



## John Reilly

January 1, 1915 - May 14, 2011

John Reilly, age 95, of Medora, North Dakota passed away on November 22, 2010 at the Evergreen Retirement Home in Dickinson, North Dakota. A Life Tribute service will be held at 11:00 A.M. on Saturday, May 14, 2011 at the Medora Community Center with Celebrant Sandy Silha officiating. Silvernale-Silha Funeral Home of Beach has been entrusted with the arrangements. On September 15, 1915 John Reilly was born at a ranch on Davis Creek near Medora, ND He attended country school in Medora and graduated in 1933. In 1934 John joined the Civilian Conservation Corp because it was the only available job at that time. They paid \$30.00 a month plus board, room, clothing and medical care. He spent the winter working in the Ozark Mountains where he got pneumonia and developed an abscess on his lung. After spending five months in the hospital, he was discharged. He returned to Medora where John helped his folks on their ranch in Sully Creek. During the war John had a contract to carry mail in the Medora area. He used a Model A Ford and when the roads got bad he had a team of horses and a saddle. John retired from ranching in 1976. He rented the Bunkhouse on the Custer Trail Ranch and later moved to a "Box Car" in town. Many of John's family and friends were able to gather for a celebration of his 90th birthday in 2005. John spent his last years at the Evergreen Living Center in Dickinson. He enjoyed the kind and thoughtful staff there. Cribbage was his game and he spent hours playing and teaching others to love the game. He will be missed by his family and friends. Remembrances and condolences may be shared with the

family at: [www.silvernale-silhafuneralhome.com](http://www.silvernale-silhafuneralhome.com) “To have lived well, laughed often and loved much, To have gained the respect of intelligent men and the love of children To have filled a niche and accomplished a task To have left the world better and to have appreciated earth’s beauty and not failed to express it To have looked for the best in others and to have given the best of yourself, That is achievement! (author unknown) John “Johnnie” Reilly had many achievements during his 95 plus years of living. His achievements reflected the man Johnnie was, quiet and simple. The lives and hearts Johnnie touched valued what he did. Perhaps it was creating special memories for visiting young nieces and nephews; sharing with them the wide open spaces, and the adventures of ranch life with its cattle, horses, and brandings that were so special to Johnnie’s heart. Perhaps it was consistently and dependably delivering mail to the remote farms and ranches around Medora in all types of weather to keep them in touch with the world during World War II. Perhaps it was working hard and with other ranchers to be a good steward of the land and the animals upon it. Perhaps it was his special way of sharing a smile or a word with everyone who crossed his path, or making them laugh with one of his jokes. Perhaps it was sharing his passion for the game of cribbage by playing and teaching it to all he encountered, both young and old. Perhaps it was his pride in being a citizen of Medora, North Dakota, and Billings County. This was his world. This is where he was a good friend to many; this is the place he loved and called home. All of these were simple achievements, all were important. Johnnie was born and raised on a ranch near Medora. He attended school and graduated in Medora. His sister Grace once asked Johnnie what he most remembered about growing up and he replied, “being a ball baby, who would cry over anything.” This surprised Grace because Johnnie grew up to be a quiet, strong, seemingly unemotional individual. Johnnie was five years older than Grace, but she remembers him being quite mischievous. Grace was about 8 years old when Johnnie borrowed their father’s shaving brush and razor, soaped up her arms and shaved them. Another memory of those early days was of walking to school

with her sister, her brothers, and the teacher who stayed with the family. There was a creek to cross, and Johnnie and Eddie loved to splash water at the girls. In the winter, even though the water froze, it wasn't always safe to walk across, so a plank was laid across the creek and they would crawl on the plank to the other side. Johnnie was always a bit of a tease. Early in her marriage, Grace's husband was in the service. She was pregnant when he was shipped overseas, so she came back to Medora to have her baby. After the baby was born, Johnnie's first comments to Grace were that the baby was sure a "cutie, even though she only had four toes." Johnnie didn't join the armed forces or serve in the war. He was left at home to help his parents run the ranch. He also picked up a mail contract to deliver mail in the Medora area. Johnnie traveled many miles by Model A or horses, in all kinds of weather, and was always glad when folks were home so he could warm up. As a rancher, Johnnie started by helping his parents, and later taking over the ranching operation. He tended to his cows, with an important time being the brandings. At his own, not only did he work the branding itself, but he would do the cooking and provide all the meals. At neighbors' brandings, he would ride, rope calves, and brand. Niece Bobbie says Johnnie even did a bit of competitive roping and that Johnnie always enjoyed his cattle and he appreciated a good horse. Throughout his life, at all the places he lived in and around Medora, Johnnie had his garden. He would grow his vegetables, including cucumbers in a bottle and tomatoes, and he was even somewhat competitive about it, loving to show off his large produce. And he liked to try growing exotic plants. Johnnie didn't wander far from home. Grace recalls a couple trips the two of them made. One trip was through northwestern Montana to ranches that raised unusual animals. One raised miniature horses and goats. When the goats were scared they would lie down and stiffen out. Further up the road was a ranch that raised reindeer. The other trip they took together was a drive to Texas. Johnnie would get out at each state border and take a picture of the signs. Johnnie's favorite food was fried chicken, dating

back to the days his mother would make it for Sunday dinner. Johnnie was a smoker and he enjoyed his liquor. His friend Tom Adams says Johnnie quit both smoking and drinking in 1972. When asked how he could just quit, Johnnie replied, he had done it long enough. Once in awhile he would share a drink with Tom, but only one. Johnnie liked western music. When entertained at Evergreen, if the music was the accordion or polka music, Johnnie would stay in his room; he did not care for that kind of music. Personal possessions important to him were his hat and his saddle. Having competed in roping events, he enjoyed watching rodeos. When Grace was widowed, she and Johnnie would spend afternoons and evenings going to rodeos. He kept a spotlessly clean house and he was an excellent cook. Although Johnnie never had children of his own, the ranch was great place for his extended family to visit and he was a "favorite uncle." The teasing Johnnie practiced on Grace, worked just as well on the next generation. Johnnie's niece, Pat, remembers Johnnie teasing her as a kid, something about "cutting her ears off." Johnnie had quite a sense of humor and always had a joke to tell, or was looking for new material to use. Some of his jokes could be a bit off color, but Johnnie was always a gentleman about it. Nephew Jim and his wife Norma remember Johnnie as having a twinkle in his eye, and say that he was both fun to be around and kind. For Christmas one year, Johnnie gave Jim and Norma's daughters their first belt buckles. For his young nieces and nephews, Johnnie was, as nephew, Robin, described him, a long, lanky, stereotypical cowboy. He was straightforward and well-liked by all who knew him. Visits to Johnnie on the ranch included brandings, roping calves, riding the wide, open spaces and the jokes Johnnie would tell to entertain and make everyone laugh. Nephew Jim enjoyed staying in the bunkhouse made of railroad ties, shooting prairie dogs, and catching chickens and roosters with a rope. Niece Cathy has a vivid memory of Johnnie's 3-sided shower with a big metal container on top where he gathered water that was heated by the sun. She says it was quite an experience when the girls would try to shower and the boys would run around to the open side. The girls would hollar up a storm until one of the adults

would come out to settle the problem. Niece Pat remembers Johnnie have a colorful bird, a parrot or parakeet, for a pet. And Grace remembers Johnnie letting the bird loose to fly around the house. Johnnie had a square glass box with a lid on the table, and the bird could push the lid off. Sometimes the bird would escape to the outdoors and Johnnie would just hang the open cage outside until the bird returned. And of course, Johnnie taught everyone to play cribbage. He would always have some tricks up his sleeve, and he could count points faster than anyone. Johnnie was hard to beat in the game of cribbage; some never did beat him. After Johnnie retired from ranching, he rented the bunkhouse from Tom Adams on Tom's ranch. Tom called Johnnie "Reilly". Tom really appreciated what a good cowman Johnnie was. Johnnie would help Tom out during calving, and branding, and if Tom had to be away from the ranch. Johnnie enjoyed catfishing on the Little Missouri. He would load his tackle on his three wheeler and go and check his set lines. Tom's family ate many fresh catfish filets that Johnnie would share with them. If Johnnie saw Tom headed in for dinner, he would call out for Tom to come on over because he had cooked too much for just himself. A meal might even include an apple pie made from scratch. Johnnie also had many holiday meals with Tom's family and exchanged gifts with them also. One cute story Tom tells is about shining wild turkeys with Johnnie. Johnnie wasn't much of a hunter, but occasionally he would hunt wild turkeys with Tom. One dark night Tom invited Johnnie to go shine turkeys. Tom had heard that you could shine them at night when they would sit in the trees. Tom and Johnnie drove down to a thicket of trees and started walking and shining a light on the treetops. No turkeys. But, they managed to walk far enough into the trees, that in the dark they couldn't find the pick-up. Tom admits that they might have been out all night had not the pick-up been white. Johnnie had his garden of course, and Tom remembers him making pickles. Johnnie also raised a few chickens. He would get up early in the morning to check his chickens, and one day Johnnie got pretty excited, he had caught a skunk in his live trap by the coop. Johnnie lived in the bunkhouse for 24 years. He then moved into Medora and lived in

his “boxcar” house and gardened. Johnnie’s friendship with Tom continued until Johnnie’s death. Tom calls Johnnie “a friend he will always remember.” One of Johnnie’s routines after retiring from ranching was to spend his mornings at the convenience store in Medora playing cards, 10 ½, for coffee. Then he would play cribbage with the store owner, Karen, until noon. From there, he would take Karen’s dog, Lindsay, home with him until Karen was finished working. Johnnie called Lindsay his best friend. Besides the many cribbage games, one memory sticks out for Karen. Johnnie taught her how hatch eggs into chicks in a frying pan. You need six brown eggs, a frying pan, an outdoor thermometer, warm towels, and baby food jars with water and holes in the lids. Turning the eggs every morning and evening at the same time, and keeping a constant temperature would hatch chicks in 14 days. See Karen Putnam for the exact recipe. She will testify it works. Karen called Johnnie a private, considerate and a good man. He was content in his small world and didn’t need much. They too, saw each other and remained friends until Johnnie’s death. When Johnnie was 88, he was officially Medora’s oldest citizen. Throughout his life, Johnnie was very independent; his mind remained sharp, and he made all his own decisions. After 65 years of no driving accidents, Johnnie gave up his car. His decision. But the time came when Grace and niece Bobbie felt he should move to a place that could give him daily help. Grace said she couldn’t be the one to bring the subject up because she, “didn’t tell her big brother anything!” But Johnnie realized the time had come to change the way he lived, and he made the decision to move to the Evergreen Assisted Living Center in Dickinson, North Dakota. He began residing there in November, 2003, and loved it. He claimed he had never been taken care of so well. His nephew Bill commented about how good Uncle Johnnie seemed during his time at Evergreen. At first, Johnnie was somewhat disappointed as cribbage players were hard to find at Evergreen. He told nephew David that between the two that could play, one was blind and the other couldn’t count. But Johnnie wasn’t a complainer, he just began teaching

the staff and residents how to play cribbage and love the game. Johnnie was always in the private dining room at 4 pm to play cribbage. He also taught the game to a few kids that would visit after school. The staff enjoyed and came to love Johnnie. They found him to be a “sweet guy, a gentleman, very patient”, and several came to regard him as a friend. He would make them smile and laugh with his jokes, and they commented how he loved to visit. Linda, a caregiver at Evergreen, writes “John was a cowboy until the end. He always had to watch the rodeo on TV. He was so proud of his hometown, Medora. He loved talking about his house that was made from a railroad car, playing cribbage at the convenience store, his photos at the Cowboy Café and his friends in Medora...John enjoyed getting e-mails from Bobbie. He would share the e-mails with the residents and staff. He loved a good joke.” John is certainly missed at his last home, Evergreen. John was very practical and would talk about “when he would tip over.” He picked out his own burial plot on the hill in the Medora cemetery. He was heard to promise that if you wave as you go by, he will wave back. On November 22, 2010, Johnnie Reilly died at the Evergreen Center. This true cowboy and friend with his quiet, simple, but important achievements will be greatly missed.

# Tribute Wall



“ *John Reilly* ”

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December 07, 2022 at 04:10 PM