

## She'll never retire

# Country music's jewel recalls climb to stardom

Story: SHIRLEE IDEN  
Photo: John Stano

doesn't travel as much as she once did. It was a long, hard road for the star of the Grand Ole Opry. The miles she traveled for 30 years are countless; now her travels are less.

"I stay home, do civic work, charity work and stay very busy."

"I'm still singing and dancing. I can still do it. But retire? 'Never,' she said emphatically with her eyes widening.

"Never."

"But I had to quit singing at home, it made the dog howl so bad."

BUT MORE than dogs have howled at her zany antics, her old country costume, the 40-year-old shoes, the straw hat, with flowers and a floppy price tag pinned on top, and the shrill "How-DEE" that has resounded through hundreds of concert halls.

She has played for millions in concert and through radio and television.

Asked how she feels about country music becoming so big, her face lit up with that familiar grin.

"It feels so good. It's like taking a chance on a horse race and finding out you have a winner."

Her chance was taken many years ago, even before she came to the Grand Ole Opry 40 years ago.

"In those old times, people would listen to the radio, and they'd always say, 'My old aunt listens to you.' But they'd never admit they listened, too," she said.

"We were always identified with country, but now we have every walk of life."

"THERE ARE no more country people since everybody's got a television." How Sarah Ophelia Colley Cannon became Minnie Pearl?

"Why, it's a great name. I picked it out because they were really country names."

"In my town, there were lots of Minnies and lots of Pearls and double names are characteristic of the South."

## Century scholar winner named

Detroit Country Day School student Scott Falk, son of Mrs. Mervyn Falk, Farmington Hills, has won the Century III Leaders Scholarship Competition at the Birmingham prep school.

The award was based on leadership abilities, community involvement and scores on a current-events exam.

The 17-year-old senior, who also is the student-council president, is now eligible to compete with other high school competition winners throughout Michigan for four state scholarships and one national \$10,000 award. Falk must now write a brief composition about what he thinks will be America's foremost future challenge and how it should be met.

The two top Michigan winners will receive an all-expense-paid trip to the fifth annual Century III National Leadership seminar in Williamsburg, Va. to participate in seminars on current issues.

The Century III Leaders program is administered by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and funded by Shell Oil Company.

Her husband Henry calls her Sarah, she said.

"Then he'll get around show biz people and say 'Minnie,' and I have to look around to see who's talking."

If you ask her the most important things in her 68 years, she answers, "First, my marriage, and second, the night I was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame" in 1975.

Another high point came during the Nixon administration when she was invited to the White House.

"I was the co-chairman of the Cancer Crusade," she said. "I lost a sister to cancer, and I try to pay my dues."

Minnie Pearl's visit to this area was to talk about her autobiography "Minnie Pearl" written with Joan Dew and recently published by Simon and Schuster.

The book was begun because she wanted to write about the country music scene. But it became more autobiographical during its "three years of birthing time."

"WE PUT more of my evolution from a country girl to a world traveler," she said. "It was difficult to write the book. We're all prone to dwell on the happy parts of our lives."

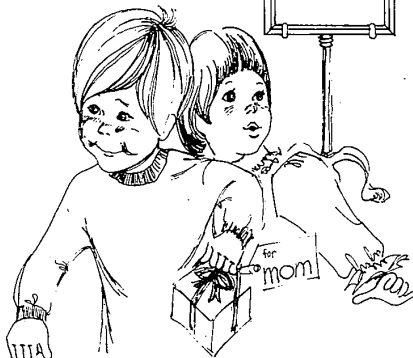
With pressure from her co-writer, she agreed to include some of the "seamier" things that happen to a young girl on the road.

She remembers well her 30 years of one-nighters, the adventure and the hard times "when there was nothing to do but cry or be silly."



Wearing her famous hat with a price tag on it, Minnie Pearl laughs heartily during her recent area visit. (Staff photo by John Stano)

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