

# Focusing On More Than Just A Blue Ribbon Ride

## Paul and Betsy Boone

BY ERICA FAULKNER

It is often said that the outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man. Relationships between horse and rider, horse and trainer, and even horse and groom help to define us throughout our lives. Often one can see how a horse has changed a life, inspired a rider, taught responsibility or simply offered support and comfort. Horses prove to be useful for so many purposes, from therapeutic relationships to companionship, from pasture pet to competition partner. Every horse enthusiast can recall a time spent with a horse that drastically changed their life. Many times an equestrian will find that one horse that touches and changes their life. For Paul Boone, that one horse was CH Moonchance.

It was a night that many won't soon forget. It was the Junior Exhibitor Five Gaited World's Grand Championship at the World's Championship Horse Show back in 2000, and the crowd was eager to hear who would be the new titleholder. The cheers in Freedom Hall could be heard all the way in downtown Louisville. Many top horses were vying for the tricolor ribbon. Horses and riders work all season long in preparation for a title such as this. The class was lined up, and the spectators eagerly waited to see if there would be a workout. It's almost expected at Louisville, that the best of the best will be put back to the rail for further evaluation. It's part of what makes Louisville so exciting.

However, on this night history was made. As the horses and their riders were put back to the rail, it became apparent that one horse was not going to be asked to partake in the workout. CH Moonchance and his well-known

and capable partner Will Cannon, were left in center ring as the remainder of the horses were asked for a second performance. The crowd grew anxious and all along the rail spectators were questioning what was going on and how could it possibly be that one of the top horses in the class was left standing in the middle of the green shavings. At the end of the class, it became clear that CH Moonchance and Will had been left in center ring, not because they were not in the top ribbons but quite the opposite. They were the only team that was agreed upon as the winner and therefore for the first time ever, the winning combination was left in center ring.

CH Moonchance and Will brought years of excitement to the show ring and garnered a strong following of fans. They simply set the bar for the Junior Exhibitor Five-Gaited division for years. However outside of the blue ribbons and the show ring success what this horse did for his trainer may to this day be the most important aspect of his career.

Paul Boone, owner and trainer at Boones Farm in Concord, North Carolina first selected the charismatic CH Moonchance in 1993, as a prospect to train. Purchased from Norton E. Lownsberry, the strong and go forward gelding was a partner in the show ring for Paul for just a few short months before being sold to Ashley Isenhower. The Saddlebred community surely can recall the presence of these two, as they lit up the show ring from 1994 to 1996 in the ladies five-gaited division. What most people do not know is that CH Moonchance was purchased by Paul Boone right around the time he was diagnosed with cancer.

It was late 1993 when Paul received the news that he had non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. This type of cancer is one that attacks the immune system, affecting lymph nodes and lymph tissue in the body (such as the spleen and bone marrow). Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma typically is found in the adult population and comes with great variation in statistics on survival rates. With the help of friend and customer Dr. Margaret McNeese, Paul began treatment in 1994 at MD Anderson Hospital in Houston, TX. Dr. McNeese played a key role in Paul being able to be treated at this well-known and respected hospital.

It was a trying time, with long weekly trips to receive radiation treatments in TX and weekends in North Carolina with horses. Paul would spend Mondays through

Thursdays at the hospital while his wife Betsy and his employees helped back at the farm, keeping horses worked and the business thriving. Betsy says "I truly believe CH Moonchance played a key role in the well being of Paul throughout his radiation treatments and long visits to the hospital. CH Moonchance gave him a reason to keep marching forward and looking to a bright future. That horse never gave up, so Paul couldn't either."

Paul Boone and CH Moonchance shared what was an incredible partnership; a life-saving partnership and one that shaped the motto and business ethics of what is Boones Farm and Stable today.

Paul and his wife Betsy expertly run Boones Farm. Paul grew up in North Carolina and unlike most trainers in today's time, his father was not a fellow American Saddlebred trainer and his family history does not run deep with stories involving the Saddlebred industry. It is true that Paul's family had horses, keeping a small barn at their home in the country. However Paul was the only one in his family to truly find a passion and love for the American Saddlebred and the horse industry as a whole.

Starting out in 4-H, trail riding and competing in horse shows at the local level, Paul quickly got attached to the lifestyle that came with having horses. Paul's interest in horses only grew as he continued throughout high school. It was during this time that he put his hobby to work for him and began training his own horses and progressing as a horseman. It was not long before Paul decided to further his education and experience with horses and went to work for Bill and Nancy Becker in Concord, NC. It was here with Bill and Nancy that Paul would fine-tune his knowledge of the American Saddlebred.

Betsy, also a native to North Carolina, grew up on land owned by her grandparents and spent much time around pasture ponies, even owning a few saddle type ponies at a young age. Similar to Paul's story, Betsy was the only one in her family who truly developed a passion and love for horses. Her story is like many others; visiting a horse show, Betsy got her first glimpse of an American Saddlebred. And as many Saddlebred enthusiasts know, one look is all it takes. Betsy knew that she wanted a life that included this charismatic breed of horse.

Her desire to be in the horse business grew with each passing day; leading her to search for work within the Saddlebred community. She found the perfect position working for Bill Becker as well, when his stable was located in Matthews NC. Previously working at Porter Lessons Club, Betsy brought her knowledge of how to instruct to her new job and grew her experience with training Saddlebreds. Up until this time Betsy had been an AOT and spend much of her own time learning from trial and error and showing on her own.

Although Paul and Betsy spent much time together while employed at Bill Becker's, it was not until later that they started dating. Paul ventured out on his own in 1981, and opened up Boone's Farm and Stable with the support of his family. Concord North Carolina was chosen for the location of the facility. With easy access to the nearby



*CH Sultans Earth Angel lit up the show ring for years in the amateur, ladies and junior exhibitor three-gaited divisions. Shown in this photo with Betsy Boone, this horse spent many years with the Cannon family before being sold to the Courtenay Byrd. Once her showing days were nearing an end, the Cannon family purchased her again and has since given her a forever home at their farm.*



city of Charlotte, and able to draw young adults from the universities near by, it's no wonder that Boones Farm began to thrive right from the day it was opened.

Paul spent the early years on his own, until he and Betsy started dating in 1993. Both Paul and Betsy spent some time that year working on the Charlotte Charity Horse Show, and it was during this time that they decided their lives would be better spent as one. Paul learned quickly of Betsy's caring and unfaltering love and loyalty, as only a few short months after their romance started, Paul received his cancer diagnosis. It was November 11, 1994 that Paul finally underwent his last radiation treatment and was cancer free. It was only a year later that Paul and Betsy tied the knot and said, "I do," getting married on November 11, 1995.

Over the years Paul and Betsy have sent numerous teams of horse and rider into the ring, and have garnered their fair share of World's Championship titles. Some of the horses that give a fine example of Paul and Betsy's expertise as a team are:

CH Callaway's Criterion, CH Hank Heiron, CH Mountainview's Starlike, Prairie Dancer, Private Night Out, CH Yes It's True, CH Empress In Black, CH Devoted To The Cause, CH Promise To Dance, Heartland High Time, CH The Showstopper and CH Carlswald Prince's Dominoe.

Of course, one of Betsy's favorite memories of her students she put in the ring is that of the earlier mentioned moment when CH Moonchance won his world's title with Will. But Betsy is quick to speak of another memory that stands out for her, and this one does not include any mention of the coveted green shavings or a world's title. She says "On the other end of the spectrum from coaching a team that made history at Louisville, another memory for me was when my beloved pony, Magic won a twenty-two horse open class at a local show in with all horses and levels of riders. So favorite memories and accomplishments are everywhere, not just at big shows with top horses."

The daily operations of the farm are just like any other top facility. Everything at Boones Farm runs on a schedule and is kept going like a well-oiled machine. A typical day starts with Paul taking the morning shift and working the show horses, and Betsy takes over the afternoon duties of giving lessons. A thriving lesson program can sometimes keep Betsy in the barn until nine at night. Keeping all the daily activities on a tight schedule allows for disruptions in the day to be taken in stride. Vet visits, farrier visits, delivery of hay and all the other odds and ends parts to running a training stable, are easily fit into the planner at Boones Farm when all the daily aspects are running smooth and on time. Paul and Betsy get help from their grooms (who have been with the barn for numerous years) and from their top-notch assistant trainer Chris Carrick. Kahtryne Stief also assists in the daily operations at Boones Farm, helping Betsy teach lessons and bring along the academy program. Nancy Boone (Paul's mother) also plays an important role in the operation of the farm, handling the billing and bookkeeping portion of the business.

The most prominent day for customers to come to the barn is Saturday. And what a day it is! Betsy explains, "Saturdays at the barn are rarely canceled, unless we are off at a horse show. It's a day that everyone comes to ride their show horses or lesson horses and show support for one another. It is not uncommon for customers to stay even after they ride, to watch and learn from their peers. There is often food and beverages and a real camaraderie can be felt among the customers. In the afternoon, we start the academy lessons, but even then students will show early on a Saturday and mingle with our show customers. We have such a wonderful mix of riders and everyone at our barn is so supportive. It truly is something we strive for and take pride in."

Boones Farm truly brings to the table a unique experience for horse and rider. The struggles that Paul and Betsy faced together in the early years of their relationship are the experiences that shaped what their philosophy is all about. It is crystal clear that the blue ribbons that are won in the show ring are not glue that holds the pieces together in the operation of the farm. Yes, of course, Betsy and Paul strive for their riders to be the best they can be in the show ring,



**CH Moonchance played an important role in the lives of Paul and Betsy Boone. Although he primarily was shown by Will Cannon, Betsy got to experience the thrill of this great show horse as well. They garnered wins at the North Carolina State Fair and North Carolina State Championship in the ladies five-gaited division.**

and if it turns out that a blue ribbon is won at a show, then that is a wonderful accomplishment and definitely a moment to celebrate. However, being a survivor of cancer and facing the challenges that came along with such a sickness changed Paul and Betsy's attitude towards what is important in life.

Betsy is quick to explain. "Blue ribbons are great and we strive for them. But over the years there have been so many memories both in and out of the ring that have changed our lives. You have to look to the positive aspects of life. I think the best thing that came out of all Paul's illnesses is that while we work hard and try our best; we also realize



**Paul Boone successfully showed Hollywood Graduate during the 2013 and 2014 show season. Paul and Betsy both had the opportunity to show this talented entry, always placing in the top ribbons in shows up and down the east coast. Currently owned by Kathy Berger, this horse is a prime example of the quality of horse that can be found at Boones Farm.**

that what we do is a sport. While some people get wrapped up in the color of their ribbon, we try to look past that. We have seen real problems in life so it gives us a lot better perspective on things. We try to have fun, and in doing so we hope that all of those around us will follow our lead and try to have fun. As a trainer or leader of a barn, if you complain about the judges, the associations, the competition, or the shows, then your customers will learn that too. How long will people want to stay in something that they perceive as crooked? If everyone were to get involved in volunteering for the shows and the associations, viewpoints would change."

Both Paul and Betsy practice what they preach. Their customers are encouraged to develop real bonds with their horses and truly enjoy the relationships built. A couple customers started riding at Boones Farm and have never ventured anywhere else. The atmosphere at the farm is so calm and in touch with reality, that once a person starts their journey with the Boones, it seems there is no reason to leave. A love for the horse is a prominent theme, even more so than the love of the ribbon or competition. Some customers feel so strongly that their horses deserve the best, they continue to keep them and care for them long after their show years and Betsy speaks of this with pride.

The Cannon family are a wonderful display of this as many of their past champions still reside with them.

"The Cannon Family keep several horses at home, including some of their prestigious show horses. CH Devoted To The Cause, CH Moonchance, CH Sultan's Earth Angel, It's Me Again and Americana's Jubilee, all found forever homes when they became part of the Cannon family. Their first horse horses, New York Talent and Starlike Reviews spent all of the lives retired at the home of the Cannons. As trainers and lovers of the horse, this gives Paul and I a feeling of peace and comfort. It is wonderful to have a whole barn full of customers who adopt this attitude of respect for the horse and life in general," Betsy states.

Boones Farm is busy with a full barn of horses in training and a strong lesson program, yet Paul and Betsy still both find the time to give back to their sport. Both are active with the ASHA Charter Club. Betsy finds pleasure in helping with ASAC where she is the Secretary. She also just finished two consecutive terms on the ASHA Board with the last three years serving as ASHA Secretary, as well as serving on the USEF Safety Committee. Paul finds time in his schedule to serve with UPHA Chapter 12 as the Chairman and he also put forth effort to help start the UPHA Horseman's Classic Horse Show held at the old Sedgefield show grounds last year. He also is active with USEF as well, working with the USEF Saddlebred Rules Committee. And it's not just Paul and Betsy who contribute their time to our industry; it's a family affair. Nancy Boone just retired from ASAC as Treasurer, however she is still the ASAC Horse Show Chairman. As if that list of committee work isn't long enough, Betsy and Nancy both worked together to start the Charlotte Charity Horse Show in 1993. With their hard work and dedication, this show ran for 20 years and benefited Betsy's church. Paul and Betsy both hold "R" judge's licenses and actively serve to judge shows when the opportunity arises.

When not in the barn, Betsy and Paul try to find some time to relax at their cabin that sits on Lake Norman, which is about 30 minutes from the barn. Boating and taking spins on the jet skis on the lake are common activities that each like to enjoy. Paul enjoys fishing when he can find time, and even can be found on a motorcycle from time to time. Apart from the horses, dogs are a large part of the family, and Paul and Betsy bring their dogs everywhere they go.

Looking forward to the future, Boones Farm is sure to stay at the top of the list of show barns for so many reasons. Along with the blue ribbons, their realistic attitude and down to earth way of life helps to attract and keep customers involved in the industry. The lessons learned throughout Paul's sickness and the bond between horse and rider (CH Moonchance and Paul) continue to be the backbone of what Paul and Betsy stand behind. Their ethics, love for the horse, appreciation for the sport and joy they find in daily life, is sure to continue and shine as they give to the horse community what has been given to them, hope and happiness.