



Connie Smith

Always Has High Hopes!

URBANA, Ohio - Connie Blair [Smith's] life with horses and ponies, like so many in the horse industry, evolved because of her parents and their relationship with horses. When she was five years old, her dad bought a pregnant pony mare and a stallion and brought them home. Her dad had no intention of training them. He just wanted to give them a home. In fact, according to Connie, her parents had no clue what to do with them.

That all changed when several years later Connie was finally able to catch the mare by herself and start training her with the goal of eventually being able to ride her and use her as transportation. Connie's aunt lived nearby and she and Connie often spent weekends together so Connie wanted an easy way to go back and forth from home.



(pictured above) High Hopes, located in Urbana, Ohio, is home to Connie Smith's training facility.

At Kentucky Spring Premier, Beth Jones (l) drove her beloved Major Impact to win the Hackney Pleasure Driving Pony Championship and qualifier under the direction of Connie Smith.



B.J. Taylor and her husband Louis built this house at High Hopes. Despite being the center of a horse and pony training operation, B.J. had decorated it with an all white color scheme. It now serves as a wonderful guest house.

Life in rural Urbana was quiet and most of Connie's friends lived 12 miles away in West Liberty so it wasn't as if she could easily call one of them to come give her a ride into downtown Urbana when she was looking for something to do. Breaking that mare to ride gave her the freedom to go where she wanted to go and at 10 years old, being able to do that perhaps planted the seed that would one day lead her to be a horse trainer.

Connie loved horses, in fact all animals, and she was involved in the 4-H program as a teenager. She eventually had a Saddlebred/Arab mare to show and they won all the English Pleasure and In-Hand classes, in fact pretty much every class, they showed in. Training was still just a hobby and a means to an end, but Connie was good at it.

As a young woman Connie started working at Central Supply which was located in the basement of Mercy Memorial Hospital in Urbana. The company dispersed hospital supplies to the various departments within the hospital. The hospital's morgue was located just across the hall.

Wayne Smith was an apprentice at the funeral home in town and he was the one who was charged with picking up the bodies from the morgue.

Seeing each other every day eventually led to dating and that relationship turned to marriage. So as Connie likes to joke "I met my husband in the morgue."

Wayne and Connie's first son, Blair, was born after they moved to Kettering, [Ohio] where Wayne took a job at one of the large funeral homes. They lived there for a few years but were then able to come back to Urbana to take over the funeral home in town. Their second son, Travis, was born in Urbana and is four years younger than his brother. Connie, Wayne and their two young sons lived upstairs in the funeral home and to say life was challenging with two boys in that environment is an understatement.

"We had to be absolutely quiet if there was a funeral happening," said Connie. "We couldn't cook certain foods and the boys certainly couldn't play together." Connie couldn't do laundry if

there were visitors because the washer and dryer were located downstairs across from the casket room. The city's small size meant that the funeral home also served as the ambulance service and townspeople knocked on the door at all hours of the day or night. "I couldn't leave to go run errands unless I could find someone to come to the house because as a funeral home and ambulance that served the entire community it could never be empty," said Connie.

When Travis was about three months old, Connie was desperate to find something else to do. She was going stir crazy. Her mom had retired from Krogers so she was able to babysit the boys. That gave Connie the freedom to find something that interested her.

She had been watching trainer B.J. Taylor, who lived nearby, work the horses and ponies she had in training including those of customer Beth Jones. Taylor didn't have an indoor or outdoor ring so she would trot them up and down the gravel road in front of the house she and husband Louis had built.

Connie eventually began helping B.J. train and they had clients including Jean Triplett, Jackie Hammond and Robin Jones. Connie in fact bought a six-year-old mare from B.J. that wasn't broke and after working her was able to show in the western division. She also showed Sugar Run Replica, a Morgan owned by Jackie Hammond.

In 1991, Connie decided it was time to leave B.J. She continued to train part time for people and began working part time for the local veterinarian at the clinic.

She built an eight stall barn at the farm her family owned and kept some horses there to train. She also helped anyone who would ask for help with training their own animals.

Meanwhile B.J. and Beth were missing her. B.J. was training but she needed help so in 1998 she asked Connie to come back. Beth Jones agreed. She wanted Connie to come and train at High Hopes again.



This painting was one of many collected by B.J. Taylor.

The success that has come to the Smith-Jones partnership from the beginning is only part of what makes their friendship so special. "In the 45 years I've known her, I've never known her to make a bad decision," said Beth. "She does so much for other people and for me. I know my ponies are well cared for. She takes care of this old lady. She loves her boys and she loves her grandchildren (Blair has a son and daughter who are two-year-old fraternal twins).

Under B.J. Taylor's direction Beth had many champion ponies and horses and Connie kept that winning tradition after B.J. died in 2005 from cancer. Some of the champions on that list include pleasure driving pony Mr. Jack Daniels, road horse Masterlink, roadster pony Dun-Haven Top Hat, roadster pony Dun-Haven Awesome Image, Hackney Horse Wentworth Lucifer, roadster pony CH Heartland Sundust, cobtail pony Heartland Seal The Deal, pleasure driving pony Autumnwood's Rumor Has It, Heartland Parade Time, Hackney pony Heartland News Leader, roadster pony Heartland Electra and so many others.

Beth Jones is known as one of those owners who will never sell her ponies. She keeps them forever and one of her all-time favorites Major Impact is certainly on that list. "I've never had a pony that makes me feel the way he does," said Beth. He'll never leave me. I'll have him for the rest of his life."

Connie Smith is known as one of those people who will do anything for anyone and any animal. Her animal rescue organization started because after she became a licensed vet tech she served all of Champagne County [Ohio]. She saved a puppy named "Tootsie" who is now four-years-old and so it began. People began dropping animals off at her farm or calling her about animals running loose. Connie just couldn't say no. Travis shares her love for animals and helps every day with the rescue center in addition to his horse transport business "Travis Smith Equine Transport".

It didn't take long before Connie knew she had to build a shelter to serve the homeless pet population of Urbana. She broke ground last fall and "Barely Used Pets" opened in November. Every dog that comes through the door is cleaned up and evaluated for their overall health. They are all spayed or neutered and get their shots. The local vet provides the service every Wednesday and graciously gives Connie a reduced rate. She is committed to not increasing the homeless population so animals are never sent home with new owners without being spayed or neutered.

Connie's beautiful facility has outdoor runs so the dogs can get exercise and each dog has a very large cage with their own bed and toys to play with and a common area for them to play and interact with potential adopters. She dreams of the day it will include a surgical room, a nursery for the endless number of puppies and pregnant dogs that get dumped at her door, and a larger area for storage of desperately needed supplies.

Barely Used Pets could use all the help the organization can get, whether that be money or food, supplies, toys or any of the long list of things used every single day to take care of the pets that no one wanted to take care of before they ended up in her amazing facility.

High Hopes on the other hand doesn't need any help to put champion ponies and horses in the ring. Major Impact was just crowned Kentucky Spring Premier's Hackney Pleasure Driving Pony Grand Champion and Champion with Beth Jones and Heartland Electra earned top ribbons in the amateur roadster pony division. Hopkins was reserve in the Open Roadster Pony class at River Ridge Charity and both Beth and Connie look forward to heading to Indianapolis Charity in a few weeks.

Connie always has high hopes; whether training a horse or pony to take their owner to the winner's circle, or picking up that stray and getting them ready for their forever home. She does whatever it takes to be successful. You'll often see her wearing her trademark tee shirt "Adoptedis my favorite breed".



Beth Jones and Heartland Sundust had a great career together including their 2010 Kentucky County Fair Roadster Pony Reserve Grand Championship.



CH Heartland Globe Trotter was the 2009 UPHA Hackney Pony Classic Champion at Lexington Junior League with Connie Smith driving for Beth Jones.



Hackney Horse Wentworth Lucifer had a successful career for Beth Jones and he had wins with her, Connie Smith and B.J. Taylor.