

Local David Balsiger Was Senior Producer of ‘Grizzly Adams’

I am sure that many of you of a certain age will remember the television series, Grizzly Adams, which ran for the 1977-78 season with Dan Haggerty portraying Adams. This character was loosely based on the real life of John Boyden “Grizzly” Adams (1812 - 1860), who was a California mountain man and trainer of grizzly bears and other wild animals. I am sure that most of you are wondering what this has to do with the history of our area. Read on to get that answer.

David Balsiger, who was Vice President and Senior Producer of Grizzly Adams Productions, Inc., was born in Monroe in December 1945. He attended the Oakley (one room) School for all eight grades followed by a year and a half at Juda High School (Class of 1964) before his family moved to California during his sophomore year. He then graduated from Western High School in Anaheim in 1964. It was while attending high school in California that his instructors noticed his writing skills and entered his work into contests where he received several awards and college scholarships.

David attended Chapman and Pepperdine Universities before earning a bachelor’s degree from National University. David was a lifelong investigative journalist, activist, photographer, speaker, best-selling author, and award-winning film producer and director. David co-authored, with the late Charles E. Sellier, the best-selling books *The Lincoln Conspiracy* and *In Search of Noah’s Ark*, which were both made into major movies of the same titles. *The Lincoln Conspiracy* landed on the New York Times Best Seller List for 22 weeks. He then received his Doctorate of Humane Letters from Lincoln Memorial University.

When I learned in 2016 that David had grown up in the area, I searched the internet to see if I could find contact information for him. My plan was to do a temporary display at the Green County Historical Society museum for the 2017 season. I was impressed that David got back to me very quickly and was very receptive to the idea. We communicated by email and telephone a few times in the months leading up to the opening on June 2. He graciously shipped to us several boxes of carefully wrapped artifacts, which included various mementos of his life and accomplishments.

I was able to fill all three shelves inside of an antique display case and had a few signs and photographs left for the top of the case. Some of the items on display included a special Tourism Ambassador Plaque from the country of South Africa, a photo of David and his assistant on President Reagan’s Air Force plane at the opening of the Reagan Library, a commemorative piece of the Berlin Wall given to David by German film makers, and a silver-coated Noah’s Ark given to him in Israel. I, of course, shared photos with him of our display.

David made a list of a few items that could be left at the museum here so that a small display could be created in the coming years. I carefully wrapped and sent back the rest of the items. Unfortunately, David did not live long enough to see those items returned. He unexpectedly passed away in Loveland, Colorado at the age of 71 leaving his wife Victoria Gardner, three daughters, and three grandchildren.

David and Victoria had last returned to the area in 2014 to attend the fiftieth class reunion of the Juda High School Class of 1964. Even though he did not graduate from Juda, he had been in school with some of those people for almost ten years. That evening he shared that he “grew up in a strict Swiss German family without any positive affirmations or any warm parental love expressions. My father would tell us five kids—you’ll never amount to a damn! So as a youngster, I wasn’t off to a very positive, self-



This photo from September 2014 shows David Balsiger, who was raised near Oakley and became Vice President and Senior Producer of Grizzly Adams Productions, Inc. Shown with David is his paternal aunt Esther Gobeli, a lifelong resident of the county. David’s grandmother, Anna Balsiger, passed away on September 14, 2001 at the age of 112. She had been a lifelong resident of Green County.

confident start.” David was fortunate to have those teachers in California who saw his potential and helped him reach for the stars.

While they were here for the reunion, David and Victoria had also visited the GCHS museum, so he was familiar with the building where his display was located. Of special interest on his visit in 2014 was the one-room schoolhouse on the museum grounds, which was similar (though smaller) to “his” Oakley School that he had attended. Unfortunately, I don’t have a photo of David to share from that visit since he did all of the photography that afternoon. A photo of the group of students attending Oakley school with David inside the school had been a part of the museum display. Although David was not able to see the display, several of his relatives and friends were able to see it.

Because of the display done here, David decided that he would like to put together a permanent display about his work that could travel to libraries and museums that might like to feature it for a time. The exhibit he created is currently on permanent display at the Loveland Public Library and has been at various churches and organizations as the pandemic allowed. Loveland, Colorado was David’s home for many years and is his final resting place.

As the museum exhibit was being created in the spring of 2017, David said to Victoria several times, “I’m so blessed. Most people don’t get an exhibit of their life and work until after they’re dead, and then someone else does it for them. I got to create mine myself.” He would be so proud to see the display in Loveland, which actually uses a display panel that was created here in Monroe.

Victoria has recently been in contact with Monroe Public Library director Suzanne Holland to donate items that can be displayed here and others that can be checked out. Select items will be held in the Kundert Special Collections archive, while published items will be held in the “Made in Monroe” collection. David would be so proud and pleased that his work, values, and legacy are being shared with the folks in his hometown.