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Sandy Thomas: from young ranch girl to vice president of a college

By Dick George
Editor
National High School Rodeo Association Times

Sandra "Sandy" Thomas could have been the subject of a book entitled, "What makes Sandy Run?" based on her activities as a young ranch girl, or for her accomplishments after leaving high school.

Sandra, an honor student from Eagle Lake, (and daughter of Ralph "Rusty" Thomas) got her first experience with rodeo on her father's ranch, or by following him to the rodeos he produced (as part of the Thomas-Clippson Rodeo Company). As an eleven-year-old, she was runner-up to the Texas State High School Rodeo Queen and won that honor the following year — going on to win the 1954 National NHRA Queen Title at the finals in Hallettsville when she had just turned 13.

Rodeo was not Sandra's entire world, however, as it is with so many of today's cowboys and cowgirls. She was always interested in the academic side of her school year, and in music and people.

She was proud of the fact that, even when she became a star in high school rodeo competition, the adults involved in the association and the announcers at the rodeos gave equal credit for her academic accomplishments.

According to her, one of the strengths of the present day National High School Rodeo Association is the dedication to using the association to provide access and financial assistance to further members' higher education.

She says there is a compatibility of excellence not only in horsemanship, but in school in general. Academic excellence and good sportsmanship are "two fine companions," she says, "and one does not have to suffer because of the other. I believe the NHRA scholarship program attests to the support of this compatibility."

Sandra's interest in rodeo did wane somewhat after winning her National Queen title in 1954, but she did go on to compete for and win the Los Charros Rodeo Queen title in her freshman year at the University of Texas. After that she turned her attention more fully to academic work, even though she was involved in equitation programs at

both Lindewood and Meredith Colleges where she later worked.

Under normal circumstances, it would be sufficient to remark only about Sandra's adult experience that, besides being an educator and a college vice president, she is also a world traveler, a distinguished scholar, a diplomat, a consultant for higher education and a frequent speaker and lecturer on education, world issues, women's issues, and is a frequent panelist, moderator and workshop coordinator for the business, professional and volunteer community.

Besides teaching and learning — Sandra has had a wide variety of related educational learning experiences going back to 1964 when she attended the National Music Camp, Interlochen, Michigan as a member of the staff.

In 1965 she served on the staff, Summer Youth Cultural and Recreational Program, Pearl Harbor, Honolulu, Hawaii. In 1966 she attended summer school at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

In 1967 she began her work with the Experiment in International Living by serving as a group leader to Mexico where she was responsible for student intercultural program bi-national activities, travel, liaison to Mexican National Office, and supervisor of language learning during a summer homestay program in Tuxtpec, Oaxaca, Mexico.

A similar program took her to Conception, Chile the following summer and in 1969 she was in charge of a group of 100 students and 10 teachers during a study program at the University of Madrid and Seville, Spain.

In 1970 she devoted her summer travel to independent research on Chile and study in Latin America.

In 1971 saw Sandra doing independent research on Chile and Peru, with visits to the major universities in those countries.

In 1972, she was again involved in the Experiment in International Living, this time as group leader to Spain for a summer homestay program in Segovia.

In 1973 she attended a Travel Study Conference in Latin America where she visited Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Argentina on the "Changing World of Women in the Americas." That same year she also did research for the Inter-American Commission of the Organization of American States on "Ways to Broaden the Political Participation of Women in the Americas."

During the summer of 1974 she worked on a coordinating committee for a congressional campaign in Memphis, Tennessee.

In December and January of 1975 Sandra was a member of the U.S. Delegation on World Education Fellowship to the International Conference on World Education in Bombay, India. The trip included meetings with the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the President of India prior to the Conference, as well as visits with U.S. Embassy Officials, other Indian officials and visits to Indian schools, universities and rural villages.

Later that same year, in June and July, she was the non-government organization delegate representing the World Education Fellowship to the United Nations World Meeting in International Women's Year in Mexico City.

Early in January of 1976, Sandra participated in an Interreligious Dialogue/Study Seminar to the Middle East where she was invited to join 23 representatives of Jewish, Protestant and Catholic faiths in a visit to community and government leaders in Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Israel to discuss the prospects for peace in the Middle East and to determine the role women could play in peace-making and peace-keeping.

In March of 1976 she served as Academic Leader of a Meredith College Spring Study Group to Mexico including study of ancient Mexico, an historical overview of the Mexican culture, and a dialogue on contemporary social and political issues in an effort to encourage a better understanding of Mexico and its people.

In June of 1976 she was a

Fellowship Recipient for a Duke University Summer Institute on Japanese politics.

In March of 1977, Sandra again was in Peru as academic leader of a Meredith College student-faculty study seminar which included a round-table seminar in Lima with national and local leaders and later visits to Cuzco, Machu Picchu, Iquitos and travel on the Amazon River.

Later, in August 1977, she was a participant in a U.S. Delegation Peace Seminar to the Soviet Union. The group met with committees in Moscow, Kiev, Odessa, Volgograd and Leningrad.

She was a guest professor for a summer Venezuelan Scholar Program sponsored by the Venezuelan Government in June 1978 for Master's Degree candidates in higher education held at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, Texas. Topic: Administration of American Higher Education and Student Development. The program was conducted in Spanish.

That same year she did research for the Inter-American Commission of the Organization of American States. From March 2 to March 12, 1979, Sandra served as the academic leader and coordinator of a Meredith College Spring Travel Seminar to Spain, focusing on Spanish history, geography, literature and art of the country.

In June of 1980 she participated in a Shipboard Conference on International Education aboard the SS Universe including seminars, lectures and discussions on current issues in international education. In October, 1980 she was appointed by the U.S. Department of State to the United States Delegation to the Biennial Assembly of the Inter-American Commission of Women of the Organization of American States held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

In March 1981, she was academic leader and coordinator of another Meredith trip to Mexico which focused on history and culture in Mexico D.F., Yucatan and Cozumel.

Prior to her tenure at Meredith College, where she presently is vice president in charge of student development, she served as North Carolina Gov. James B. Hunt's Executive

Director of Citizen Affairs (1977-78); Dean of Students at Lindewood College (1969-70); Assistant Dean of Women at Southern Methodist University, Dallas (1968-69); Graduate Assistant, Indiana University, Bloomington (1967-68); Teacher of English, The Briam Institute, Academy of Languages, Madrid, Spain; and Teacher, College Preparatory English, Lakewood, Denver (1966-67 and 1963-65).

She is a member of numerous education associations and civic organizations and was named the Outstanding Young Woman of Metropolitan St. Louis (1972-73); Tar Heel of the Week, Raleigh News & Observer (1977); and Distinguished Woman of North Carolina (1977).

Sandra Thomas continues in her position as Vice President of Meredith College and her involvement in a continuing stream of activities which have made up her adult life.

The discipline and dedication she learned as a youth in Texas

her ability to balance a large number of interests and activities, must be tied to the years when she balanced rodeo, academics and ranch life in Eagle Lake.

She hasn't been associated with the National High School Rodeo Association for many years, and was amazed at the size it had grown to and was pleased with the emphasis now placed on seeing that high school students complete their studies and go on to college.

At any rate, this account of one former member's life during and after High School Rodeo should dispel any feeling that there just isn't time to do everything a person wants to

do. *Submitted by the December 1985 issue of the National High School Rodeo Association Times.*

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