

THE STAR SEPTEMBER 1, 1981

# Ballad of Harry Truman Hails folk hero

Like Johnny Appleseed, Davy Crockett and Casey Jones, Harry Truman is now a folk hero. That's not the former President of the United States, but a simple mountain man whose life was meaningful because he had something that he cared about enough to die for it — his home near Mount St. Helens.

"I'm not leavin'," said Harry when he was warned the volcano in Washington State would soon erupt. "I'm part of that mountain, and the mountain is part of me."

On May 16, 1980, hundreds of feet of ash and mud buried Harry, his 16 cats and his house. But even though the whiskey sipping 84-year-old is gone, he's not forgotten — far from it.

He's remembered in songs, souvenirs, posters and even in a restaurant named after him.

More than 100 songs — including such favorites as *The Ballad Of Harry Truman*, *Harry's Song*, *Ode To Harry Truman* and *Give 'Em Hell, Harry* — have been composed in honor of the modern-day martyr.

And a record album called *The Musical Legend Of Harry Truman — A Very Special Collection Of Mount St. Helens' Volcano Songs*, has become a best seller in the area near Harry's beloved home.

The gutsy old hero lived just five miles from the awesome volcano — at Spirit Lake. So even though a memorial marker is planted over the site where his house stood, most tourists can't get near it because it's in the area restricted since last year's devastating eruption.

But they can buy the Harry Truman hats, photographs, postcards and posters sold nearby — and that's exactly what they're doing.

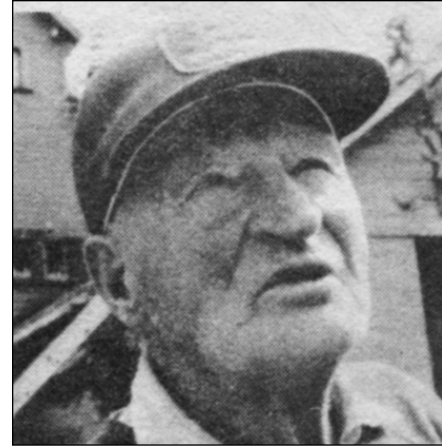
And tourists in Anchorage, Alaska, can even dine in a restaurant named after the old man. The eatery, which honored Harry's sister — 75-year-old Geri Whiting — at its opening, serves such special-ties as Harry's Hot Molten Chili. And the owner is planning to open a second restaurant just a few miles from where Harry died.

Says Mrs. Whiting: "Harry loved being the center of attention when he was alive, so I know he would be delighted by what has happened since his death,"

Harry's sister, who planted the memorial on the first anniversary of his death, was the star of an autograph-signing party when her book, *The Legend Of Harry Truman*, was published.

"He always wanted to be famous but I'm sure he could never, have dreamed of anything like this happening," she says.

"Lots of people seem to be producing mementos of Harry. He's a public figure now so there's nothing we can do about



Harry Truman, a mountain man turned martyr, is now a folk hero.



Geri Whiting, who wrote *"The Legend of Harry Truman"* looks at merchandise hailing her brother who died at Mt. St. Helens.

## Record set straight

# Harry Truman is misunderstood

*Mrs. Whiting is the only sister of Harry Truman, She is the sister who is mentioned in this article which is phrased as though written by Mr. Whiting,*

**By D. O. and Geri Truman Whiting  
Castle Rock Residents**

The family of Harry Truman would appreciate it if the erroneous and misleading stories of Harry Truman and his drinking during his early years at Spirit Lake would cease, They are embarrassing, false and unfounded.

There are only two people on Earth today who are in possession of the true facts of Harry Truman's life; neither of those are The Daily News' editor or Shirley Rosen.

Harry Truman's first wife did not leave him and the Spirit Lake country because of a drinking problem. He did not drink during his early years at Spirit Lake. It was coffee and tea he refused to drink, and to the end his eyesight and hearing were good, along with good general health. Until the day he died, Harry was not concerned, if, in fact, he had a problem. Never in my 52 years association with him did I ever see him with a hangover.

Harry liked the benefits of his drinking in later life far more than the pills and bitter medicine his doctors assured him he should take to remain healthy. He managed to out-live both of those gentlemen.

Life at Spirit Lake in 1928 was a step back in time. The resort was snowed-in for an average of six months out of 12. A trip to town meant a journey on skis of 12 to 15 miles one

way to get to his parked car. There was no electricity, no fresh food supply — but unlimited solitude.

Even a trip to the bathroom, or, in this case, toilet, meant donning snowshoes and trudging to the outhouse buried under many feet of snow, then down 12 to 20 icy snow-covered steps to the frostiest, most chilling experience of one's life. That was life during the early days at Spirit Lake. Harry's first wife simply could not cope with this kind of life, so came the parting of their ways.

For the next several years Harry's sister lived with him at Spirit Lake, summer and winter. The two of them always got along well together, but the memories of the snowbound winters at Spirit Lake are strong and vivid to Harry's sister today.

It was Harry's sister who organized an emergency trip to the hospital in midwinter 1932, for Harry via bobsled and skis some 15 miles as the result of a skiing accident. It was Harry's sister who tried to prepare beans, macaroni, rice and canned milk with moldy ham and bacon in a different way than for the previous six months, a matter joked about later.

Through all this I view Harry Truman as a very tough, aggressive person.

He refused to let adversity slow him down. He and his sister toughed it out several long, long years together at Spirit Lake.

During the spring in the early days Harry would organize a work party including the writer, and open the well-

snowed-in road with hand shovels. One year we shoveled over four miles of road; the other years the distance would be about two miles — well below Lange's Resort to Spirit Lake.

Harry's sister and I lived through three crippling wind-storms that reduced the cabins to kindling, but, again, Harry rebuilt and continued on. During this time we assisted Harry in rebuilding every cabin, two boathouses, shop and major building at his Spirit Lake resort.

We do feel we know the background and history of Harry Truman.

I would like to close with a contribution from our family member, Mr. John Anderson, of Longview:

*I can see a smile on his face,*

*For he lived and he died in his own special place.*

*All he would ask of the Lord for his sake,*

*Is a place in eternity like Spirit Lake.*

*May he rest in peace.*