

NORTH DAKOTA horizons

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North Dakota's State Magazine

Explore North Dakota
This Summer



Dakota Attitude: The Stories of North Dakota

By **Becky Thorp, Clearwater Communications**

Following his retirement in 2004, author Jim Puppe traveled 113,000 miles over 14 years to visit every town in North Dakota. He was on a mission to collect the inspiring stories of the state's residents and write his book, *Dakota Attitude*. "The book captures a unique, positive attitude found in the lives and experiences of several North Dakotans," says Puppe.

Dakota Attitude contains 617 stories, along with photos taken by Puppe, that will preserve the history of North Dakota for generations to come.

A North Dakota Native

Puppe grew up with three brothers on a farm near Hensel. When he started grade school, there were only two kids in his class. Many of his memories of growing up in North Dakota include milking and feeding cows, chickens and pigs; driving tractors; hauling manure; candling eggs; planting the garden; and being domesticated by helping his mom in the house. "We had a few protests as to who would wash and dry the dishes, but nevertheless, they got done," says Puppe.

He also remembers when his family bought a television set in the 1950s and his mom boldly said, "television is ruination to the family."

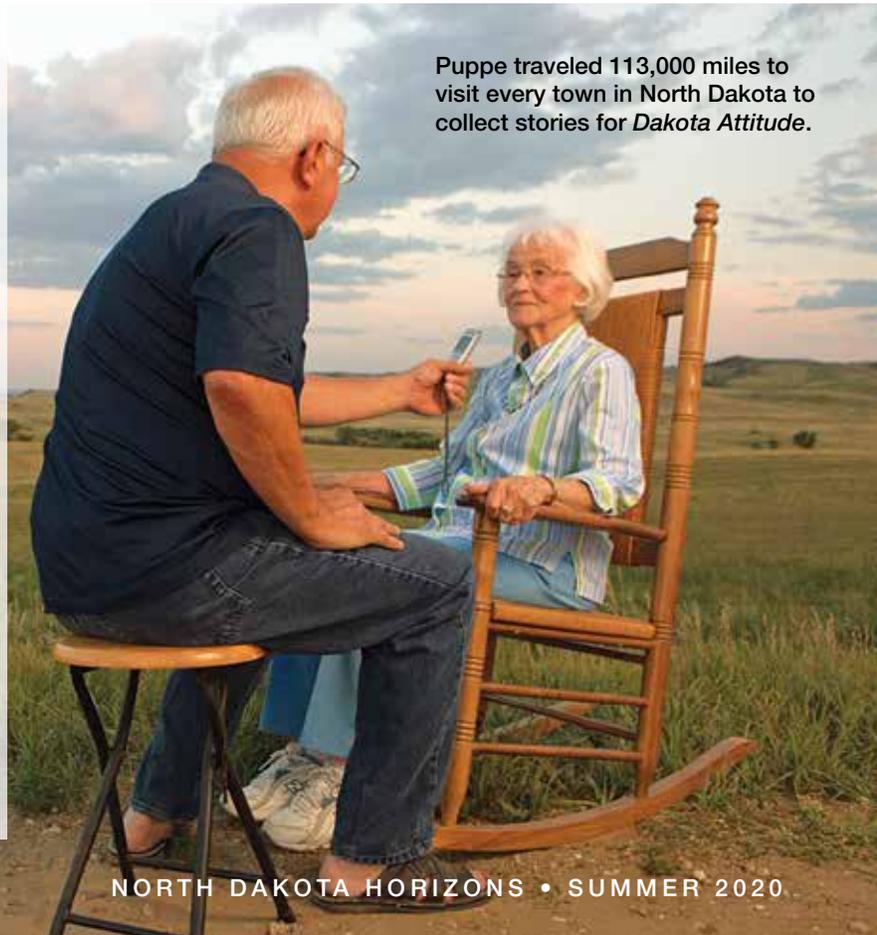
Puppe served in the Vietnam War and, after the war, went to work for the Veterans Administration (VA). He rated disability for veterans and was also the coordinator for the former American Prisoners of War (POW). This experience made Puppe aware of the hardships many soldiers encountered. "Through interactions with these special veterans, I was aware of the trauma, deprivation, humiliation, and severe hardships they endured. The POWs went through so much and asked for so little. In spite of their captivity, their resiliency and love for America left a lasting impression on me," he says.

Puppe retired from the VA in 2004 and was inspired to record the stories of those living in North Dakota. "I would still think about what those POWs went through. I wondered if there were others living throughout our state of North Dakota who would tell me their stories and we could learn from them, just like the POWs," he says.

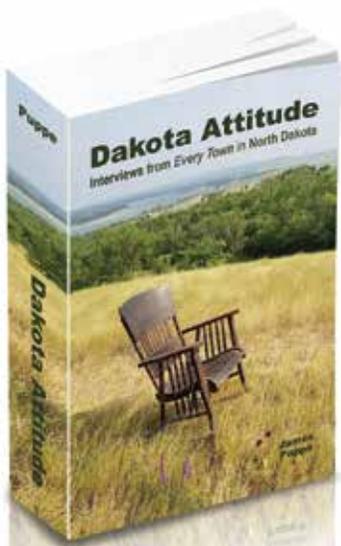
This began his journey across the state recording the stories of people in North Dakota.

Sharing the Stories

When Puppe was writing *Dakota Attitude*, he took a unique approach. "I would drive into a community, approach anyone who was available and introduce myself as a native North Dakotan. I told them a little about myself and about my project. I asked them to identify someone in the community who had great human spirit, was optimistic, had good moral values, and integrity. Someone they would identify as an unsung hero," Puppe says.



Puppe traveled 113,000 miles to visit every town in North Dakota to collect stories for *Dakota Attitude*.



The first printing of *Dakota Attitude* sold out in one week.



After collecting names, he would conduct interviews. “There were so many remarkable stories. To me, what they had to say in the interview was priceless. It was a treasure of stories and advice,” notes Puppe.

Consequently, Puppe chose to name the book *Dakota Attitude* to demonstrate the special character that surfaced from these interviews.

After the interview process was finished, Puppe began writing and found the stories spoke for themselves. The book includes many North Dakotans including Pauline Roll from Heil, a mother who had 21 children in 21 years; Harold Tastad from Portland, a World War II German prisoner of war for 27 months; and many more.

The first printing of *Dakota Attitude* produced 2,000 books and sold out within one week of its printing. The second printing of 3,000 books sold out within four months, and due to demand, a third printing occurred in May.

With such success, Puppe would love to go back to North Dakota communities and visit those he interviewed to record more stories. “Unfortunately, a third of those people have passed on. However, I’m convinced there is so much more untold wisdom and uncelebrated resilience in the state,” he says.

Puppe recognizes *Dakota Attitude* would not have been possible without the help of those he interviewed and says he is grateful for the experience of getting to share and pass along the stories. “I appreciate their willingness to share their stories. They gave us a gift. Many do not have notoriety, but we can learn so much from them. At least, I certainly did,” Puppe says.

Dakota Attitude can be purchased online at dakotaattitude.com and at several independent North Dakota bookstores. The book was recently awarded the 2020 bronze medal in the Midwest-Best Regional Non-Fiction category from the Independent Book Publishers.



A NDSU bookstore employee placing *Dakota Attitude* out for display and sale.



Puppe, left, picking up the initial printing of *Dakota Attitude* books from Forum Communications Printing.