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CRAZY HORSE MEMORIAL, S.D. -- The young reach for the stars. Every road is a magic carpet. Over time some warriors fall behind clouds, others get swept away in storms.

But Ruth Ziolkowski is a lucky woman. She has lived in the heavens above the Black Hills.

Ruth is the widow of Korczak Ziolkowski, a sculptor who dreamed big. On June 3, 1948, Korczak began carving the likeness of Oglala Lakota leader Crazy Horse into a granite mountain in the southern Black Hills, about 45 miles southwest of Rapid City.

Korczak died in 1982. The work is still under way, and Ruth wears his dream like a ring around her finger.

During my June 27 visit to the Crazy Horse Memorial, the constellations aligned. Unbeknownst to me, June 26 was Ruth's 80th birthday. And June 25 was the 130th anniversary of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, where Crazy Horse, Touch the Clouds (who stood nearly 7 feet tall) and Lakota and Cheyenne warriors defeated Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer and his 7th Cavalry.

Custer and his troops invaded Lakota territory after Indian inspectors claimed Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull were hostile to the United States. In the two-day battle, Custer and the 200 men he commanded were killed. It was a stirring victory for the Indian nation.

On June 27, descendents of Crazy Horse were visiting the site in commemoration of the Battle of Little Bighorn. Every four years they make an annual 13-day pilgrimage on horseback to Crazy Horse from the battle site, 313 miles away.

The Floyd Clown family took me to the top of the monument, the 88-foot-high head of Crazy Horse. (The great warrior had no children, but the Clown family is related to Crazy Horse through his sister.) When completed, the Crazy Horse Memorial will be 563 feet high and 641 feet long -- twice the size of the Statue of Liberty. The Lakota warrior's arm will point to his ancestral homeland while perched on a stallion more than two soccer fields long.

Self-taught sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski was brought on board in 1948 by Lakota Chief Henry Standing Bear. Korczak volunteered his services. The chief noticed Gutzon Borglum's carving of Mount Rushmore, 17 miles northeast of where the Crazy Horse Memorial now stands. The chief wanted a sculpture to honor the

American Indian. He got that and more.

After visiting Crazy Horse, I visited Mount Rushmore. It was a slight letdown -- so much smaller and, in fact, I learned that the four presidential Mount Rushmore figures could squeeze inside of the Sioux warrior's head I was standing in front of earlier in the day.

Floyd Clown slowly walked to the edge of the arc of the Crazy Horse sculpture, high above the southern Black Hills. There was dignity in each step. Clown, 51, has spent his entire life along the Cheyenne River.

"Crazy Horse believed the two-legged man who walked on this earth had no skin color," he said. "They were all created equal within nature. He believed the strength of a nation was in its children. We are trying to make other people aware of his spirituality."

What makes the Crazy Horse effort even more amazing is that the memorial receives no government money. When Korczak, Ruth and five survivors of the Battle of Little Bighorn began work on the sculpture in 1948, they refused to take federal funds. A nonprofit corporation was formed in 1949. The Crazy Horse Memorial exists on admission fees, contributions and sales from a gift shop. "People say, 'I'll support you as long as you don't take government money,'" Ruth said over lunch with a benevolent smile.

"People still love free enterprise."

There is so much more to the memorial than the mountain carving. The complex consists of more than 1,000 acres and employs 176 people. A Laughing Water Restaurant overlooks the mountain carving and tourists can check out Korczak's original workshop and log studio. An Indian Museum of North America is built from native pine and incorporates three wings. Visitors watch an orientation DVD in a 300-seat twin theater.

Ruth Ziolkowski was born Ruth Ross in West Hartford, Conn. She spent summers at Fenwick on the Connecticut shore in the shadow of Katharine Hepburn's residence. She met Korczak at a Connecticut party for actor Richard Bennett. They married in 1950. Korczak was born in Boston and orphaned at 1 year old. He grew up in foster homes.

"Korczak loved people," she said. "If the banker was there for the lunch and the garbage man came to the door, he could get the two of them together at the same table. Life was always fun."

Korczak moved to South Dakota on the invitation of Standing Bear. The chief had noticed Korczak won first prize at the New York World's Fair in 1939 for his marble portrait of pianist Ignace Paderewski. When Korczak began work on the mountain,

he was 40 years old and had \$174 to his name. He lived in a tent before building himself a log cabin.

"When we got here, there was no highway going by," Ruth said. "There was no electricity, no running water, no telephones -- which in itself was a blessing. It was as close to pioneering as you could come and stay in this country. It was beautiful. Laughing Water Creek starts up here at the foot of the mountain and flows south to Custer. Mr. Borglum had started Mount Rushmore. During three months in the summer of 1939, Korczak worked with Borglum on Mount Rushmore before they had a falling out. It was just about as finished as it was when he passed away in '41. But it wasn't the tremendous economical aspect it is today."

The Ziolkowskis weren't popular when they arrived in South Dakota. Businesses still posted signs that said, "We Don't Serve Indians."

"They thought Korczak was crazy," Ruth recalled. "People didn't think we needed two mountain carvings. And the attitudes toward Native Americans in those days was not good. Attitudes changed, thanks to our Gov. George S. Mickelson 1987-1993, he died in an April 20, 1993 plane crash, whose father was governor when we came out here. They lived near one of the reservations so the family grew up with Native Americans. They had a genuine love of Native Americans. There were a number of people Korczak invited for the first blast in the mountains in 1948. The only politician in South Dakota who came was Gov. George T. Mickelson. The rest of them didn't want anything to do with the project."

The mountain crew's foreman is Cas Ziolkowski, the 52-year-old son of Ruth and Korczak. Blasts in the mountain average once a week during good weather. There are two nighttime blasts: On June 26, to honor Ruth's birthday and the Battle of the Little Bighorn, and on Sept. 6. In a mystical coincidence, Sept. 6 is day of Crazy Horse's death in 1877 and it marks the 1908 birth of Korczak.

In 1996, a two-level Native American Cultural Center was built with blast fragments. Visitors can take home a small piece of granite from a blast. Mine sits adjacent to my Crazy Horse shrine in my Chicago apartment.

The Ziolkowskis struggled to make ends meet in the early years. The family raised hogs, cattle and chickens. Ruth rode a horse to nearby towns to sell eggs. Ruth and Korczak had 10 children and seven are still involved with the memorial. All 10 children live within five miles of Crazy Horse. She recalled, "On the way home from school our children would pick up pop bottles. They were worth a nickel. We would go to Rapid City and knock on doors to see if people would contribute to Crazy Horse. We'd tell them about the project. I may have only had \$50, but I never came home empty."

Since work on the memorial began in 1948 Ruth learned that Crazy Horse was "a real hero."

"He was killed when he was only 35 years old," she said. In 1877, while at Fort Robinson, Neb., under a flag of truce, he was stabbed in the back by an American soldier. He was a martyr to his people. They still teach Crazy Horse's method of fighting. He took care of older people and the little ones. When they put out the Crazy Horse stamp Jan. 15, 1982 the assistant postmaster general was here. He said Crazy Horse was not only a hero to the Indian people, but he should be a hero to all people. We need heroes today."

But -- tricky for a sculptor -- there are no pictures of Crazy Horse.

"Three of my uncles posed for Korczak," Floyd Clown said. "They did a ceremony but Korczak couldn't tell anybody how he came up with the face. He burned the sketches when he was done. He kept his promise. When we came here in 2003 our family told Ruth for the first time."

More than 1 million people visit the Crazy Horse Memorial annually. Notable visitors recently have included race car driver Richard Petty (who just visited a couple weeks ago), President Bill Clinton, and June Carter Cash and Johnny Cash, who would stop by every time they had a show in the Rapid City area. "I've never seen anybody with broader shoulders than Johnny Cash," Ruth said. "And he was always dressed in black, I don't care if it was 100 degrees in August. He asked a lot of questions. He and Korczak hit it off."

I asked Ruth what people are looking for when they come here.

She paused and said, "That's a very good question. People have either been here before or they have friends who have been here. The American public has a great spirit. We get a little more people every year." Of course, most visitors wonder when the memorial will be finished. Work has been ongoing for 58 years, which only rivals the Illinois Tollway system. Yet the work-in-progress makes visitors want to come back.

"It's about every three years to return," Ruth said. "Which is kind of nice, because if you watch a youngster grow, you don't see the difference from day to day. This mountain is the same way. I will never forget that Korczak was sitting on the back porch one day when a blast went off. A lady walked up to him and asked, 'How many tons did that move?' He said, 'About 600 tons.' She looked back at the mountain and looked at him and said, 'If that's all the difference 600 tons makes, I know why it's going to take forever.'"

Today's crew works from a keenly detailed 16-ton plaster model and three books of instructions Korczak left behind. The model can be seen on the viewing deck, adjacent to the memorial's Indian Museum of North America. Korczak also had a surprise in his will.

"There was a letter he wrote in 1952 that he included with his will," Ruth said. "The youngsters had never seen the letter. He said life is fleeting. We're like a wisp of a cloud that comes up out of the horizon, from where we know not. You can, with your own lives, either darken the sun and make things unhappy for you, or you can create a lovely haven of shade for your family, your friends and for those who will follow you."

Ruth Ziolkowski fell quiet. She looked out the window at the Crazy Horse Memorial. It was one of the longest days of summer and it seemed as if the sun would circle the Black Hills forever.

### SCULPTOR FINDS CATERPILLARS FLY

CRAZY HORSE MEMORIAL, S.D. -- In 1976, Cas Ziolkowski encountered a mechanical problem with one of the Caterpillar bulldozers while working on Thunderhead Mountain, the site of the Crazy Horse Memorial.

The bulldozer slipped off the side of the mountain. Cas jumped clear of his impending doom, but the bulldozer tumbled down the mountain, rolled about 200 feet and landed on its tracks -- still running.

Word of the accident got back to Caterpillar headquarters in Peoria.

Head sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski and his wife, Ruth, soon got a letter from Caterpillar awarding them 25 shares of common stock. The Caterpillar president joked how the company has testing grounds -- they really didn't need to fly a bulldozer off a mountain.

The bulldozer is still used on the mountain today.

CRAZY HORSE MEMORIAL, S.D. - Sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski twice refused \$10 million from the U.S. government to complete the Crazy Horse Memorial. He replied, "I have copies of 365 treaties the government made with the Indian; am I to believe you would keep this one?" He always said the public - not the taxpayer - would finance the memorial.

A \$26.5 million fund-raising campaign, "Dynamite and Dreams," targeted to individuals, corporations and foundations, will be announced on Oct. 7. It is the first national fund-raiser in Crazy Horse history. The goal is to raise \$16.5 million over the first three to five years and then another \$10 million, said Fred Tully, development director.

The first project is a \$1.4 million dormitory that will house 40 American Indian students who will work at the memorial. The second phase will fund a hall that will recognize Indian heroes from the past and present, including an astronaut,

soldiers, athletes and people in science and medicine.