

2005 Maryland Horsewoman of the Year

Louise Hollyday

59 Years Teaching Children Horsemanship Basics by Hope Holland

Every year the Maryland Horse Council recognizes a professional who has enjoyed an outstanding and influential career in the Maryland horse industry. The recognition of the individual is designed to inspire young people to combine their love of horses with their chosen careers.

The Horsewoman or Horseman of the year is usually someone in the industry whose work is known but not widely celebrated in the media. This time, the honoree is Louise Hollyday, whose career as a riding instructor is even more distant from the headlines, but her work, like that of all instructors, is absolutely crucial to the horse industry.

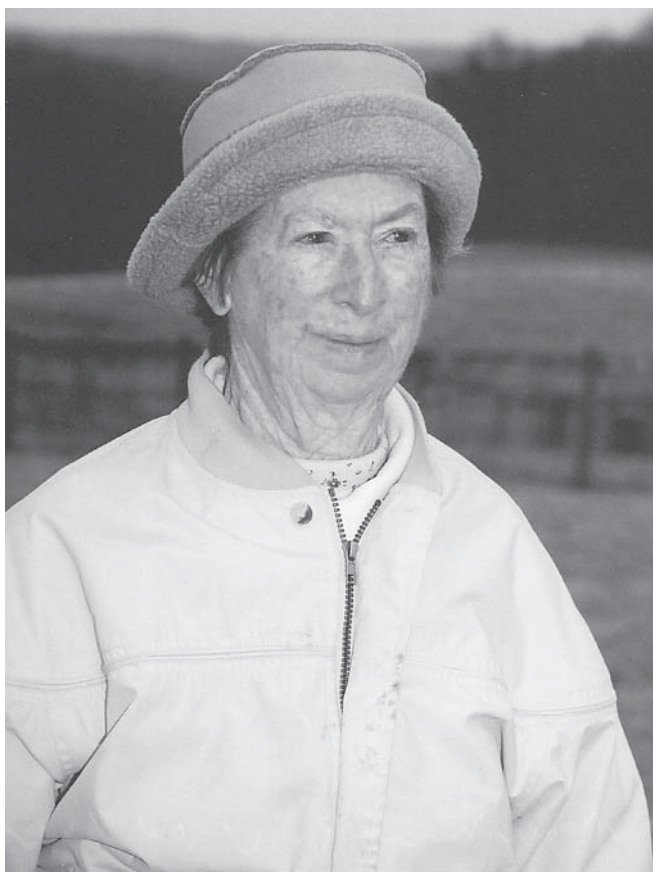
For nearly 60 years, Louise has taught beginners. She elected to teach only those youngest of beginners, the children. As in any riding school, most of Louise's pupils do not go on to collect tons of ribbons or global glory, but most do go on to embrace a life-long love of horses.

Louise's story is her own, the tale of one hardworking woman, but is representative of all riding schools everywhere, that very first gate that would-be riders pass through on their way to becoming "horse people." Like all trainers, camp counselors and riding instructors who hold the key to a child's introduction to horses, Louise is an unsung hero in the equestrian business. Where would the horse industry be without the Louises of the world?

Louise IS Columbia Horse Center, Wheaton Park, Potomac Horse Center, Woodmont—the beginner lesson programs that steadily function, minus glory and attention. Lesson programs do not bring home ribbons; they operate in the shadows of the horse business. Louise's choice not to teach adult or even teenage beginners leaves her work even deeper in the shadows. This award is to shine a bright spotlight on those shadows, a reminder that honors Louise and all who work tirelessly to teach beginners. To this day, Louise remains a vital, unique personality whose life is entwined in her work.

Louise Este Hollyday sits in her old leather recliner in the living room of her new home on the property of her former pupil Sharon Schilling, recounting her upbringing. Near Louise lies her Doberman, Marta, the 11th Doberman in a series of faithful friends. Marta is now blind and deaf from age and diabetes, but still affectionate and well-loved.

The house is like its owner: cleverly designed and filled with memories, with portraits of honored family members, nooks and crannies filled with books on hunting, horses and ponies. There is an assortment of stuffed animals, many of them gifts from admirers, both children and adults. They add a whimsical touch that seems at one with the framed pictures of ponies and children here and there in the living room.



On the bedroom wall hangs the picture of Severn Chief, done by Linell Nash Smith, daughter of Ogden Nash and a writer in her own accord as well as an artist. Severn Chief, deceased since 1971, was the sire of many winning ponies and a winner himself, both in harness and in hand, and a critical component to the success of Louise's breeding business.

Right now Louise is "taking it easy for a couple of hours," and enjoying the sensation of dealing with life again on her own terms. A fall on a sidewalk caused bleeding into her skull, which led to a trip to the emergency room and a four day stay in intensive care. Upon her return home, she was prohibited from driving, which severely cramped her style.

Although Louise still needs to be quiet and not overwork herself, her students will be arriving shortly and there is a bit of barn work to be done. It will be accomplished by what Louise feels free to call either her "helpers" when she is being serious or, in a comical tone, "my slaves."

Louise supervises with a sharp eye for slackers and while she allows them to have fun, she will quickly pick up the bight of her reins, breaking up a gaggle of girls attempting to muck one stall: "Now, come on girls, you're having too much fun at this and it is starting to show! One of you go into that stall over there, one of you in that stall over there and you go out and pick out the ponies' run in shed! Now, there!"

She watches them for a moment more and then turns away, smiling. Louise has a knack for dealing with children. "I have always felt more comfortable with children than with adults," she admits. A good thing, too, as she has made her life's work in dealing with both children and the ponies that they ride.

A Knack for Teaching

The year was 1946 and she was 17 years old, and Louise was attending Warrenton Country School in Warrenton, Va., where riding was part of the regular curriculum. The school riding teacher suffered a fall while hunting and a new teacher had to be called to fill in. The substitute had little patience with the younger girls just starting out, and so one day claiming that she had promised the older girls a trail ride, she convinced Louise to teach her beginner class. Much to everyone's surprise, it turned out to be a perfect fit for all, and Louise continued to teach them for the rest of that year.

Before Warrenton, Louise was riding as a child in the Roland Park area where her family lived. Although her mother rode, she received formal riding instruction from a teacher, plus wonderful

informal instruction from her grandmother's chauffeur, who had been both a groom and carriage driver before his demotion to the automobile.

"Not from my mother, although she was a darn good horsewoman" Louise says. "It is almost impossible for mothers to teach their kids to ride. Always has been. Two of the little ones that I am teaching right now are kids of a wonderful horsewoman who is a vet as well, but she knows that someone else has to teach them too."

Louise fancied possibly being a vet. However, as was typical of girls' boarding schools of that time, the school did not offer science, and although she graduated with honors, she lacked the necessary science credits to get accepted into veterinary training. She explored avenues to correct this deficiency but found mainly dead ends. Little did she know at that time that she was also thwarted by old Dr. Gadd, who had privately informed her mother that vet work "was not the place for a lady."

She toyed with the idea of becoming a school teacher, but found Towson's Teaching College too overwhelming after her cloistered boarding school life.

While she and her family pondered her future, Louise began teaching children to ride on the family property on Cowpens Road in Towson, a dirt road which joined Loch Raven Boulevard at Joppa Road.

The Breeding Business

As Louise's teaching program grew, she and her mother collected more and more crossbreds. However, they quickly became dissatisfied with what they were finding and decided to begin breeding their own line of ponies specifically for Louise's riding school, and thus in 1950 acquired their first pony stallion, a red road Welsh yearling named Severn Chief. Severn Chief quickly proved himself not only an able sire, but a producer of fine stock. The resulting ponies were such reliable lesson mounts and equally successful show ponies that soon Louise had another business: breeding.

With Ponies for Children, Inc., Louise was breeding and showing both Welsh ponies (under the Celynnen prefix, which is Welsh for "holly") and the English-style Shetlands that now make up the basis of her school stock. Her ponies were winners on the state and national level as well as at the local shows with her little riders.

Louise and her friend, Pick Archer, recognized the need for a unifying influence on the pony breeding business and came up with the concept that became The Maryland Pony Breeders organization. Knowing that they would need help to make a go of the idea, they approached Humphrey Finney, the force behind the Maryland Horse Breeder's Association.

Louise fashioned a career—unique for women of her era—from her love for ponies, children and the fundamentals of good riding.



An unusual entry in the Lead Rein class at Timonium was that of Louise Este Hollyday. AUGUST, 1948



Louise Hollyday's fondness for and knowledge of ponies has served her well in a lengthy storied career.

"Mr. Finney told us that the first thing we needed was a lot more people," recalls Louise. "So Pick and I went looking for reinforcements and the Maryland Pony Breeders was incorporated in June of 1953." The organization celebrated its 50th year of continuous service in 2003.

Louise was my first real teacher. I went to her, almost completely uncivilized in the world of horses, having ridden anything that I was allowed to climb onto, and she taught me that there were right and wrong ways to do everything with horses, and why those things were necessary to learn.

She gave my horse dreams architectural structure. As a young person, I read every horse book that was published, right or wrong. After I had expounded one author's fairly fuzzy theory to Miss Louise, she dryly replied, "Well, I just hope that your horse has read the same book you did."

Advice that's good for over 40 years and grows with you is hard to find and precious to keep.

Hope Holland, author

A Piece of Paper

Despite the fact that she was operating two successful businesses, a riding school and a breeding operation, Louise's father thought that Louise's career endeavors would be more legitimate if she had "a piece of paper that actually said that I was an instructor," she laughs.

And so, after having already spent over ten years teaching, off Louise went to England to attend the British Horse Society program and earn her BHSAI—one of the first in the States to do so. "Of course, I was the oldest student in the lot," she recalls. "Most of them were either horse crazy girls or ones that were just doing this until they found someone and settled down and got married."

She does confess, however, that despite the fact that she already had a lesson and

breeding business, she found the program very interesting. She also put her time across the pond to good use, buying ponies in Wales for clients. She laughs now that it never occurred to her then to choose a few for herself.

A Good Education is a Good Education

The piece of paper, now yellowed with age, is neatly framed and hanging on a wall in the tack room, along with several other framed pieces of paper. Most are not for achievements she sought, but rather are honors conferred upon her, from 4-H and therapeutic programs.

The tack room sports no large saddles. The practical, no-nonsense room is filled with neatly arranged pony saddles, tiny pony bridles and little saddle cloths. The equipment racks are not set high, but low so that children can get their bridles, saddles and clean saddle towels easily. Across two of the racks is a group of fairly beaten-up riding crops, testament to both their age and use in the school, because a rider needs to know how to handle both the reins and the crop.

And Louise Hollyday's riders, no matter how endearingly mounted on the tiny ponies, are here to learn. They learn to tack



Louise's beloved pony stallion, the late Severn Chief, was spotlighted in the December 2004 Equiery.

up a pony, and to pick up its feet and clean them out before and after a ride. They learn to groom the pony they have been assigned for the day or for the duration. But there is no nonsense about getting one pony and making it yours: the riders will be exchanging mounts throughout their education.

"Yes, I know that you want Reds," Louise will calmly explain to a child. "But Reds has been too easy on you lately. You need a bit more challenge and you're getting a little lazy, so today you are going to ride this pony! Let someone else get the easy pony for today."

Few children have the temerity to argue with Louise during the first years of their riding lessons. Once they get to know her, they realize she is open to discussion if it is done in an intelligent way. Not with the autocratic "I want," but with the more considerate "Miss Louise, will it work if we..." The children can approach her with their ideas and they may be allowed to try things their way as long as it is safe for the pony and the child.

Children are accepted into the program at any age, so long as they are potty trained, and are moved "up and out" usually around the age of nine, once they outgrow her ponies, which are predominantly Shetlands these days. The youngsters move into other lesson or training programs in the areas, and the instructors are always happy to have a Louise started rider.

"Louise instills a wonderful work ethic into a child," explains JoAnn Robertson of Aspiring Heights Farm in Westminster.

"They arrive wearing the proper, safe apparel and I know that a child that Louise has taught will have a very good seat on a pony and good legs," she said. "She just makes an all-around good young rider that is ready to go on and move up into the next level."

Linda Smith, whose daughter and granddaughter were schooled by Louise, echoes JoAnne: Louise is "a wonderful disciplinarian, which the children really did need when a whole group of them was working with a bunch of ponies. We all knew that she ran a tight ship because of caring so much that the children would be safe with the ponies.

"There was a great deal of respect on both sides, both from the child and from Miss Louise for the child," continues Linda. Louise's students always tied their hair up out of the way and never had chewing gum in the mouth, putting an emphasis on good manners. "As a parent you soon realized that she was insist-

ing on not only respect for the animals and for herself but she also insisted that the child respect [him or her] self."

"A huge part of being a successful teacher," explains JoAnn, is "being able to see what might happen even before it did and forestalling it." This gift is particularly critical when working with special needs students in a therapeutic riding program, which Louise did in the 1970s.

After teaching for over 50 years, the number of adults who Louise started in the saddle is in the hundreds, if not the thousands. Some have gone on to success show or professional careers of their own in the horse industry. The late Betsy Firey, who was on the first USPC team to compete in England and, as an adult, competed in point-to-points, was a young rider with Louise, as were Streett Moore, now manager of the riding program at McDonough School, and Sally Shirley, who runs a riding lesson program and 4-H program in Westminster.

A Well Rounded Career

Louise did become a teacher, just not the kind usually turned out by the Towson's Teaching College.

And, although she never made it to vet school, like any good horse person (particularly before the plethora of equine vets that we have today), Louise became adept at equine health care. Adding to her informal but critical education were her weekly stints as a "vet tech" for Dr. I. W. Frock, traveling with him each Tuesday to help him and to sock up knowledge. "That was my social day," she recalls. "I got to go out and say hello to the people that he was making calls on and I got to get into the veterinary work that would have been my first love if times had been a bit different. I learned a lot from I. W. over the years and he was always amusing company for the day."

She also credits Doc Frock with saving her leg on a spring day when a colicking pony fell against her, breaking both bones in her lower leg and trapping her. Frock pulled her out of the stall and applied a light cast to her leg, while the pony's owner called for an ambulance. The emergency room physician was a bit taken aback to find his patient's leg was already set, but he was most complimentary about Frock's quick thinking. He then told her that she would not be able to ride for at least a year. But Louise had no intention of being housebound and managed to get to the barn, cast and all (and back then, casts were much heavier, bigger, longer and generally more unwieldy than today). Her parents decided that if Louise was that determined, some automotive help was needed, finding one of the first automatic

shift lawn tractors on the market. A common sight that summer was of Louise settled upon the tractor, giving instruction with her cast propped up on a bracket. She was out of the cast and back to her own devices by late fall that same year, a clear case of grim determination confounding the medical community.

A Comfortable, Fulfilled Life

Louise remained on her family's property in Sparks until after her parents' deaths, then found a place on Beckleysville Rd. in the Hampstead area. There she ran her school full time for another decade. Then, in the 90s, she decided it was time to have a life beyond teaching and began taking the weekends off. She worked out a living arrangement with former pupil Sharon Schilling; Louise turned over the larger house to the Schillings, moving into the cozy house attached by a breezeway, and sharing the land and

"We've known Miss Hollyday forever! She has touched a lot of people's lives. She still teaches those little kids the essentials: safety and the good horsemanship habits that will serve them all their lives. She breeds her ponies to my good old stallion, Olney Troubadour, and she just brings her trailer over and picks him up for the month or so that she will need his services. When he comes back he is all groomed up and special and I know that he likes it at Louise's for the attention that he gets, as well as for the girlfriends that he finds there. There aren't many people that you would trust this way, but Louise is certainly one of them!"

Mary Gordon
Secretary

Maryland Horse Shows Association

pastures. Louise has kept her ponies and teaches from the older barn while Sharon has built a bigger barn and uses the rest of the land for her own horses.

With this situation, Louise, now 78, finds a great deal to be pleased about in her life: a comfortable house filled with the memories of a lifetime enjoyed to the fullest, her beloved ponies and the children that have always accompanied them, her car and permission to drive it again after her last contretemps with the sidewalk.

Now she is free to visit friends, some in nursing homes, others still on their own acreage, just as she is determined to be. She goes to church on Sunday mornings, does her own shopping and deals with the general detritus of life on a farm. Vetting for the ponies is part of that, as is catching Rerun, the bobtailed kitten in the barn so that the vet can remove the stitches from its recent surgery. There is usually a mare or two in foal. In other words, she is still the teacher and animal health care provider she has always wanted to be. ■

Miss Hollyday will be presented with the 2005 Maryland Horsewoman of the Year award on Saturday, August 6, at Laurel Park during the Maryland Horse Council's 20th Anniversary Celebration. If you would like to receive an invitation, please contact The Equiery with your name, address and phone number. 1-800-244-9580, fax: 410-489-7828; editor@equiery.com or P.O. Box 610 Lisbon, MD 21765.

WANTED—Your Louise Hollyday Memories

Please send your written memories to

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