



IN THE COWBOY HAT she still wears daily, Mrs. Pancake (above) is shown with their infant son, Jonathan, in 1969. King David, a registered Arabian stallion, (below) was an inval-

able riding horse for Mrs. Pancake when she helped round up cattle on their farm or just rode for pleasure. Her saddle was made and hand-tooled by a neighbor, the late Murray Edwards.

Achilles woman writes her first novel

By MARY LOU OLSON

Iris Pancake, a farm wife who lives southwest of Achilles in Rawlins County, has published her first book, "Where the Meadowlarks Sing."

She said that the seed for writing the novel came from a cousin, William Mayfield of Centerview, Mo., who told her when the couple visited him, "Iris, you ought to be a writer the way you use words."

Mrs. Pancake said she laughed, and gave it no more thought at the time. However, about a year later, she said his words came to mind and that seed began to sprout, growing into a book.

Her novel tells the story of Ellie Langford, a teen-ager who is left with an evil, lazy, shiftless step-father after her mother dies from pneumonia. To escape him, she decides to leave home one day while he is away from the farm.

Taking Queenie, the mare that had belonged to her late father, and his buggy; Janie, their Jersey milk cow; a rooster and several hens; her mother's trunk; her dog, Ring; and some food, she starts down the road, not knowing where it will lead her.

Hurrying to get away from her step-father, she has harrowing experiences along the way. Running out of food and nearing exhaustion, she is finally rescued by a friendly man. He takes her to the home of John and Martha Sanders, a couple who were never blessed with children.

The couple owns a general store in town and a small acreage. Ellie enjoys helping "Pap," the father of Mrs. Sanders, who becomes like a grandfather to her. She helps the couple, not only at the store but with housework, cooking and chores at the farm.

Ellie makes new friends, including a neighbor boy, Billy. Love comes into her life after she is introduced to Jesse, the son of friends of John and Martha Sanders, and their courtship and love story follow. Then her step-father kidnaps her. Mrs. Pancake said she has re-

ceived a lot of comments from friends and relatives about her book.

"The book paints beautiful word pictures of prairie life in its simple, but elegant, style," said Sheryl Nelson, a neighbor. "It reflects Iris's love for nature, hard work, honesty and the family. Ellie, the main character, encounters many hardships as a young girl, but finds respect and love from a community that befriends her."

"In these days of so much violence and hatred," Mrs. Pancake said, "it is my fervent hope that the readers of this book will find it interesting and entertainment that is both restful and peaceful."

The former Iris Thomas, Mrs. Pancake was born in 1931 at the farm home of her parents, Joe and Bessie Thomas, near Morland, in Graham County, the youngest of seven children. Her parents had moved to Kansas from Missouri in 1922 and to make the trip, they loaded their furniture, heirlooms and all their belongings into a wagon with their two milk cows tied behind.

She said that the family did not have a car until she was in her early teens. Horses, and a team of horses and a wagon used for farming, were their only transportation.

Later, the family moved to a farm northeast of Hoxie. Iris attended a one-room country school for eight years, until it closed when she was in seventh grade.

After that, she said, she rode a horse three miles to the neighboring district each day. She said that her father made arrangements with a neighbor, who lived a half mile from the school, to feed the horse, and she walked on to school.

"One of my fondest memories while riding to school," she recalled, "was seeing meadowlarks sitting on fence posts along the road and listening to them sing in the early morning."

When she was 13, her family moved to a farm on the Middle Fork of the Sappa Creek in Rawlins

County. There was a country school nearby with all boys, with the exception of one girl enrolled that fall. She said that the girl's parents asked her folks if she could attend school, even though she had already completed eighth grade. They agreed and Iris said she loved that ninth year of school.

"Venza Persinger was our teacher, and she was such a good one," she said. "I will always hold her memory in high respect. She and her husband Ernest became lifelong friends and Mr. Persinger later built our new home on the farm."

After she finished school, she helped her parents on the farm and also worked for a neighbor, Mrs. Pence, who had triplets — two girls and a boy. She helped with cooking, washing and ironing, cleaning, caring for the children and spent two weeks helping during wheat harvest.

She said she met her future husband, Delmer Pancake, at a youth gathering at the Lone Star Presbyterian Church and they were married on Jan. 28, 1950, by the pastor, Dr. Hatfield, in Colby.

They moved to the Pancake homestead, where her husband was born and raised, and they still live there today. They have a son, Jonathan, who lives with them and has taken over much of the farming operation.

"I have had a lifelong interest in the care and breeding of livestock," she said. "I always loved to ride a horse, and my dad despaired that I would ever become a lady."

"One of my earliest memories is walking with my father, grasping his little finger tightly, as we went to do the morning chores. I began milking by standing up because I was too small to need a stool."

The book was published by Xlibris Corporation.

She plans a book signing from 2-4 p.m. Friday, March 11, at the Oberlin City Library, or call her at (785) 626-9280.



AUTHOR Iris Pancake and her husband Delmer at their farm home in 1998. Her Arabian stallion, King David, is shown in a painting by the late Murray Edwards in the background.