posted in Ottawa for 22 years which made it challenging to be involved with the Miss Rodeo Canada Committee and the Miss Rodeo Canada Alumni. When we returned in 2008. I gladly embraced the opportunity to become involved in the MRC Alumni and the MRC contest.



Question: Did you ever qualify for the Nationals in High School rodeo?

High School rodeo started in 1972 and consequently, I did not have the opportunity to participate in that sport. I did, however, become involved in the Little Britches Circuit. The picture below shows me sitting on my steer in the chute at one of these competitions.

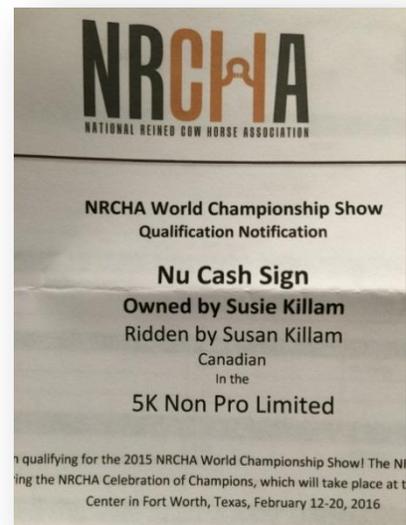
Question: Have you ever won any awards/accomplishments?

The year 2015 proved to be a stellar season for me and my horse Nu Sign Cash (Cashman). I have been competing the last two years in the Alberta Reined Cowhorse Association and this last year, we were year-end Champions as follows:

- 1) Non-Pro 1000 Limit Reinbox,
- 2) 1000 Limit Ranch Cutting,
- 3) Reserve Champion in the Reinbox Cutting, and
- 4) 3rd place in the Non Pro Reinbox 5,000 limit.

We also won the Cowtown Derby Non-Pro 5,000 Limit Reinbox and Reinbox Cutting.

These wins qualified us to participate in the World Non-Pro 5,000 Reinbox Class held in Fort Worth, Texas in Feb of 2016. I am very blessed and yes I am smiling.



In my earlier years:

Horse: Over the years with different horses, I have placed or won at team penning, cutting, sorting, gymkhana and horse shows. I have a ton of ribbons. The picture is from team penning with the Ottawa Valley Team Penning Association where I won two high point gymkhana buckles.



Rodeo: In boy's steer riding, I won one Little Britches Rodeo and placed in a few others. I've also won the odd barrel racing and goat tying event.

Body Building: I won my division in the 1984 Red Deer Body Building Classic, Women's Light Weight Division and second in the finals for all divisions. In the 1990 Cornwall, Ontario bodybuilding show, I placed third place in the light weight division.

Soccer: In 1997, we won the Women's Master's Eastern Ontario Champions.

4H Beef: I won public speaking, best groomed calf, reserve champion calf, and grand champion calf. The picture below is my brother Mike, myself and our wonderful 4H leader Vic Heaver. Mike and his calf Bert won grand champion 4H calf and my 4H calf Ernie and I won reserve champion, in High River, Alberta. I was very fortunate to have opportunities like these growing up.



Question: How did you get interested in becoming Miss Rodeo Canada?

I grew up with beautiful supportive women like Suzanne Randal (Depoli) the Calgary Stampede Queen, Phyllis Dahl who was Miss Rodeo Canada 1959 and Jerri Duce, Miss Rodeo Canada 1974.

Question: Can you tell me about your pageant experience?

Overall, it was an amazing

experience. I have always enjoyed meeting people and learning about their life experiences. I met other contestants for MRC, rodeo people, judges, sponsors, owner and operators of western stores, jewelry stores, and restaurants along with front line employees. I grew from each experience. This helped me to become the person I am today.

Question: What can you tell me about the judges?

We had three main judges that traveled with us everywhere we went. These judges came from city, had country backgrounds and had vast life and work experiences.

Question: Was having judges follow you around a good or bad thing?

I think it was a good thing that the judges followed us around. As we became more comfortable around them, I believe they had the opportunity to experience our true personalities. From a judge's point of view, I would imagine it was a good way to see how each contestant manages different situations.

Question: Who was running the Miss Rodeo Canada organization your year?

Merry Ann Reid Stoney ran the MRC organization my year. She gave up a good deal of her personal and family time in order to ensure myself and the other competitors had a wonderful experience. To this day, I remain good friends with Merry Ann and her husband Rob.

Question: What was your public speaking speech about?

I spoke about how my family and extended family had inspired me in my life. As a young child, I was impressed by my various family members' achievements, both great and small and was determined to follow in their footsteps. Because of them, I developed a deep appreciation for the cowboy lifestyle from an early age.



Question: During the Horsemanship competition, whose horse did you ride?

Horsemanship was held at Grant MacEwan College and I believe they were lesson horses. We were assigned a horse and allowed one-half hour to free ride prior to being judged for the horsemanship part of the program. These horses were very well broke.

Question: The Miss Rodeo Canada pageant required you to do Impromptus, where did you do these?

All of the contestants were asked to perform impromptus when we were out for supper at a local restaurant. We each took turns speaking on topics randomly pulled from a hat.

Question: Were there any contracts to sign as Miss Rodeo Canada? What were some of the rules?

There were no contracts and only a few rules. MRC required contestants to be childless, unmarried, over 18 and under 25 years old. The contestants were judged on appearance, horsemanship, rodeo knowledge, fashion show, speeches, poise and personality. The young lady who earned the most points was the winner.

Question: Were there any rules you would have changed?

No.

Question: What can you tell me about your wardrobe? My wardrobe consisted of a few western shirts and dress pants from Daine's Western Shops where I worked part-time while attending Red Deer College. Also, I owned two western suits from Frasers Western Wear in High River. However, after

meeting the newly crowned Miss Rodeo America, Donna Keifler, she advised me she was taking me clothes shopping and my closet grew!

Question: Where was your fashion show?

The CFR Fashion Show was at the Westin Hotel and the theme was “fashion from the 1930’s”.

Question: Are you still friends or in contact with any of the contestants who ran your year?

Yes, I am still in contact with Kim Lewis Mosher who travelled all the way from Moncton, New Brunswick to participate in the contest. Kim won the Miss Congeniality award and was my room-mate. I also stay in touch with Donna Keffeler, Miss Rodeo America 1982, from time to time.

Question: Do you still have any of your contestant clothes?

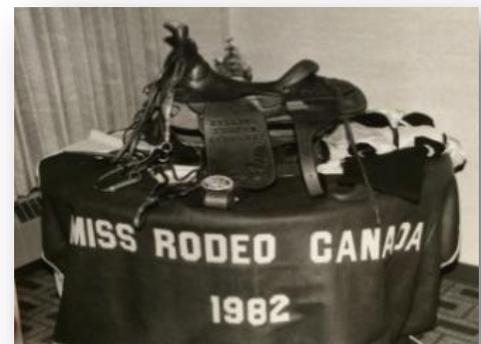
Yes, I still have my gold panhandle Slims, a shirt, winter vest and my black cowgirl hat that has a puncture in the top part to hold the crown.

Question: How did you feel when you won the Miss Rodeo Canada title?

Initially, very surprised! During the evening performance, the MRC contestants were asked to enter the arena on foot and line up on the red carpet. The announcer identified the runner up and I turned and congratulated her. When the winner was announced, I was unable to hear the name over the cheering crowd. I started to clap and looked around to see who won when suddenly another contestant hugged me and said congratulations, you won! I nearly fell out of my boots with excitement.

Question: Tell me about your saddle you won as Miss Rodeo Canada 1982

I won a Chuck Rollins custom made roping saddle. It is the most comfortable and beautiful saddle I have ever owned. I had a grin from ear to ear. RIP Chuck.



Question: What were your duties once you won the title?

Given that Miss Rodeo Canada symbolizes the youth of our great country who wish to promote the sport of rodeo and the western way of life, I hit the trail running.

I travelled to a variety of Pro-Rodeos to promote the sport of rodeo. I also taught rodeo at the local schools using my rodeo teaching binder that was written by Lorraine Rowan, a teacher and champion rodeo competitor. In addition to the binder, I had a number of black and white photos of my uncles competing in the five main rodeo events which helped me to demonstrate to children what to expect at each rodeo. I also brought along an old bull rope from my steer riding days and one of my Uncle’s bareback riggings and heading rope to provide the “hands-on” experience. I had the kids line up and rope chairs in the gym. For the younger children, I had a choice of rodeo clowns, barrel racers and bull riders for them to color.

Question: Did you attend the NFR? What events did you participate in at the NFR?

Yes, I did. The flight to the NFR was sponsored by Mary Jo Burrel's company "Canada Rides." I flew down to Oklahoma with a plane full of Canadians and stayed at the famous "Hall of Fame Inn."

I attended the NFR Ladies Day Fashion Show at the Myriad. I was also invited to "Canada Night" where all the Canadians get together for supper and a few drinks. I watched the rodeo each night with the folks that I flew down with on the plane. I rode in two Grand entries, once with the retiring Queen and once with the newly crowned Queen.

I had never been to the NFR prior to this and it was truly an amazing experience. The PRCA really goes all out to create a fun exciting rodeo.

Question: What can you tell me about the horses at NFR?

The rodeo stock at the NFR was the absolute best I had ever witnessed. The performance horses were in great shape for that time of the year and they had coats that were slicked out and shiny.

Question: What was the hairstyle of your year?

My hair was long and curly and "hat head" was definitely in, on occasion.

Question – What was your style of hats?

I wore a crowned hat to support the height of the crown, with a regular brim. In the summer the hat was straw but in the fall and winter it was felt.



Question: What crown did you wear?

The crown I wore was new that year and I was the first person to receive it. It was sponsored by Simon Jewelry.

Question: Describe your belt-buckle?

My belt buckle was silver and gold. It was round with the words "Miss Rodeo Canada" and the year I won on it.

Question: What other special events did you do then/now?

Presently, I am the 2015 Vice President of the Miss Rodeo Canada Alumni which is growing rapidly and becoming more active. In addition, I am a board member of the Okotoks Agricultural Society. Most of our events are youth programs for example "Future Young Cowboys and Cowgirls." I compete in Alberta Reined Cowhorse and I also enjoy barrel racing and team roping practices.

Question: Did you have sponsors during your reign?

My main sponsors and cheer leaders would have been my family, especially my mom and step-dad as they travelled with me when they could.

Calgary Sponsors: The MRC buckle was donated by Roger Cooper and Associates, one western outfit was donated by The Tack Shop, an Austin reproduction was donated by Crockett's Western Wear, a jean jacket outfit was donated by Three Bars Western Wear, a cowgirl hat by Smithbilt, two MRC banners were donated by Mono Crest, an eight week personal development course was donated by the John Casablanca Elite School of Modeling, boots were donated by Grand Saddlery, a trip to the National Finals Rodeo was donated by Canada Rides and a Mary Kay Basic Set was donated by Merry Ann Stoney, of Airdrie, Alberta.

Edmonton Sponsors: A dinner for two was donated by the Westin Hotel, a horse cooler was donated by Welsh's Saddlery and a western down-filled jacket was donated by Mercury Sports Wear.

Cochrane Sponsor: The saddle was donated by Rollins Custom Saddle.

Okotoks Sponsor: Moray Keith GM donated a truck for one year and Brush Strokes made magnetic signs for my truck.

Saskatchewan Sponsor: The use of a two horse trailer for one year was donated by Wylie Trailers.

Question: How did you design your chaps and who made them? Were they sponsored?

We did not have a sponsor for chaps in 1982, but a local chap maker and family friend named Bud Dalton made chaps for my family when I was riding steers. Bud made me my chaps, stove-pipe white leather with shiny silver stitching. I had never owned brand new chaps until that day. I still have those chaps, as they mean a lot to me, especially now that my old friend has moved on to that big green pasture in the sky.

Question: Who was a famous person you got to meet?

I met a number of famous people that year including, Donna Keffeler, MRA 1982, Oiler Hockey Players Wayne Gretzky, Dave Hunt, and David Semenko. I also met Barbara Mandrell, David Cassidy from the Partridge family, Terry Bradshaw, quarterback for the Pittsburg Steelers, Ian Tyson, Jim Stafford, and Kenny Rogers. Rodeo bulls: Haggar and Bunney.



Question: What was your most memorable parade?

Well that is a tough question, as I participated in a number of parades and all the parades are so much fun. I like them all for their own uniqueness.



Question: Did you compete or attend the Miss Rodeo America pageant?

Yes, I attended an event called Beauty and the Beast, where I watched the MRA 1982 crowning. I had never seen so many beautiful rodeo queens in one place before. After she was crowned, I was invited to attend the most amazing reception, where I had the opportunity to meet many of the rodeo queens. In my view, they are all winners and represented their respective State extremely well.

Question: Explain your NFR experiences.

The NFR was held in Oklahoma and it was by far the biggest and fanciest rodeo I had ever attended. Everyone treated me very well and made me feel welcome. I rode both Friday and Saturday night.

Question: Which pro-rodeo was your fondest and why?

I enjoyed rodeos where I was involved with the community. A few rodeo boards also invited me into their schools where I would teach children about the sport of rodeo. I often had free tickets to hand out to the child that was the best roper and fastest barrel racer which was a foot race around garbage cans.

Question: Did you ever have to ride difficult horses?

Oh yes, but they were never any worse than the young colts I used to ride with my Dad.

Question: Who was your role model and why?

Although there are numerous people who have influenced me throughout my life, I would have to say my Mom, Phyllis and my Grandmother, Jean Gittens. They were my role models by encouraging me to believe in myself. I have carried that confidence with me throughout my life.

Question: What was the hardest part of being Miss Rodeo Canada? The easiest part?

The hardest part of being MRC for me was saying goodbye to the folks who I stayed with after including me as one of their own family. The easiest part of being MRC would be promoting a sport I grew up with and love. It was always exciting to meet new people and say hello to old friends.

Question: Who did you pass your crown on to?

Kathy Cornelson of Saskatchewan, Canada.

Question: What would people be surprised to know about you?

People may be surprised to know that I am of Metis heritage (carded/registered) and I am related to Louis Riel's right hand man, Gabriel Dumont.

Question: Where would you like to see the Miss Rodeo Canada organization go in the future?

Bigger, better, stronger.

Question: What are you doing now?

My husband of 32 years (Dan) and I live in DeWinton, Alberta where I grew up. I work as a registered nurse for the Primary Care Network in High River teaching people with chronic disease how to manage their disease and be as healthy as possible.

Question: Did you ever mentor or teach others?

During my two children's school aged years, I attended their schools for nursing duties and also volunteered to provide rodeo knowledge as part of heritage days. Once again, I was using the rodeo binder and rodeo equipment to teach rodeo in the schools.

Question: Where were some the places you went as Miss Rodeo Canada – how many events did you go to your year?

Mostly, I was invited for Pro-Rodeo, however I was also honored to be invited to grand openings. I was a judge at Best Beard competition and was part of Western Week at various schools.

I traveled approximately 200 days that year. My first rodeo as MRC was the CFR 1981, followed by the Regina Agribition, then to: Oklahoma, Hobbema (Christmas and Spring Rodeo), Rodeo Royal in Calgary, Medicine Hat, Super Rodeo Edmonton, Saskatoon, Kamloops, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Cloverdale, Falkland, Moose Jaw, Black Diamond, Rocky Mountain House, Assiniboia, Ponoka, Swift Current, Williams Lake, Calgary Stampede, Innisfail, Grand Prairie, High Prairie, Grimshaw, High River, Denver, Cheyenne, Estavan, Shaunovan, Moose Jaw, Saskatoon, Swift Current, North Battleford, Lethbridge, Wainwright, Kamloops, Falklands, Vernon, and Banff.

Question: Are you involved with the Miss Rodeo Canada organization?

Yes, I have modeled and assisted the association throughout the years. In 2015, I was a judge for the modeling competition at the 2016 Miss Rodeo Canada pageant.

Question: If you could pass on one tip to an upcoming rodeo queen contestant – what would it be?
My tip would be to tell the upcoming rodeo queen to remember to have fun during her reign! More importantly, when your year is complete, please come join the MRC Alumni.



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