



Lonnie Boydston

A Thanksgiving Story

**By Rachel French, Becky Duran and Robyn Payton
The Daughters of Lonnie Boydston**

Jimmy Duran, Lonnie Boydston's son-in-law, driving this two-year-old team, raking hay July 1, 2010.

Editor's note: I've known Lonnie Boydston for some time now and he's one of the nicest guys you'll want to meet. The more I've learned about Lonnie Boydston, the more understanding I have of this mule man and the beautiful mules that he raises and shows. I've wanted to share Lonnie's story with you for some time now and at the Missouri State Fair in August of this year, I even became more compelled to share his story.

Watching his family show those outstanding mules that he raises was some of the best entertainment that I've had in this year of 2010. Daughters, sons-in-law, grandsons and even Lonnie's wife Linda. It does the heart good to see a family with one big love for mules.

As I was talking with Becky Duran, Lonnie's middle daughter, seeking more information for a story, I asked his daughters to give me their thoughts about their dad,

which turned my idea of an article about Lonnie Boydston into something I was not expecting. It became not a story of a mule man and his mules, but a story about a mule man and his daughters; it is a Thanksgiving Story. Lonnie Boydston raises good mules in Dearborn, Missouri, some of the best you'll lay your eyes on, but he also raised some good kids. Please listen to what they have to say about their daddy.

I couldn't have written a story better than this, no way!

As I sit here thinking of my dad and mules I keep going back to the things he taught me. Never to be afraid to work hard, have pride in what you accomplish at the end of the day and a little dirt never hurt anyone. Being a father to three girls I'm sure wasn't the easiest task, but he ran with what God gave him.

One memory that stands out in my mind is of a jack we had named Jackson, who would only breed mares (not jennies). Dad always stressed to never trust a jack. I will never forget one particular evening. I was doing chores when Jackson cornered me in the stall with his rear to me, continually backing up. He planned to kick or scare me to death. I escaped by climbing through a small hole he had made by kicking a few times before. Let's just say, after that, if Jackson's trough was over in the opposite corner, he ate off the ground.

Another instance with Jackson was when Dad would be in the field and I had to breed a mare. I would have to shake that jack's head a million times and walk him in circles just waiting for him to find the perfect moment. It seemed like he always took longer on Friday or Saturday nights when I wanted to go out for the evening.

I have shared a lot of memories with my dad. After graduating from college, I had the opportunity to work with my dad for three years. I loved doing chores with my dad, riding around together feeding and haying the livestock. I will cherish this time forever.

Have you ever heard of the saying 'People die in bed'? This is one of my dad's all-time, favorite quotes. He always used it when it was time to get up and start chores. As a teenager I hated these words, but why is it you catch yourself saying the same things your parents said when you are now an adult?

Our family vacations were more work than play, but us girls loved attending the fairs showing draft horses and mules. I will never forget the Percheron mare, Coleen, who only had gray, mare mule colts. She took Grand Champion Mare at the Missouri State Fair. Our whole family had a glow about us when she won.

Oh, I can't forget Columbia Mule Days. I attended my first one three years ago, as a spectator. The parade was awesome! It was a good feeling sitting with my parents watching mule after mule go by. You don't see the appreciation for animals like this as often today. Mule Days is the best thing ever if you love mules, horses, or just the country life. Last year I attended again with my parents to show. Let's just say I have plans to go again in 2011.

Now my oldest son, Ben has taken to the love of mules, just like his Grandpa. It makes me so proud to see my twelve-year-old handle a mule at halter in a show arena better than I ever could. However, this summer Ben was a little shook when a trash truck spooked his mule, Rosa. My dad reassured him to get back on. It paid off because he took first at area shows with Rosa and went on to take Reserve Champion at the Missouri State Fair. I look at him in comparison to his classmates in school and he has something none of them could have in his class, a grandpa passing on the love and learning of mules.

As I have grown and have my own family now, it is difficult to make new precious moments with my dad, but the memories I have I hold dear to my heart and always will. Thanks Dad, Rachel



Rachel



Lonnie showing in a mare and mule foal class at the Platte County Fair in Missouri in the mid 80's.



Gus French, three and a half year old son of Rachel and grandson of Lonnie and Linda getting ready to enter a peewee class.



Ben French Rachel's son showing Rosa at the 2010 Missouri State Fair.
Photo by Western Mule Magazine.

I contemplated on how to start this letter. I talked it over in my mind while I was gardening, doing chores and housework. I started it a thousand different ways. I am writing this letter for my dad, Lonnie Boydston.

Our family lives in the Dearborn, Missouri, area (45 miles north of Kansas City). Some people look up to athletes and rush to sporting events. Others aspire to be movie stars and singers. On the other hand, my hero is my dad and I tag along with him to mule sales and shows.

Dad sleeps, eats and breaths mules. He can be anywhere doing anything and his phone will ring. It will be a mule call or a mule buddy. Dad will stop everything and anything to answer the call. (He has learned to shut his phone off or leave it in the car when he goes to church.) My dad once said, "The best moment in my life was when my mule took Reserve Champion at the Missouri State Fair." His best moment wasn't when he married Mom, not when one of us girls was born, married, graduated or when he had grandchildren. No, it was over a mule and he wasn't kidding.

The three-foot Reserve Champion trophy sat on the coffee table in the living room for months. We had to bend our necks around it like giraffes to see the TV or make conversation. Now he has three Reserve Champion trophies in his collection but they now live in the



Becky

bedroom. We haven't made it over the hump to Grand Champion Mule at the Missouri State Fair, but hopefully it is in our future.

Dad's love affair with mules started back in the early seventies when he was in his twenties. He purchased two Belgian colts, a filly named Duchess and a gelding named Duke. Duchess's first colt was a mare mule; he sold her to Pete Miller for \$1,250. Dad didn't have a jack at the time so he had to take his mare to be bred. The next colt was a mare mule which he sold to Ralph Higgenbottom for some where between \$1,000- \$1,500. Now Dad has over thirty mares, a stud, two jacks, and at the time around fifty mules. That could change if his phone would ring. Over the years he has met several people who have become close friends and traveled all over the country buying, selling and showing mules.

Dad has been begging me to send a couple of pictures in of his mules raking hay. He doesn't know I have sent the pictures or written this letter because I wanted to surprise him. I took the opening picture; that one and another took first place at our county fair. Both teams in the pictures are just two year olds. It was the first of July, and we had a week with no rain and temperatures in the low 80s. We put up 4,000 small bales that week. The mules are hooked to a fore cart and the fore cart is hooked to a 1955 New Holland Rake. My husband, Jimmy Duran, is driving both teams. It was peaceful to hear just the rake ticking, something you miss when pulling a rake with a tractor.

Thanks Dad for raising us girls with mules and teaching us everything you know about them. It has made us the outstanding adults we are today. Now you are passing this tradition and love for mules on to our children, your grandchildren. This article will probably make Dad's day--no probably his year. Thank you Dad, Becky



Photo courtesy of J. Zane Photography
Grandson's, Jesse Duran and Ben French.
4 Mules, any Age, Owned By Lonnie &
Linda Boydston. Missouri State Fair 2010.



Photo by Western Mule Magazine
Jesse Duran showing Billy in the NASMA
Youth 18 & Under Showmanship,
Missouri State Fair 2010.



Photo courtesy of J. Zane Photography
Jesse and Ben showing a pair of sorrel
mules at the Missouri State Fair 2010.
Yes, Lonnie raises sorrel mules too.

Like other little girls growing up, I always dreamed of having a riding horse. However, my father is Lonnie Boydston and he only believed in mules. My sister and I shared our first riding mule together. Her name was Sally and Dad bought her for \$1,600, from the Noltz boys that live in Versailles, Missouri.

We could do anything on that beautiful gray mule. The only time that mule threw me was when I ran her into an electric fence, which was my fault, I guess. When we came home after school we would throw our books down and head out to find Sally. As we grew up though, our eyes turned to boys and we stopped riding her. Dad threatened to sell her time after time, and then he did. He sold her at the Bobbi Quick Sale in St. Joseph, Missouri, for \$2,400. People still talk about the girls in the sale ring that day. Probably because, they had never seen anyone cry that hard over selling a mule.

Another story my father likes to tell on me was when we were showing at the Missouri State Fair. I was showing a jenny colt, I had worked hard that summer getting her broke to lead. I believe I was six or seven years old at that time. All that work paid off, I took first place. When I went to get my ribbon the darn jenny colt would not walk for me. I dropped the lead rope and retrieved my ribbon without the jenny. The jenny was still standing in the same spot when I got back, surprisingly though, because the crowd was roaring with laughter.

My dream of having my own riding horse was finally fulfilled when I was in college. I had saved enough money to buy one for myself. Saving money was not an easy task around our house because we were paid in room and board. Dad just shook his head in disapproval, if only he knew then what we know now. That mare has had some of the best riding mules I have ever seen. I would sell her weanling colts for \$800 to a \$1,000. My nephew, Bennett French, took Reserve Grand Champion Riding mule at the Missouri State Fair this year, with her offspring.

One of my fondest memories with my father is going on road trips. He was the most comfortable pillow you could ask for. I could sleep going and coming home on these trips if I wanted to. However, that came to an end when I received my driver's license. I began driving both ways and he was the one that got to sleep. I remember the time his nap was rudely interrupted when we had a blowout on the truck. We were on our way home from Jackson, Mississippi, with fourteen full-grown jennies in the trailer. I was clicking right along when the rear tire blew and the truck started fish tailing down the interstate. When I finally got the truck under control and pulled over, Dad and I just looked at each other like, 'what in the world just happened?' I guess all those times doing chores in the mud taught me how to be a good driver.

There is a pair of mules I will never forget. Joe and Ann were their names. Dad raised Joe and he bought Ann from the Noltz boys.



Robyn

Dad turned this pair over to me when they were colts. They were blacks with white noses and white underneath their bellies. My first undertaking was getting them broke to lead, which is always a chore. In the end there is always a great feeling of self-reward. By the time they were two years old, I could shear them without a halter on. Then Dad decided to sell them at the Bobbi Quick Sale. I believe this pair brought \$4,000 in the sale ring. The guys who bought them stopped by a buddy's house on their way home from the sale. The buddy liked them so well, he bought them for \$6,000. This guy went on to break Joe and Ann, and then sold them to a military fort in Kansas. They now give one last ride to the ones who have served our country. Dad and I are proud to say we had a hand in raising that team.

I also remember John; he was a gray horse mule. When measured from the top of the hoof to the middle of his knee as a colt you would get eighteen inches. Now trying to find a mate to this mule was not going to be an easy task. By the way this mule and his momma won Grand Champion Mare and Mule Colt at the Missouri State Fair a few years back. Word gets around and Dad heard about a mule Nicky Howell had down in Tennessee. I believe we were housing tobacco at the time and Dad could not get away for the road trip. My husband Corey and I went on this trip together. When we got to Nicky's place he had a pair of mules in the back of a trailer. Dad had to buy both of them or none. Nicky started talking to Corey about the mules. Little did he know that Corey could not tell a horse mule from a mare mule at that time. Ha Ha Ha. I guess some men think the mule business is just for men. After I pointed all of their negative qualities out to Nicky, we brought the two mules home. I was just trying to get the price lowered, what every good daughter would do for her father. I never got this pair of horse mules as gentle as the blacks, but that is the opposite sex for you. Dad ended up selling this pair as two year olds at the Bobbi Quick Sale. I wonder if that mule ever made 18 hands, I guess I will never know.

The latest adventure that I went on with my father took us to the Kentucky State Fair. I did not see myself traveling nine hours with my three and half year old son and twenty-one-month old daughter. My mother convinced me that everything would be fine if she rode with me, and she was right as usual. My father took ten mules to show and my brother-in-law, Jimmy Duran to do all the work. I think Jimmy was the happiest one to see me show up to help show. All the traveling and the preparation of getting these ten mules ready paid off this time because my dad made Kentucky State Fair history. This year in 2010, he won Grand Champion Mule with a five-month-old colt he had raised. I was showing that mule and when I saw my father's face I knew I had made him proud. I guess my showing abilities have improved a little since dropping the lead rope at the Missouri State Fair to get my ribbon. My dad also won Grand Champion Pair of mare mules at the Kentucky Fair this year. My dad said he didn't care to show another day in his life after that.

Growing up on the farm was not an easy life, but I would not have had it any other way. My father and the mules have taught me to put up a strong fight and to never give up because persistence pays off. I have also learned to jump in and get the job done even if there is a little dirt involved.

Thanks, Dad for creating all of the wonderful memories I will cherish for the rest of my life. Robyn



*Lonnie and Linda Boydston's three daughters,
left to right:
Robyn Payton, Becky Duran and Rachel French.*

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Edotor's note: We want to thank the girls so much for sharing their special memories with our readers. This is one more reminder of what is important and how mules can help make those special memories with our families. Happy Thanksgiving to the Boydston Family and all of Western Mule Magazine readers.



*Robyn Payton showing the Best Mare Mule at the Kentucky State Fair 2010.
Photo courtesy of Sam Hegdespeth .*



*Left: Lonnie Boydston and Jimmy Duran, showing at the 2010 Kentucky State Fair and winning the Grand Champion Mule award.
Photo courtesy of Sam Hegdespeth .*



"Tiny"

Tiny was raised by Lonnie Boydston and is now owned by W.J. Staggs, from Livingston, Tennessee. Tiny is believed by some to be the tallest mule in the world standing 19 plus hands at only four years old. Tiny is the mule that Larry The Cable Guy worked, with help from W.J., during the filming of the new series "Only in America with Larry the Cable Guy" It is a new series that will air on the History Channel in February 2011.

Photo courtesy of Horse Pix Photography.



Reserve Champion Draft Mule at the 2010 Missouri State Fair; owned by Lonnie and Linda Boydston and shown by Jimmy Duran, Lonnie Boydston's son-in-law.

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