



A Mini Memoir



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The President's Dad

Since I was a child, I always thought that it was important to be active in the breed associations of the animals that you were breeding. I wanted my dad to take part in the AQHA (American Quarter Horse Association) and the ASPC (American Shetland Pony Club) because he made a living for our family breeding and selling both breeds. He, however, had no interest in the "politics" of both association business and showing.

So, when I grew up and began breeding miniature horses, I decided to practice what I had tried to preach to my dad, and took an active part in AMHA (American Miniature Horse Association). After serving as a volunteer Executive Secretary for five and a half years, I was elected to the Board of Directors and served in several offices including Secretary and vice-president. Then I decided that it was time, after all the experience to run for President. It was a time of "political unrest" in the association and when I ran for President, I lost by one vote! Several of my friends decided that I must be an officer that year and nominated me for vice-president, again, losing by one vote! Then not to be outdone, they nominated me for Secretary and shortly thereafter, for Director at Large, and I succeeded in losing each of those offices by TWO votes!

After that year, my time on the Board expired and with quite a bit of prodding by my supporters, I ran for the Board after three years. I was approached by several of the current officers after my election to the Board while attending the National Show. They asked to have a meeting with me where I learned that the President was resigning from the Board and the rest of the officers wanted me to run again. I explained that my wife, Carol, did not even want me to run for the Board again, and that she had said that if I ran for office again, she was going to leave home. After much arm twisting on the part of the Executive Committee, I finally said that I would talk it over with my wife and let them know later.

After the meeting, Carol joined me for a walk around the horse show barns to look at the displays, horses, and to visit with friends. While we were walking around she asked me what the meeting was about. I took a deep breath, fearing her response to the news, and told her that they wanted me to run for President and asked her opinion. Her reply, "Don't guess I can stop you."

So with that "blessing," I ran for President, and this time, rather than losing by one vote, I won by acclamation that year and the next two years, before having to leave office because of term limits. After over fifteen years of active participation in AMHA politics, I suppose that I have made up for my dad's lack of interest.

The President's Daughter

Ever since eighth grade when I had first spoken to Jackie McGinnis about her dreams for a separate miniature horse youth association, I had been excited about running for an office. The American Miniature Horse Youth Association: an association of our own. What a dream! From that night on I was always conversing with whomever our current youth coordinator happened to be, trying to change things for the youth, and anxiously awaiting the arrival of this new association.

It still amazes me that my first plan was to let my good friend, Jeff Jenkins, run first. I'm not sure if I was afraid of running against him or if I just didn't want to see one of us lose, but I was ready to step down and let him go first. Of course by the time the association really got going, all the big dreams Jeff had thought up had been forgotten and he was already out of showing the horses and into showing cattle instead. So I decided I'd run for President. The more I thought about it, the more exciting it became. At the time I was crazy about Legally Blonde so naturally my colors were going to be white and pink.

Every day after school I'd busy myself painting "VOTE FOR LAUREN" in large white letters across fluorescent pink poster boards. I think I might have gotten three done before I started giving up on that idea. I had bought twenty poster boards, and the first poster alone had taken me an hour to finish. Luckily for me, my mother took over that job so I could move on to other things.

So with that spare time, I decided I wanted to have buttons. I got on my computer, opened paint, and went for it. It was pink with black lettering saying "Vote for Lauren" and had a large "G" encircling the writing and tracing the edge of the button. Fabulous! I was getting even more excited. I then went and had my picture made (wearing pink and white, naturally) so I would have a matching picture to put on my campaign table and at the top of the bio sheets.

Finally the time came for us to go to the show. The elections were to be held on Saturday at our World Championship Show in Fort Worth, Texas. Friday night they had a welcome reception for the youth, and all candidates for office were to give campaign speeches at this time. Now sometimes I tend to be a bit of a procrastinator. So naturally, when Jackie called my name to come up on stage and give my speech, I had just decided to start writing it. When I heard my name called, I froze, looked up, made a conscious effort to not look like a deer in the headlights, and then slowly rose to make my way up to the stage. I tried to keep my knees from shaking as I walked up the stairs with other candidates following behind me and for the first time *ever*, wished I wasn't wearing my trademark flip flop heels.

Finally Jackie was through with her introduction, and I was up. All I remember saying is the line that my dad had suggested I say: "I've always been known as the President's daughter. Now I'd like him to be known as the President's dad." I fumbled the line at first, but then made a clean recovery. There was laughter from the audience... and then a little relaxation on my part. The rest of my speech was short and sweet which thankfully was what everyone's ended up being.

The weekend was worlds of fun for me. My campaign table had a pretty pink table cloth, little pink roses in a pot for decoration, one of my pictures in a pink frame, a pink photo album with pictures of my horses, my fliers, pink campaign buttons, and two clear jars holding nothing other than pink and white candy. Only now am I realizing that

the only thing that wasn't pink in my campaign were my fliers. But had I thought of that, they would have been too.

Finally the night of the elections came. Since some people had to leave the show early to be home for school the next day, they had been allowed to vote early. Jackie informed my dad that with early voting alone, I was already winning by a landslide. I was still nervous, though.

They went through the entire process of the youth team tournament parade and handed out awards for anything and everything you could possibly imagine before finally getting to the election results. All I remember is standing frozen, next to my team leader, ready to smile if I faced a defeat when I heard my name called and cheers throughout the arena. I had won. And the upcoming year was going to be my biggest adventure yet.

Favorites

When one has had horses for sixty years, it is almost impossible to pick only one as your favorite, but there are several who have held that title from time to time, and for different reasons, but if I were forced to pick just one, it would have to be my very first horse, a little silver dapple Shetland filly, affectionately named "Daffy." My parents gave her to me when I was just a few months old and was just learning to speak and to walk. They called her "the dapple filly", but I seemed to only be able to make it sound like "Daffy", so Daffy it became. Mother even says that I learned to walk holding on to Daffy's halter. As I grew older, Daffy was my best buddy, I learned to ride on her and also drove her to a cart until I was almost high school age. I was the youngest kid in our country neighborhood, but almost everyone in our area had horses and lots of time, we would all saddle up, pack a picnic lunch, and take off for the day during the summer. It was a wonderful time; parents did not have to worry about where we were, or what we were doing. We were all together, on our horses and having a great time until sundown, most days.

Once I rode Daffy over to my cousin's house, and all the "big kids" were swimming in the tank that held water that the windmill in that west Texas area pumped. I had asked my parents if I could go swimming, too, and they told me no, which of course, I didn't think was fair, not really worrying about the fact that I couldn't swim and everyone else there was twice my age of seven at the time. I was sitting on the concrete edge of the tank, playing like I was going to hit everyone with my "quirt" (riding crop), when suddenly I lost my balance and fell in! It was much deeper than I was tall, and I came up spitting, and thankful that one of the "big kids" had the sense to grab me and help me out of the water. I rode home the couple of miles very slowly, hoping that my clothes, belt, and boots would be dry by the time I got home so that I wouldn't have to explain that I really HADN'T gone swimming!

Demolition Dimitri

People used to ask me what my favorite horse when I was younger, and for a long time I didn't have an answer and would just say "all of them." Then came Dimitri. When I was in fourth grade, my favorite movie was Anastasia. So when foaling season came around, I named one horse "Little America's Tex Anastasia", and another "Little America's Xenon Dimitri". Later on, my dad decided he wanted to geld Dimitri so I would have a good performance horse to show.

There is no other way to say it other than this horse rocks my world. We match perfectly. Always into something, big butts, and thick hair. I don't think I ever noticed horses had their own personalities until he came along.

I once walked into his stall to find him with a five gallon bucket on his head. Somehow he had managed to unlatch the bucket from the wall (we usually have them either clipped or wired so they can't be moved) after he had finished eating and get it stuck on his head.

When Dimitri turned three, we decided we'd teach him to drive. Dad thought he was a good driving prospect so he wanted him to be taught by a professional trainer, so we sent him to one. By our first show in January, the trainer thought Dimitri was ready to drive. When we went to the arena to watch the trainer warm him up, we saw that Dimitri was already throwing a fit, and the cart wasn't even attached to him yet. He had all of the harness on and any time anyone would try to get him to go forward, he would stretch his front legs out and try to break his belly band. Then, when he failed at this, he would jump up and start throwing himself against the wall. Obviously I didn't get to drive him at this show.

The next phase my dear, sweet Dimitri went into was the stop and back. At shows, when you go into the arena, you show at three different gaits: walk, trot, and working trot. For a good while, when it came time to walk, Dimitri would just stop. That's all. He would just stop. No matter what I did, once he stopped, he would not go forward again. I could yell, slap his rear with the reins, use my whip, and nothing would work. The only reaction I would get would be him doing his old routine of stretching out to try to break the belly band. On two different occasions, I had to have either a judge or a ring steward come and pull him forward to get him going again. After that, he'd be fine! If I really ticked him off, then he would start backing and see, when Dimitri is mad and starts backing... He doesn't stop until he hits something. So on a particularly bad day, he would start backing, I'd start yelling, and he would continue backing until we hit a wall or any solid object that could scare him into actually going forward for a change.

Dimitri is also talented in jumping. He has acquired the nickname, "Demolition Dimitri" from the staff of the shows for his talent of knocking jumps down. He is perfectly capable of jumping. He will easily go over any and every practice jump I take him over at home or before his class. But once he gets into that arena, it's a whole other story. Once at a show in Conroe, he had a clean round (didn't knock over any jumps) in Jumper so he went to the second round. In the second round, he realized his nickname was in jeopardy after the first round and proceeded to knock down every single jump after that. I've never heard more people say "You forgot one!" in my entire life.

It has actually gotten to the point where I'll stand at the gate when I'm the next one to go in and Amanda, a trainer I'm good friends with, will come up to me and we'll

have an extensive conversation about what order Dimitri should knock the jumps over in and which ones would be most fun to completely rip apart.

A year later at AMHR (American Miniature Horse Registry) Nationals, I decided I would be brave and show Dimitri in Driving Obstacle while Dimitri decided he didn't feel like showing in obstacle. When I came to a hoola hoop that I was supposed to pivot in with one wheel, he *would not* turn. Finally the judges blew the whistle to excuse me from that obstacle so I could move on to the next.

Dimitri continued to move throughout the course but then at the end, he had to walk over a tarp with water on top and giant, brightly colored blow up pool toys on each side. At this time, Dimitri decided that to make up for his not going over the tarp, he would begin pivoting like he had been asked to do earlier. I fought, slapped him with my reins and whip, yelled, begged, and pleaded for Dimitri to go forward. Finally, I just gave up. It was as simple as that: I gave up. After all, it was Dimitri I was dealing with. I then simply laid my hands down in my lap and sat in despair, sighing as my horse continued to drill his hole to China.

The Fun of Driving – Horses, that is

Another memory of childhood on Greaves' Pony Farm was the parades in which we participated. Daddy had a team of beautiful silver dapple mares that were often used for birthday parties and in most of the local parades around my hometown of Lamesa. We had a chuck wagon that was specially built to fit the Shetland team, and my parents made a cover for it to use sometimes as a covered wagon. I always loved to ride in the wagon, but also enjoyed riding along behind it, usually on Daffy, and usually with her foal trotting along beside the wagon. We were always applauded by the crowds that lined the streets as we did the Rodeo Parade, the Christmas Parade, and others around O'Donnel, Tahoka, and Lamesa. When I was younger, about age five, my dad would ride his big horse, Ginger, and I would be led by him, happily trotting along on Twinkle, while Daddy carried my baby sister, Marcia, in his lap.

However, I remember one of the parades most distinctly, and not for the usual fun of the experience. This time it was a Fiesta Parade, so Mother and Daddy dressed up Mexican style and decided that instead of my riding a horse, I should ride a donkey! Now that does not seem like a bad idea to go along with the theme of the day, but we soon learned that a donkey does NOT ride like a horse. In fact, a regular saddle unless specially rigged, tends to slip off of the donkey's back onto its neck, and that is a scary place to try to keep your balance, especially when you are only six years old. I started crying and my mother made me stay on the donkey, just slipped out of the saddle and finished the parade riding behind the saddle which was far too near the donkey's head to make riding possible. Mother was all attired in her Mexican style dress, smiling as she walked along beside me, quietly threatening me if I didn't stop crying and "smile"! I learned at an early age that the show must go on!

Since I was a child, I have lived with horses of one kind or another and have had numerous close calls, some frightening, some humorous. I mentioned that my parents raised Shetland ponies when I was very young, and one of my fondest memories of childhood, living in the country, was sometimes riding and sometimes driving a pony to church, which was at the edge of my grandfather's farm, where we lived. It seemed that each time I had a ride to church; most times I ended up walking home because my "steed" would rub his bridle off and beat me home. One time I got in trouble because Tommy, my little sorrel stallion that I loved to drive, got away and went running home with the cart bouncing along, urging him to go ever faster until he ran through a walk-through gate, which unfortunately was a little narrower than the cart! The cart made it through, but not in the same shape that it started through. We never did get it straightened out completely.

Years later after I was married and living in Denton, Texas, I was breaking a beautiful stallion, Bond Peter Piper, who had not even been halter broke until he was almost twelve, to drive pulling a cart. After only a couple of days ground driving him, that is walking behind him driving him without his being hooked to a cart, and then a time or two walking beside the cart, I felt that he was ready for me to get in. Unfortunately I was wrong. As soon as I got in the cart, he decided that he did not like that weight that he was suddenly being asked to pull and started off running full speed toward the barn, completely unaware of the chain link fence, until he ran headlong into it! It took several minutes to untangle the mess of wire, harness, horse, and shafts of the cart.

From that day, you would think that I would have learned my lesson, but being sure of myself, and a little naïve of the real needs to train a horse to drive in the show ring, I took Peter Piper only a week or two later to the Dallas State Fair, which was also the site of the National AMHA Miniature Horse Show that year.. When we trotted into the ring for our class, I thought, “Gee, he is really doing great,” and he was, until the first horse passed him! Since he was so inexperienced, the horse that passed startled him and he started to run. As soon as he tried to run, his hocks hit the basket of the cart, startling him even more, and he started to buck and kick at the cart. I was hanging on, recalling my friend’s admonition, “Don’t fall out of the cart,” as we went careening around the ring, finally coming to a stop when two ring stewards and one of the judges finally were able to get him to stop. There was no graceful way to leave the ring after the spectacle that I had caused! Shortly thereafter, the director of all the livestock shows at the State Fair caught up with me, and with a grin, he said, “Tony, we charge money for people to see acts like yours when they come to the rodeo.” I must say that he reminded me of that one several times through the many years that we showed in Dallas!

You would think that I would learn my lesson, but years later I was helping my then nine or ten year old daughter, Lauren, to learn to drive. The little mare that she was driving suddenly got it into her mind to run away. I decided to “straighten her out”, taking the reins, getting in the cart and she tried it with me. I quickly stopped her, letting her know that that was not to be the case this time, only to have her rear up, upending the cart to the point, that with my two-hundred pound frame, weighing down my end of the cart, like a teeter totter, and suddenly Gorgeous, the mare, found herself suspended in air hanging by the harness, swinging in the shafts. I had safely gotten out of the cart and just let her hang there for a few seconds. She never tried that little trick again.

Dangerous Driving

When I was younger, we owned a miniature saddle that we could put on the older miniatures and I could ride them. Every once in a while, we would have a news station that was interested in coming out and doing a story on the horses. Once when I was in pre kindergarten, we had a crew come. My dad went around showing them horses and then did the usual picking up of a foal and rocking it to sleep. Well then at the end of the story, he was going to put the saddle on one of the horses and lead a horse around while I rode. He picked me up, placed me on the saddle, and we started walking around. Then the horse started bucking a little bit. I don't even think it was enough for the camera to see, but it was enough to scare a six year-old so naturally, I started crying. "It's okay; he's just playing with you! D..... Don't cry..."

By the time I was seven, I was capable of driving horses on my own so my dad trained a little brood mare named "Ima Gorgeous" for me to drive around at home. One day, I was driving her in the front yard by myself when something spooked her. Before I knew what was happening, Gorgeous ran straight out of the front yard, then through another gate making her way, full speed, back to the barn. I was pulling back on her as hard as I possibly could, trying to get her to stop before breaking something or hurting one of us. Next to the barn, we have a walker to exercise the horses that is only about four feet off the ground. Of course Gorgeous ran right under its steel pipes as I thankfully ducked down in time. She then took a sharp turn as my dad and the man who worked for us tried to grab her, and I was thrown out of the cart against a fence. Quickly after this, they caught her. After this experience, I wasn't in a hurry to drive again for a long time.

Several years later, I went to stay with Tammi Nuttall—a trainer from Oklahoma—for a week so she could help me with driving. We hooked my horse, Dimitri, up to the harness and he proceeded to rear up, and being the smart creature he is, he somehow managed to tip over backward to where he was on his back with his feet in the air... and broke some of the harness. Tammi immediately jumped out of the cart and we both began to pull the harness off of my brilliant horse so he wouldn't injure himself further.