

Bernard PARKER

LARGER THAN LIFE



Bernard Parker drove Flight's Son Rise to many sensational victories including the 1989 Grand National Park Harness Mares & Geldings. Their partnership also netted the 1991 and 1992 East Coast Park Harness Championship for owner Diane Miers. (photo by Howard Schattberg)

by Diana Davidson

Bursting through the gate with hands held high on the lines of a harness horse with his head held high and legs waving. That is the lasting memory of those who watched Bernard Parker drive any one of the long list of Morgan Park Harness Champions he proudly trained and showed over the past 40+ years. While his stature was certainly large, it was his personality, presence and sense of humor that completed the larger than life persona that was Bernard Parker.

While his life here on Earth came to a close on April 8, 2016; his accomplishments and the tales he told certainly will never be forgotten by those whose lives he touched. Bernard was the youngest of the six children of renowned horseman Joe Parker and his beloved wife Marie. Bernard was Marie's baby from the day he was born on June 2, 1946, until the day she passed in 2009.

Bernard lost his brave battle with cancer, but he was never one to shy away from a fight. He served his country with pride and honor serving in the US Army during the Vietnam War. When he returned from his Army commitment, Bernard joined his family atop the hill in Amenia, New York at the Joe Parker Stables. Over the years he worked with his father and brothers to dazzle on the national stage with some of the Morgan world's top park and in hand horses.



The burgundy and grey banner at Joe Parker Stables was home to many of the Morgan breed's greats along with the stories behind them. Bernard and nephew Jerome shared in this photo at the 2012 Big E, a show that Bernard enjoyed and supported for over 40 years.



The copper chestnut Anda's Dartanion starred with Bernard as 1981 New England Junior Park Harness Champion. They went on to add the reserve tricolor in the East Coast Park Harness Championship the next three years for the Doug King family. (photo by Bob Moseder)



The white pants and burgundy shirts were a trademark of the famed in hand performances by the Parker brothers. Here, Bernard presented Arrow Hill Baroness to the 1984 New England Grand Champion Mare win. She went on to earn tricolors in Oklahoma in 1984, 1985 and 1986 including the 1984 World Champion Junior Mare honors for Ketch Brook Stables. (photo by Bob Moseder)



The exquisite black mare, Equinox Musique was one of many Courage Of Equinox get that Bernard trained and showed with great success. The 1998 New England Junior Pleasure Driving Championship was one of their many wins for Catherine Haynes. (photo by Bob Moseder)



Bernard teamed with Catherine Haynes for several notable champions with the CVH Celtic prefix. CVH Celtic Command was a prolific champion including 2002 Grand National Championships in park harness and in hand. He went on to sire the final world champion that Bernard presented, CVH Celtic Dancer. They posed for the win in the 2008 World Champion Futurity Yearling Colts. (photos by Howard Schatzberg)



While Bernard trained champions in many divisions, it was always the park harness horses that he was most closely associated with and most remembered for. The names Trophy's Beau Dandy, Quaker's Raven, Anda's Dartanion, Flight's Son Rise and Courage Of Sweet Meadow are some of the notable champions. It was Flight's Son Rise who was Bernard's match and together they lit up the ring. The bay horse trimmed in white was larger than life as well. Over 16 hands, game, talented and tough, Flight's Son Rise (Phil) met his match when he met Bernard.

After a few memorable tussles in which neither one gave an inch, they came to a meeting of the minds. Once they hit the ring, it was a match that brought home many impressive wins, a large fan club and the fear and respect of their competitors in the park harness division. Their most noted wins came from Gold Cup, New England and Oklahoma for owner Diane Miers. Another Miers entry, Courage Of Sweet Meadow added a third consecutive East Coast Park Harness Championship to the burgundy and grey banner in 1993 following two by Flight's Son Rise in 1991 and 1992.

Bernard enjoyed a wonderful association with Ivan Beattie and East Of Equinox Farm with many champions hailing from the lines of Courage Of Equinox. The gorgeous black mare, Equinox Musique was the first top champion that Bernard presented for Catherine Haynes. Bernard went on to coordinate the breeding of numerous champions for Haynes and her CVH Celtic prefix including CVH Celtic Command and his son CVH Celtic Dancer. Celtic Command added a fourth East Coast Park Harness Championship to Bernard's legacy in 2005.

Bernard participated in several regional and national organizations, including the United Professional Horseman's Association, the American Morgan Horse Association, the New York State Morgan Horse Society, and the Connecticut Morgan Horse Association. He was an "R" rated judge and judged shows across the

United States including the 2006 Grand National and World Championship Morgan Horse Show.

While Bernard's show ring performances are well-documented, it was the stabling area at Joe Parker Stables at horse shows where he held court that are most memorable to those who ever had the chance to enjoy Bernard's storytelling. His many friends will greatly miss his larger than life personality as they shared in the stories he told punctuated by his booming laugh and mischievous smile.

Bernard is survived by three sons (Nicholas, Anthony and Bernard), along with three brothers (Joe, Bill and Hugh), along with several nieces and nephews. Bernard was predeceased by his parents Joe and Marie along with brother Leslie and sister Dorothea.

The Parker Family requested that two of Bernard's best friends be acknowledged. The Rev. Francis Crombie was one of his closest friends for decades. Father Crombie provided Bernard with guidance and strength through his illness. Heather Finlayson has been a dear friend to Bernard since working with him at Figure's Morgan Farm, and spent countless hours keeping him company during his final weeks.

Jerome Parker remembered his uncle, the man who taught him many important lessons, "He was at different times a friend, brother, protector, teacher, and sometimes a pain in the ass. He was Ali and Charles Barkley all rolled into one. When he entered a room or the show ring you knew it. He is going to be missed because he not only 'showed his horse', he entertained the crowd and you never felt cheated when Bernie P hit the gate. The horse world owes a debt to this man who was the ultimate showman and to many a mentor, friend, and ambassador. He was part saint, part sinner, but one hundred percent Bernie P. We'll never see the likes of him again.

"He was always The People's Champion. If you never met him, you missed the real thing he was never too busy for anyone. I'll always remember him holding court back at his stalls. One of the best things was listening to him tell a story because he never let the facts get in the way of a good story.

"When his brother Les got sick he answered the call, caring for his brother and continuing to show and entertain. Never once did he ask for sympathy or complain that his life was too tough or unfair. He knew what he had to do and did it even at the expense of his own health. Right to the end he remained Bernard Parker."



Bernard enjoyed the opportunity to judge shows across the country including the 2006 Grand National. The 2012 New York Regional was the last show that Bernard judged and he enjoyed sharing his time with nephew Jerome, who served as the ringmaster. (photo by Terry Young)