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Local Oz enthusiast displays collection Saturday

By EARL WATT • Daily Leader

Doris Ogletree grew up in a farmhouse with no running water, no electricity and no indoor plumbing.

“The water was in a barrel outside the kitchen,” she said. “I slept in my baby bed in the same room with my parents until my feet hung off the end. After that, they put a cot in for me.”

Her two brothers slept in the only other bedroom in the four-room house near Garden City in the 1930s.

Perhaps it is those childhood experiences of being a little girl on a Kansas farm that has captivated Ogletree’s imagination about another girl from Kansas who took a journey over the rainbow to the Land of Oz.

Ogletree watched the movie when it debuted in 1939.

“My parents were farmers,” she said. “We really didn’t have money for things like that.”

Every once in a while, however, the family would go to town.

Ogletree’s mother would visit on Main Street while her dad played a little pool.

And Ogletree went to the movie 70 years ago to watch "The Wizard of Oz."

"It was a fantasy land," she said.

The movie was a natural escape for a nation that was battling the Great Depression.

Ogletree recalled life in the '30s.

"You didn't take a bath every day like you do now," she said. "You might take a sponge bath through the week, and on Saturday you took a bath. Mom would start with me and then move on down the line."

Baths were given in the wash tub outside.

Her parents eventually moved to another farmhouse, one with an indoor bathroom, a coal furnace, a butane powered refrigerator, crank telephone and a wind charger for electric lights.

Ogletree beamed at having the modern amenities.

"Whenever lightning hit the phone line, it would blow the box off the side of the house," she said. "Dad would have to put it back on the house every time."

Ogletree eventually moved off the farm when she married, but her experiences of growing up a Kansas farm girl never went away.

As she ran across an item from the classical movie, she would pick it up.

From dolls and figurines to Christmas tree ornaments and music boxes, carousels, postage stamps, globes, T-shirts and even the sheet music to “Somewhere Over The Rainbow” from 1947, Ogletree has put together one of the largest collections of Oz memorabilia in existence.

Those items will be on display Saturday during Ozfest.

The collection has been a way for Ogletree to hold on to her inner child.

“It puts me back in my youth,” she said. “It keeps me young.”

Ogletree has some one-of-a-kind pieces that includes a T-shirt signed by several Munchkin actors, and a Dorothy doll that was used to raise funds for the Land of Oz that Ogletree had purchased the winning ticket.

“I nearly fell out of my seat when they called my name,” she said.

She has purses, lunch boxes, movie posters and more.

Her items filled the display cases in the exhibit room of the Land of Oz.

These days, Ogletree gets to meet some of the visitors to Dorothy’s House, and she has discovered that there are many others like her that have an attachment to that little Kansas farm girl who took a magical journey.

“A majority of them already know about Oz,” she said. “Some of them are collectors, too.”

But Ogletree’s collection goes beyond a passing fancy. It has grown to become a unique set of items that made a natural fit to be displayed at Ozfest.

“I think it’s great,” she said. “Thank God for the ‘Land of Oz.’”

Ozfest begins Saturday morning with a breakfast at the south McDonald’s with Munchkin Margaret Pellegrini.

For tickets to Ozfest activities, cal 624-7624.

cut line: Doris Ogletree displays some of her Oz collectibles that will be on display at Ozfest 2009 Saturday at the Land of Oz exhibit at Dorothy’s House. Ogletree has several hundred items that will be viewed by the public. Daily Leader photo/Earl Watt

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