

Newsletter295

Keith's Corner/McGill News

December 27, 2024

Dan Bush Builds A Dogsled

The winter of 1948-49 was a bad one. That was the winter of the famous “haylift”. The U. S. Air Force was using C-82 cargo planes to drop hay to the many stranded cattle herds.



The snow was so deep that the cows couldn't move.

The snow was deep and the temperatures were very low, but the local school gulag never closed for a second. We McGill heathens had to brave the cold and trudge through knee deep snow, to sit in a classroom, when we could have been sledding and more immortally, pelting the girls with snowballs.

KCC blocked off I Ave. For us McGill misfits to sleigh ride to our heart's content.

Dan Bush and I were close friends, but Dan didn't like to sleigh ride, but his three brothers, Keith, Tommy and Jerry did. Dan was always inventing and building things. He did amazing things with leather. Years later, he would build saddles and other horse riding gear.

He had a nice Flexible Flyer sled, but decided to build a better one.

One day he asked me to come to his house and help him with a problem. The problem turned out to be his newly built sled. It was an authentic Alaskan dog sled and was too big to get out of the basement. The McGill houses had an outside slanted cellar door and the sled was too big to get up the 8 stairs and through the door. We spent several hours, but due to the tremendous ingenuity of our McGill upbringing we finally got it out of the cellar.

Dan rode it down I Ave one time and decided it was too hard to steer and too much work getting it back up the hill. We pulled it back to his house and he hooked up his dog in a harness he quickly made, but the sled was too big for the little dog to pull. I started to leave and Dan told me to come back later and he would have some more dogs.

I did go back hours later and he did have more dogs. I guess he just went around the town and collected some dogs. He had them all in the long harness he had made. They were all growling and snapping at each other, but Dan said they would stop that once he got them moving. He stepped on the back of the sled and then cracked a long bullwhip over the dogs and yelled 'mush'. The crack of the whip sent them all into a frenzy and they all tried to run in different directions. Eventually the harness broke and the dogs got loose and headed for parts unknown.

Later that winter I saw Dan riding the sled down 1st. Street with 4 dogs pulling him. He had a way with animals. He told me later that he took the sled out of town and had a lot of fun with it.

The sled was a masterpiece. He probably saw a picture of one and was able to duplicate it. He built it out of scrap lumber and tied all the joints with wet buckskin leather. The buckskin would tighten as it dried. It wove some buckskin straps into a strong webbed seat. It was beautiful. Dan was amazing at building things.

Dan Bush was a unique individual and had a mind of his own and stubbornness to go with it. Whenever he got an idea and started some project, he worked at it with great intensity, until finished. He enjoyed working with leather. He made countless belts, holsters and tack for horses.

Dan loved horses and kept one at the McGill corrals. He used a horse on a lot of his many lion hunts. I never knew Dan to do any walking.

Dan acquired some hounds and began a long career of hunting lion and jaguars. This career led him to various parts of Mexico. He became friends with other hunters and teamed up with some to catch jaguars for zoos.

Dan would always bring back gifts for his parents and brothers. I remember one time when he came home and his brother Keith started bugging Dan about his gift. Dan casually pointed to a large suitcase on the couch and told Keith to open it up and see what the gift was. Keith quickly unbuckled the straps and lifted the lid to peak in and see what the gift was. Suddenly, Keith screamed and jumped back. A large 12 footlong python slithered out of the suitcase. Now Keith didn't want anything to do with the snake, but his mother, Blanche, loved it and took great care of it.

One I stopped to see Dan. Blanche answered the door and told me Dan was in his bedroom. As I was walking through the living room my eyes caught a movement on the valance that held up the drapes. The python liked to get on the couch and then slither up the wall and lay on top of the valance. Probably thought it was a tree branch. I gave it a wide berth as I went through the room. Dan led an exciting life and had many experiences that most people only dream of having. He lived his life to the fullest.

I am learning Word Perfect and will use it instead of Microsoft Word for various reasons. I will put the Nls

into PDF, as I am told that it will open in most everyone's device. If you have trouble please let me know. Thanks to all of you for your patience. I hope to get caught up this next week. I hope there are not too many mistakes. Have a great year—Keith