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Carla Payne with a black bear she hunted in northern California. Big game hunting is just one of Payne's passions.

Photo by Kathy Floyd

Passion and Payne

Many interests lead Slidell woman on many adventures

By Kathy Floyd
Staff Writer

Carla Payne shares her home with some unusual roommates – a couple of Australian Shepherd dogs, a grizzly bear, a black bear, an elk, a bobcat and an airplane. While Longhorn cattle may not exactly share the home, they're nearby.

At the Flying C Ranch between Era and Slidell, Payne has found a home where she can nurture all her passions, hunting, flying and Longhorns, plus serve the community as captain of the Slidell Volunteer Fire Department and a basic Emergency Medical Technician.

Growing up in Lubbock and Levelland, Payne's first love though was horses.

"I rode horses before I could walk," Payne said. "My mom said I only cried when they pulled me off horses."

She comes by her love of flying naturally. Her dad and uncle both flew. Payne spotted an offer for flying lessons for \$300 and worked on her dad's farm to earn the money to pay for the lessons.

"I probably cost him more than that with things I broke," Payne said.

She was 15 then, and flew solo at 16.

She met her future husband Carl through their mutual love of flying. He flew a P-51 fighter plane with the Commemorative Air Force, a flying museum of World War II airplanes. They married when Carla was 19 and moved from West Texas to Katy and started an aerial application (crop dusting) business. They also used the planes to fight fires. In 2000, it was fighting a fire in far West Texas that took her husband's life in a crash when he hit a radio tower.

Payne planned to stay in the business, but a prospective new pilot changed her mind. After their interview, the pilot had a serious crash and realized he didn't want to take any more chances in the crop-dusting business. Payne saw his point.

She ended up in North Texas in 2002 after buying land between Era and Slidell with friends who are aerobatic pilots. One reason they bought the land was so the pilots would have a place to practice their flying. Payne still flies, but just for pleasure, or when a friend wants to survey some land. She flies a 1973 Cessna 185 with an IO-550 conversion engine.

When Carl and Carla Payne got married, they bought two Longhorn cows as their wedding presents to each other. After producing some award-winning

Longhorns, Payne said she got a good reputation as a breeder, then was asked to judge Longhorns. She has now been judging Longhorns for about 10 years.

Payne said that character is what sets Longhorns apart, aside from their long horns. That is what she looks for in other Longhorns. She runs a herd of 20 registered Longhorns now, and shares her knowledge of the cows with area children.

"It's exciting to let little kids see what used to roam here before European breeds came," Payne said.

She said that people are amazed by Longhorns' gentleness and good nature.

"You can move through a herd of these cows with 70 inches of horns and they will lift their horns so you can get through," Payne said.

Boomerang CP is her most well-known Longhorn.

Helping others is a recurring theme with Payne. She grew up with a Christian background and in return for help she has received, Payne believes she needs to help others. She will let school kids use cattle in ag projects because she believes ag projects are motivational.

She volunteered to help drive trucks for the Slidell Fire Department and ended up as captain and training officer. During the summers, Payne took Texas Engineering Extension Service training and with Slidell Fire Chief Adam North and other officers, said that the organization has grown into a more structured organization. The department of 23 volunteers is now applying for grants and concentrating on safety.

When she joined, Payne said she told them that she would help with fires but not wrecks. Now, after being certified as an EMT basic, she had rather work wrecks because offers an immediate assistance to people.

Payne attends the First Baptist Church in Slidell and there her commercial driver's license with a bus endorsement comes in handy when the church needs a bus driver.

Judging a Longhorn show in California, she met a rancher who let her hunt black bear in northern California, leading to her current passion of big game hunting. She has been to Alaska twice and will go again this year. The elk that looks over her living room was shot near Yellowstone National Park. In Alaska, she has hunted in places so

remote that airplanes land on hills to let hunting parties off for a week of tracking their quarries.

"Alaska is so beautiful," Payne said. "You land in the middle of nowhere. You're sleeping in a tent and cooking on a fire. But you learn patience and discipline while you're hunting."

Payne said that's what the attraction of big game hunting is — the hunt itself.

"You have to outwit and outsmart the quarry," Payne said. "They're smart. They can smell you for two miles. Your heart gets pumping while you're tracking big game."

Elk meat is eaten but is too expensive

to bring home so it is distributed to Alaskan villages. Grizzly bear is not eaten. Payne said that controlling grizzlies is necessary because they hurt the moose population.

Both the grizzly and the black bear are less than an inch away from qualifying on the Boone and Crockett Scale, a rating system using skull measurements. But these tendencies to bring home her trophies and display them have led friends to offer to redecorate her house. She doesn't care as long as she's gone hunting for more trophies while they redecorate.



Carla Payne with her 1973 Cessna 185 airplane, parked inside her garage.

Photo by Kathy Floyd