

The Return To The Ring

"A" Juniors who left the show world, made their mark on the "real world" as adults, and then returned.

by Hope Holland

This world of horses and showing can be likened to a railway station; people converge upon it carrying the baggage from their lives elsewhere. Some are destined for one place, some for another, but for a little while we all travel together. After a while, some of us leave for other destinations and don't come back. Others leave and then find themselves almost mysteriously drawn back to pick up the threads of our past lives within the world of showing. Some come to stay and make a life here; some come on a visa from another life, visiting as it were to find a place of peace that will balance the demands of their ongoing lives outside of this world.

Three "A" Kids

Nancy Potter, now of Mt. Airy, grew up on Cape Cod and began taking formal riding lessons from Richard and Julie Ulrich of Friarsgate Farm in Cape Cod and Pembroke, Mass at the tender age of 4. At ages 6, 7 and 8 she also received tutelage from Gordon Wright and, in fact, purchased her first pony through Wright, who had been instructing one of Potter's cousins for ten years at that time.

A family move took Potter to the Berkshires during her teenage years where she began taking lessons from Sally Hart. She stayed in lessons with Hart through her teen years, but often received coaching at shows from Wayne Carroll of Conn. Attending clinics also augmented her equitation education. She vividly remembers attending clinics during which Ronnie Mutch, George Morris, Victor Hugo-Vidal and Judy Richter taught.

During this time Potter qualified and competed four times for the AHSA Medal Finals at Harrisburg. At Harrisburg she also competed successfully in the Green Hunter and Junior Hunter divisions at the same time. Potter qualified and competed at the (Madison Square) Garden in NY for the ASPCA Maclay finals four times, and she also showed successfully in the Jr. Jumper divisions while competing in the Equitation and Hunter classes.

Robin Wertlieb, meanwhile, remembers her best years of showing as the first couple of years that she showed as a Young Amateur. "I qualified and showed

two horses for the Nationals," she recalls, "And over the two years that I did it they made the change from the (Madison Square) Garden in NY to Meadowbrook (NJ). So that meant that I had the experience of going to the Garden and then the next year I got to try the new facility."

Jackie Schubert rode with Bobbie Gibbon and Stanley Garrick as a Junior, during which she won the MHS A Equitation Award, qualified and competed in the Medal class at Harrisburg and as a Junior and then a Young Amateur she qualified for Washington D.C. in '83, '84 and '85. She had a good pretty year in 1985 as a matter of fact, winning the National Championship in Adult Equitation aboard Highland's Finery.

New Roads

With Potter's childhood, it is a wonder that she ever chose to move out the world of horses at all, as she had all the makings to be a pro when she left her teens. Potter, however, had a vision of herself that included a wider world.

As a very young child Potter had been strongly impressed by the Helen

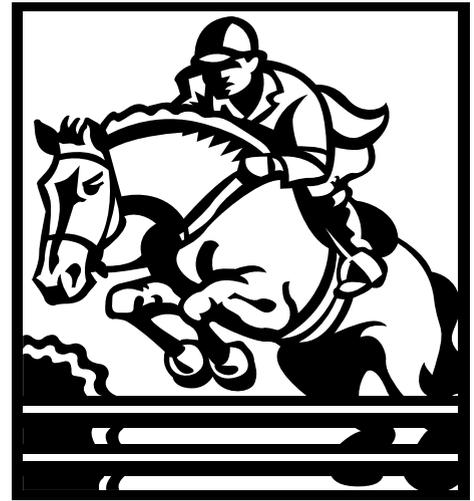
Keller story, awed by Keller's faith and courage. As an adult Potter sought work with both Special Ed and Deaf/Blind persons while completing her degree in Special Education.

Wertlieb, meanwhile, moved on to a rather straight forward career choice in residential real estate. "I needed to make some money so that I could support myself. I am a competitive person and I really go after anything that I do. A career in residential real estate was exactly right for me."

And Jackie Schubert, like so many young people, went on to college, fell in love, got married, had children (two boys) and thought she left horse showing far behind her.

The Path Back

"I loved working with Special Ed people," Nancy Potter says, "But I simply could not deal with the frustration of the Special Ed bureaucracy. Also it was at this time that I met Tony Hall. At the begin-



ning Tony required a great deal of my time."

Tony was a young man who had been deaf and blind since birth. Potter met Hall while working in Special Ed and eventually adopted him. Tony's early lack of help fueled rages that he needed help in overcoming, but, as Potter helped Tony to find himself and learn more and better ways of self-expression, Tony helped Nancy to realize that, indeed, her first love was her real one. Tony loved riding and sat a horse extremely well, handicapped or not.

"Tony would ask me, 'Did you really like riding, too?' and I would say, 'Yes, I miss it every day'", Potter reminisces. "Then Tony would ask, 'Why don't you still ride?' and I realized that I didn't have an answer for that. It made me think. It really did."

Potter coached Tony at a friend's farm on the horses there. As boarders watched Potter give Tony lessons, they would ask for coaching for themselves or their children. When her riders started winning at the shows, Potter got requests for more and more coaching from both adults and children and, eventually, found herself with a decision to make.

Wertlieb, however, came back into showing more by accident than by design. "I always try to go to Washington, just to watch the A/O classes," explains Wertlieb. "[Then one day] I ran into Patty (Nicholson) Foster. We talked a bit about horses and I mentioned that I missed riding. She was kind enough to tell me to come on out and get on a horse or two at the farm. I went out and rode a few times, but then there were problems that kept me away for most of the year. I saw her again next year at D.C. and she invited me out again just to ride. As she walked away, she turned back and said, 'I have

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-Nancy Potter

the perfect horse for you.' As it turns out, she did. I went out and tried the horse, he was a little adult horse and I did the pre-greens for a couple of years and just had fun. Well, yes, we did some winning, too... I'm competitive; showing isn't a lot of fun if you don't do well!"

Schubert, however, "came back to showing for myself. It's different now that I am an adult. It's more relaxing now. This is a little piece of life that is for me and it helps to keep me sane. It makes me a better mother. My husband has his golf and I have my showing. I have a different perspective on my life now, though. I know that if something happened tomorrow so that I couldn't ride again, I'd still have my family and that's what is really important."

Family is the recurring theme in Schubert's life. She is very open about that and continues, "In fact, showing is a family affair for me. If it weren't for my Mom keeping the boys I couldn't show at all, and my Dad, well, he's my sidekick. He's a horse show Dad and this is something that we do together. I'm a little afraid that my boys are going to get spoiled. They were in Florida with me during the winter and they loved that. Then last week we took time to show them historical features that are near the Keswick show grounds so it made me feel that was a good thing for them educationally speaking."

"Of course, if it weren't for Jack [Stedding], I couldn't show at all! Jack makes this so easy for me to participate in. He watches over everything that is connected to the showing for me and he makes this fun. That's what he says to me, when I go into the ring. 'You can do this, he will say, have fun.' And it is. The hardest part for me is convincing myself that I don't always have to be perfect. If I make an error I feel badly and think that I have let Jack down. That's the only bad part."

And Then It Got More Serious

It was after those couple of years of "fun" that Wertlieb realized that she really wanted to come back seriously. The purchase of the horse Pay It Forward (aka Albert) made that realization a reality. Mary Lisa (Nicholson) Leffler rode Pay It Forward as a 1st year horse, but really he went straight into the A/O with Robin in the saddle.

"My parents bought Pay It Forward. My dad is in poor health and can't get to the shows but my sisters and my mother come out and are my cheering section. Showing is a family affair for us. We get the videos of my rides and my father enjoys watching them at home. When I make a good ride and get announced it always gives me a

glow to hear them announce my mother and my father as the owners of the horse that I'm on. That's why we named him Pay It Forward, like the movie.'

Wertlieb did the Florida winter circuit in 2000/2001, but it was curtailed when a riding accident shattered her wrist. She went on to qualify for Devon. "Albert was just a star at Devon. He got ribbons in every class!" she recalls. Unfortunately problems caused Wertlieb to miss the 2001 indoor circuit.

Albert is often a star, it seems. The pair competed well in Florida over the past winter; Albert skipped the 2nd Year Green division entirely and is now doing regular Conformation Hunter classes occasionally in addition to his duties in the A/O ring. Last week at Keswick Wertlieb and Albert were Champion A/O, Reg. Conformation Hunter Champion and Grand Hunter Champion and they have qualified for Devon again.

Schubert also experienced a steady trajectory back into the As. "Jack had Sally (Seventh Heaven) as a pre-green horse. She had only a few shows as a first year horse and then we went straight into the A/O classes together. Sally is great. Sure, she likes a treat or two, but she is really a very businesslike horse when it comes to showing. She just walks in anywhere and never even looks around. Sally makes it almost pathetically easy to do well. I just sit there and point and shoot," Schubert cheerfully admits.

"I never really had any qualms about coming back and riding over fences. It was just like riding a bicycle—you never forget. The only thing that worries me is letting Jack down because he gives so much to my show effort."

It doesn't sound as though Jack Stedding has much to feel badly about with Sally and Schubert. Last year Schubert qualified for the Hunter Classic at Palm Beach and finished 11th in the class. She was 3rd in Stake at Devon and finished the year as 11th in the country in the A/O (younger) division and won a class at Washington.

The outcome of Potter's final decision led to the purchase of Ivy Green Farm on East Watersville Rd. in Mt Airy, MD. It should be noted that Potter chose the farm name to honor the woman that she still admires, Ms. Keller, as the farm is named for Helen Keller's own birthplace of Ivy Green in Alabama.

At Ivy Green, Potter works with adults and children who ride competitively at

both the local and national level.

"I have only been on the farm for a couple of years," Potter says. "The farm was here before me, but I am still in the process of 'making it mine' so to speak. I am adding stalls, sprucing up the grounds and replacing fencing so some of my show time will have to be put into the farm for this year. A farm, like a rider is a process,

you know. It's never just, 'There. That's done and on to the next thing.' The work is always an ongoing process with farm and horse and rider."

Potter's philosophy of making a rider reflects her early training. "I will

never, ever train someone who expects to simply get on a horse and ride and then go away until next ride," Potter says. "All of my riders have to understand that full knowledge of their horses is the hallmark of a real horseman or woman and that riding is only a part of the equation. I would never develop simply a 'rider' without creating a horseman or woman at the same time."

Striking the Balance

Wertlieb still works full time in her real estate career. She claims that many of her friends in one area of her life don't know anything about the other. "Oh, they say, 'You have a horse?' and they don't really understand what 'having a horse means to me', of course. Actually when I think about it, my family is my only connection to both of my worlds."

What having a horse means to Wertlieb has a lot to do with balance. She has two equal parts of her life now. The challenging life in real estate which allows her to set her own hours so that horse showing will fit into her schedule. And because of who she is she has an equally challenging life in horse showing.

"I am finding a new level of fulfillment in my riding now that I don't remember feeling as a Junior. Now there is no pressure! Of course, Albert makes it fun. He's a character sometimes. And I feel blessed in my relationship with my parents and my sister...I feel that I am finding a new and peaceful balance in my life."

For Schubert, it is all about peace and balance as well. While winning the class at D.C. made her happy for several reasons (she acknowledges that it is more fun when you are winning), but Schubert noted gleefully, "I was able to show and I didn't even have to leave home to do it! I got to compete and didn't have to travel; it was the best of both worlds." ♦

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—Jackie Schubert