



Jennifer Dixon is described as a beautiful rider, talented trainer and dedicated to the horse industry.

JENNIFER DIXON

An Asset to the Industry

by Leeann Mione

Jennifer Dixon is one of those horsewomen that makes an impression on you from the first moment you meet her and it is interesting that her friends and colleagues, whether they've known her for 20 years or 20 minutes, all describe her as "dedicated, hard-working and deeply committed to the horses and ponies in her charge."

Dixon grew up in Colorado and started riding when she was six. Her family kept a pony in the back yard and eventually the family took an interest in the Morgan breed and purchased a horse from some local breeders in Loveland, Colorado. They showed on the local level and Dixon took lessons from several trainers including Cece Green and Arab trainer Judy Wilder Wilson. Her parents were very supportive of her horse activities and became involved themselves. They served as horse show managers and show secretaries and trained the family's horses. Dixon has two older brothers and an older sister but none share her passion for the horses.

As a junior exhibitor Jennifer Sherman worked for Mary Cockriel at the horse shows. "I've known Jenny since she was 12 or 13 years old," said Cockriel. "I worked for Patricia Chamberlain at Wanstead Farm and Jenny took lessons there."

Dixon also worked for Mary Cockriel's dad and legendary trainer Martin Cockriel in Parker, Colorado before marrying fellow Coloradoan and trainer Bruce Dixon. The Dixons trained in Colorado with much success before being hired by Josephine "Jody" Haas to be the trainers at her Middlefield Farm in Novato, California. Haas was an owner and breeder of top Morgans.

Their success with the Middlefield Morgans then led to Bruce being tapped in 1996 to be the barn manager of the Menlo Circus Club in Atherton, California. The historic Menlo Circus Club was established in 1920 and began as a Club for a group of young girls to show their horses, and assorted animals, to raise money for the Stan-

ford Convalescent Home (now the Lucille Packard Children's Hospital).

Bruce and Jennifer moved in and set up their Dixon Stables with champion Saddlebreds, Morgans and Hackneys. Jennifer was the instructor and they started with three horses in training plus a couple of horses that were inherited from former Circus Club manager and trainer Frank Buckley.

"I taught lessons and brought in 75 to 80 percent of our business from the riding program. There were a lot of club members and parents who wanted their kids to ride saddle seat instead of riding the jumpers and we provided that alternative," said Jennifer.

Bruce and Jennifer's business continued to expand as the list of world's and national champions they produced grew longer. They were equally successful with all three breeds and had champion Friesians on the roster as well. The show horses would head to Kentucky every summer

JENNIFER DIXON

after the Santa Barbara National Horse Show. Bruce would go and stay and Jennifer would fly back and forth so that she could keep things running at home. Champions from the Dixon show string were crowned at Lexington Junior League, Shelbyville and Louisville.

When Bruce Dixon died in May of 2008, Jennifer's life changed forever. She took over as barn manager of Circus Club; a monumental task in itself. "There were two hunter/jumper trainers besides myself as well as several grooms and assistant trainers. Three instructors gave hundreds of lessons per week," said Jennifer.

Circus Club couldn't have had a better person for the job. Performing a hundred different tasks in the course of each day and working harder than everybody else, dealing with the bureaucracy that comes with a management position, while training and instructing her own string of champion horses and riders and managing customer expectations as well as the expectations of parents whose children took lessons with the Circus Club trainers was all just part of the job to Jennifer.

Her philosophy that "There's no reason to do something if you aren't going to do it to the best of your ability" is why all those who know her, love her and admire her describe her as "loyal," "passionate" and "a warrior".

Dixon's warrior spirit was tested when her beloved mother was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in late 2012. She had to reach deep and draw on her resilience yet again in early 2013 when, during a routine doctor's visit with her general practitioner, a lump on her thyroid was discovered. "I never felt anything or even knew it was there but I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer and had a total thyroidectomy in February. I began iodine radiation in April," said Dixon. "One of the scariest times after the surgery was when my calcium got too low. I've never felt so awful in my life."

In 2017, after 21 years at Circus Club, it seemed that the time was right for her to change course. "The board of directors was becoming increasingly involved in the equestrian program and they were going to start limiting which horse shows we could go to. They were non-horse people trying to make decisions that affected my business and so it just felt like it was time to go," said Dixon.

The prospect of leaving Circus Club and operating her own barn was daunting. "You've got to be confident in yourself. One thing I know about myself is that I will make it. I can always make a decision because if I don't like it, I can always make another decision. I'm never paralyzed by fear."

When she found the 10 acre property in Vacaville (Solano County), she knew it was perfect. "This had been a horse property before; they bred and raised Thoroughbreds. There are 10 paddocks so the horses can roam at will or be separated and can be on or off grass. Part of the apricot orchard is still here. There are two nice sized pastures and a walk-in covered shelter which is large enough for both hay storage and shelter for the horses. The house was here and there is a modular next door as well."

Dixon was tasked with building the perimeter fencing, covered arena, and the barn. "I thought I wanted the kind of barn I saw in Kentucky with the fancy tack room, big customer lounge and elaborate facade," said Dixon. "But that was going to be far too expensive and what really mattered to me was being able to provide great care for the horses and giving customers the best experience they could have. We don't have Morton Buildings out here and no one will build a wood barn because of the climate. This property, because of the setbacks and regulations, offered only one place for the barn to be located but it has turned out to be perfect."

"When I was a kid I went to Morgan Grand National every year and I knew even then as I walked through the parking lot that as cool as those big, fancy rigs were, I would rather have the horses that went in them. I realized when I thought about the kind of barn I wanted that it was more important that it be comfortable and functional instead of fancy and elaborate.

"Our arena is adjacent to the barn, not attached to it, but it has worked out great. We keep the windows open all day and I can see from the arena who is in which stall. We can pull the equipment truck between the two buildings to load and unload which is convenient.

"Between the contractor, the county and PG & E, I wasn't certain we'd ever put a horse in the barn but now that we are completely settled in and working out of it, there is little I would change," said Dixon. "I have 16 stalls, which are all 12 x 12, in the main barn and eight in the original barn. The new barn also has a wash rack, double tack room which accommodates the trunks for ease of packing, feed room, automatic waterers, laundry room, bathroom and small lounge. Carousel Charity was the first show that we packed to go to and it all flowed really well.

"My business model changes a lot and I'm sure it will continue to change. I'm probably not going to buy the new tractor I need and I'm not going to breed my mare this year. I'm being careful with expenses and keeping a watchful eye on hourly wages. I may perhaps



Gen Hess and Jennifer Dixon both waved the tricolors after Hess rode CH Your Lucky Stars to the Western Country Pleasure World's Champion of Champions title for the third year in a row in 2019.



VVM Uncensored and Amanda Vinson have done a lot of winning in their years together under the direction of Jennifer Dixon.



Kevin Michael catch-drove CH Heartland Resplendent to wins at the 2018 Carousel Charity Horse Show for owner Gen Hess under the direction of JL Dixon Stable.

JENNIFER DIXON



Betty Smith posed with Right Here Now, the gelding she co-owns with her daughter Katrina Smith. They have been customers since the beginning of Jennifer's time at Menlo Circus Club and Katrina enjoys riding and pleasure driving with Nochi.



Katie Sinclair has been riding with Jennifer since her days in walk and trot pleasure with Something Is In The Heir. In 2018 she showed Callaway's Already Gone in junior exhibitor five-gaited for Gen Hess and showed VVM Uncensored in classic pleasure saddle junior exhibitor for Amanda Vinson in 2019.



Jennifer Dixon was as thrilled as Sue Valley was when CH Here We Are won the 2017 Adult Five-Gaited Pleasure Division III World's Championship.

be able to get a lesson program started later this year but tightening my belt as needed isn't hard for me. We weren't wealthy when I was growing up so I've done it before."

She added, "I spent a lot of years teaching a lot of kids how to ride. Now I teach a group of strong, accomplished women and we have a great time. I have a great group of customers and a perfectly suited location in Vacaville."

Gen Hess was an amateur, owner, trainer when she and Dixon first became friends. "Jen and I have always had a lot of fun and laughs together. I love her and all the good times we've had, however our trainer/client relationship remains very professional. She has chosen many horses for me, worked hard to team me with them (not often an easy task) but she's hung in there and has certainly helped me to become more successful than I ever dreamed possible." That success includes Hess and CH Your Lucky Stars being crowned the 2017, 2018 and 2019 Western Country Pleasure World's Champion of Champions and World's Champions."

Hess added, "I am very driven and more than willing to work hard and she too is very driven. She's firm but understanding in her teaching and it clicked for me. She makes me want to work hard and be the best partner for my horses that I can be. I admire her tremendous work ethic and her commitment to every detail to all the horses in her care. I doubt many people really know how hard she works. It's a good thing she loves what she does. Jen is a very special person and those of us riding with her are truly blessed."

One of those who knows what makes Jennifer Dixon tick is friend and trainer Missy Hanover. "Jen is a lifelong friend and she has acquired several long relationships throughout her life, of people that love her so very much.

Even though we were both in California (a very large state), Jen and I got to know each other one year in Oklahoma when we were stabled next to each other at Morgan Grand National. I think it was around 1989 or 1990 and she was showing Trust In June. I remember she rode that beautiful mare so smoothly and precisely. We became fast friends after that first Oklahoma where we were stabled together.

"We were similar in age and places in our life and were engulfed in the horse business. Soon Jennifer came up with the idea of a bunch of horse trainers going on vacation together in the winter. Although this is quite popular now, back then it was a new idea. Jen was the 'Cruise Director' and organized probably five or six different cruises with the majority of West Coast horse trainers and friends year after year. It was something we all looked forward to. It was a sweet time.

"Jen is a warrior and I mean that in the best way. She has a strong work ethic, is a talented horse trainer and is willing to look outside the box for ways to make her business flourish. Jen also has a wicked sense of humor and loves to laugh," added Missy. "Everyone knows how much she loves her dogs and they mean the world to her."

Jen's dogs are well known by fellow horse show participants and customers of her JL Dixon Stables. Her affinity for Corgis started with her beloved Buster Brown, who starred in his own children's book. "The Brown," as he was often called, was her constant companion. DJ the Beagle, Karma Jean (her black lab rescued from Hurricane Katrina), Rottweilers Rizzo and Sophie, Hayzel the Boxer, and her Corgi Barkley have all been part of Jen's pack.

"I lost my mom just eight months after her diagnosis

and I flew straight from Charity Fair Horse Show in Del Mar to be with her. I had my doctor write a letter so that I could take The Brown with me and he gave me a bit of normalcy and comfort," said Jennifer. "He did his Corgi best, as only he could, to bring a bit of cheer to us all. He definitely was part of my emotional support team, as were my customers and friends who helped me through one of the most horrible times in my life."

Sandra Surber was a customer of Jennifer and Bruce's from the beginning and continues that relationship with Jennifer today. "I met Jennifer when she was just a young girl. Jennifer has not had an easy row to hoe. She has pulled herself up by her bootstraps and is a success both in business and as a human being. We couldn't be prouder of her."

"Jennifer taught my daughter for a year or so in 1998 when Julia was six and we really had enjoyed her encouraging style of teaching, so we were happy to be back when we returned in 2007 when our former trainer relocated out of state," said customer Sue Valley. "We had several very good years with me and my daughter, Julia Chen, sharing my walk-trot mare CH Like Sunshine. Jennifer did a great job taking on this mare, who had been very successful, and keeping her in top form for several years for Julia and me.

"In 2011 we sold Sunshine and Jennifer took me shopping. We purchased a junior gaited horse named Here We Are (Al) from Doc Raun and a pleasure horse from Jean Durant named Too Attached (Spud) that I could ride at home. Jennifer has worked hard over the years to make me and "Big Al" a team. Al is always eager to do his job and he and I tend to get a bit enthusiastic in the speed department. Jennifer has been persistent and it

JENNIFER DIXON



Those who know Jennifer know that she has a wicked sense of humor and she and friend Missy Hanover have shared a lot of laughs over the years after meeting at Morgan Grand National.

Mary Cockriel and Jennifer Dixon go way back. Mary used to give Jennifer lessons when Jennifer's family trained their own Morgans in Colorado.



Jennifer Dixon joined Rich Campbell, Maureen Quackenbush, Maureen Campbell and Ted Surber for the presentation of the AHHS Gwen Stableford Lifetime Achievement Award to Sandra Surber at the 2020 combined convention.

paid off in spades when we took home the blue ribbon in 2017 at the World's Championship Horse Show. Al has been a once-in-a-lifetime horse and I have Jennifer to thank for that."

Sue continued, "Jennifer is very dedicated to her customers and her horses. She works very hard and isn't afraid to ask for advice from her peers, which I think is the mark of a true professional. The horses are always in top form and Jennifer is always the one in the stall taking care of them when they are having issues. She cares deeply for them.

"She has always supported our local Saddlebred club NCASHA (Northern California American Saddlebred Horse Association) by donating horses and riders for our horse expos, demonstrations and club shows. She's always a resource for helping me with my "at home" horses and helps me at shows whether dealing with my side saddle adventures or dealing with my 'bug eyed, neurotic Spud.

"She makes the whole experience fun in and out of the show ring in addition to being my trainer. We abide by the motto of "Eat well and travel often" and we have a ball."

"I've known Jennifer for more than 20 years," said Amanda Vinson. "She's seen me through college at Stanford, grad school, marriage and kids. She's been a big part of my life and I've often told her that I couldn't do this without her. I could not put my horse in training with anyone else.

She added, "I competed a lot on my Morgans including my world champion High Y Summer Storm. He stayed at Circus Club with Bruce and Jen while I was at school. I leased Saddlebreds, bought a Saddlebred and

then bought my Morgan VVM Uncensored. He's been a wonderful horse for me and while at the Circus Club, he colicked badly. He was so well looked after by Jennifer and she caught it in time. I'm not sure that would have been the case if he'd been somewhere else.

"She always puts the horses first and she deserves all the credit for any success I've had in the show ring. She's always completely honest and is never afraid to say what she thinks. She's been known to tell me I haven't brushed my horse well enough, even if we're just going out for a trail ride. Her honesty, integrity and attention to detail, and her devotion to the horses are what we all love about her"

Katrina Smith and her mother Betty have also known Jennifer a long time. "My mother and I first met Jennifer when she and Bruce took over for Frank Buckley at the Menlo Circus Club," said Katrina. "We both remember thinking that Jennifer was such a beautiful rider. Knowing that Jennifer is a wonderful trainer who pushes and guides you and your horse to be a great team is a given. She is also a great friend and so funny!

"Since she's moved her operation to Vacaville and built her new barn, I've seen a great change in Jennifer. She is more focused yet more relaxed, and thriving. She once told me 'All I want to do is work horses.' It shows."

Kevin Michael and Michael Craghead have had an enduring friendship with Dixon

since she arrived at the Menlo Circus Club. Kevin is occasionally called on to catch-drive for JL Dixon Stable and he was the one who drove her equipment truck home from Carousel Charity last month. In 2018, he showed CH Heartland Resplendent to two wins at Carousel be-

fore owner Gen Hess debuted with the pony at Charity Fair.

"We've known her a long time," said Kevin. "I knew Bruce when we were young and Michael and I became even closer to Jennifer after Bruce died. Livermore [California] is in the East Bay, just the next town East, so we started hanging out and doing things together while we were at Diamond Hills. We had a great time then and we still do. We usually spend Thanksgiving together, sometimes at Lake Tahoe and sometimes in Vacaville. No matter where, it always becomes a 'festival of dogs'. It's great to see Jennifer relax and enjoy it."

Michael Craghead added, "In 2016 when Kevin almost died I called Jennifer and she was there the very next day. She was my lifesaver. She's very fun and her new barn is just perfect for her. It's very pretty and just exactly what she needs." He added, "I love her to death. If I needed her tomorrow, she'd be here. She's just that kind of friend."

Lauren Brizgys was preparing to move to California to continue her education and sought Dixon out. "I've always known who Jennifer was from reading magazines and seeing her pictures and I had always daydreamed that I could someday ride to the caliber of Jennifer and her riders, but I never could have imagined that my path in education would lead me to her. I remember emailing her almost six months before I moved to California asking her if I could take lessons from her. Her response and becoming one of Jennifer's riders was as exciting as my acceptance into my Ph.D. program.

"There are so many attributes that define Jennifer, you could just fill a book. She is so dedicated and passionate about our breed and our industry and she represents

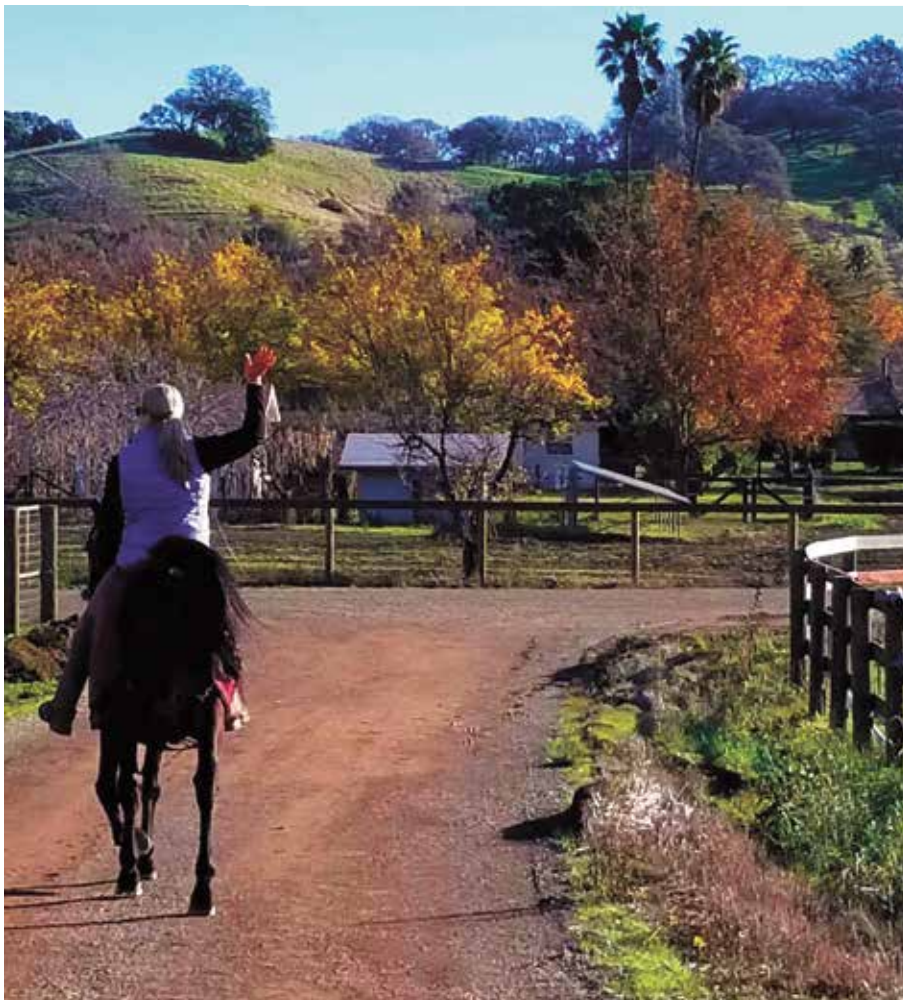
JENNIFER DIXON



Jennifer Dixon and Lauren Brizgys celebrated Nuttin' But Kisses' win in the Amateur Park class at this year's Carousel Charity. The Scottsdale show is often the first stop for the JL Dixon team.



Jennifer loves her dogs as much as her horses and friends. Buster Brown, DJ and Karma Jean were never far from her side.



Jennifer Dixon has achieved her dream of owning her own barn and has made a home and a fabulous life for herself and the dogs and horses she loves so much in the picturesque setting of Vacaville, California.

everyone who loves horses. When she teaches, she teaches you foundational riding so that you become a strong, confident and correct rider. Her lessons, especially on CH Thundersnow (Pogo), are so rich in technique and skill, you can take everything from that lesson and translate it to any horse and be able to ride at your horse's best.

"She sees the 'little things' in your personal riding and helps shape them and guides you in such a way that even if you are new to the sport it makes sense because you can feel the change and response of the horse underneath you.

"Having the opportunity to ride and grow with Nuttin' But Kisses and Jennifer has been nothing short of a dream come true. My mare and I in the ring are a product of Jennifer's expert eye at pairing a team and phenomenal training. The best feeling in the world is when Jennifer shouts 'Good girl!' in practice and in the show ring because when I hear that it means my mare and I are in sync and showing at our brightest.

"I have immense respect for Jennifer; she is my biggest role model and I am so proud to ride for her and be part of her barn. I am blessed to know her and call her my trainer and friend."

Lauren's mom Audra Brizgys added, "Jennifer's intense training leads to top-level performances. She's action forward in training of the mind, the body, rider and horse to create a competitive team dynamic. She's an excellent teacher to those riding and those learning from the ground. She's organized and a fantastic representative for our breed and our industry. I am honored to call Jennifer my friend. She is a phenomenal trainer and mentor for both myself and my daughter."

Katie Sinclair began riding with Jennifer Dixon when she was eight years old. She has shown Callaway's Already Gone in the junior exhibitor five-gaited division and VVM Uncensored in Morgan classic pleasure saddle junior exhibitor classes after showing in walk and trot pleasure with Something Is In The Heir.

"She has become one of my biggest role models in and out of the ring," said Katie. "I am honored to have the privilege to learn from her. Not only has she made me a stronger rider and horsewoman, but her invaluable coaching has given me confidence as well as communication and leadership skills that continue to help me in other aspects of life.

"Jennifer is one of the most genuine and sincere people that I know. She cares deeply about each of her horses and riders and the atmosphere that she has created at her barn is unlike any other. She is more than just a trainer to me. She is a great friend and mentor who I would love to grow up to be like."

A person like Dixon is just the kind of person that everyone would like to have on their team as we all try to navigate through these uncertain times. Her former trainer and longtime friend Mary Cockriel treasures the relationship they have forged in the many years they've known each other.

Carousel Charity, which squeaked in under the wire before we had to shelter in place, held a great show in March in Scottsdale, Arizona. Mary and Jennifer put horses in the ring for The Rivers Edge and JL Dixon Stable respectively, and both kicked off the season on a high note.

"We're just best friends," said Mary. "It's always very easy for me to step in to assist her on those occasions when she flies me in to help put horses in the ring at a show. Whether we are showing our own horses or helping each other we always a grand time doing it.

"We can show against each other and no matter the outcome there are never any hard feelings. She's very passionate about this business and very worried about it. She supports it as much as she can, and is equally as passionate about the Saddlebreds and the Morgans.

"She's honest and caring and there isn't anybody she can't get along with. People trust her and willingly do business with her. Bob [Kellert] and I have enjoyed our many years of friendship with her. (Kellert is co-owner and trainer with Mary of The River's Edge in Elizabeth, Colorado).

"There just isn't anything she can't do. She ran the Circus Club like nobody else and she did it with style and class. She can handle anything; she's got a very good head on her shoulders which makes her a very important part of this business."

She added, "Regardless of where the twists and turns of life take them, her friends are lifelong friends because Jennifer is the kind of friend that you never want to lose."