



Noble Lad was Jane's first three-gaited horse and they enjoyed several wins.



photo by Sandra Hall

Mary Jane Gregory spent 59 years enjoying horses, horse shows, and the people involved. Two of her favorites were Nelson Green (l) and Frank Gray.



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Scarit and Bill Gregory teamed up for many top performances for the family. He would later have great success with their roadster mare, Georgia Lass.



The Gregory children, Jane and Bill, started taking riding lessons because their mom did and she thought it would be fun. "Bill wasn't cut out to be a rider so they got him driving this little pony named Ajax," said his sister Jane, "and that was the start of my family's love of horses."

ONE OF GEORGIA'S FINEST... MARY JANE GREGORY

BY BOB FUNKHOUSER

"She was a great lady. We had a lot of fun together," said Nelson Green. "Mary Jane loved her horses."

Mary Jane Angel Gregory of Dalton, Georgia, passed away December 21, 2020 at the age of 90. She was born June 26, 1930 in Albany, Georgia, to Lewis and Thelma Angel and was the middle of three sisters. In her youth she performed with the noted Cypress Gardens water ski team and flew a plane solo at the age of 16.

She married Dr. Leonard Julian Gregory in 1953 and they spent their lives together, raising two children, Bill and Jane. Mary Jane also had a lifelong passion for raising and showing American Saddlebreds and roadsters. In 1962, the family purchased a white pony named Ajax. It would be Bill's first road pony.

"Mom bought the road pony, a pony/Hackney Horse for me, and a prospect named True Love," said her daughter, Jane Yirak. "True Love came with a goat and the goat sold for more than the horse."

Mary Jane and a couple of her friends started take riding lessons at Pine Acres where the Womble brothers were their teachers. Later, when the late John L. Hutcheson had started Happy Valley with Sam Brannon as trainer, the Gregory family became a part of that family and called the Valley home for a long time.

Early in that association Mary Jane went on a buying trip and purchased a broodmare and the sellers threw in another mare. That throw in mare wound up being the famed Rich Tradition

(Hickory Society Rex x My Bourbon Highland by Bourbon Genius) who had at her side, a bay colt named Chalton's Half Angel (by Beauchamp's King David). Half Angel went on to be a great amateur gaited horse for Wendy Wagner Johnson (trained by Don Harris) and later, with Betty Kern Miller's Silver Lining Stables, he became the only horse to win all three Kentucky County Fair Championships (Five-Gaited, Three-Gaited, Fine Harness) at Louisville. Rich Tradition was also the dam of My Angel, a top walk-trot mare shown by her daughter, Jane Gregory Yirak; CH King's Tradition, an amateur three-gaited world's champion shown by Meg Salmon; and Oman's Luck, a noted breeding stallion by Oman's Desdemona Denmark.

The great Georgia Lass brought a lot of notoriety to the family in the roadster division as did the road pony Scarit. Both were shown by Bill. Another of Mary Jane's favorites was Noble Lad, Jane's first three-gaited horse.

Mary Jane loved the horse industry and its professionals. Some of her favorites included Nelson Green and Frank Gray, along with Peter Palmer, Bob Vesel, Bobby Gatlin and Sam Brannon. She was also very fond of Eddie B. Womble who is the subject of one of daughter Jane's many memories of her mom with the horses.

"Eddie B. got his teeth kicked out right before we were getting ready to go to the Montgomery, Alabama, show," recalled Jane. "He was going to show Half Angel for the first time but backed out because of his teeth. Mom made my dad, who was

a dentist, make Eddie B. some front teeth. She told my dad she didn't care how he made them – even if he had to carve them out of wood – Eddie B. was going to have teeth and was going to show her horse. Turned out perfect. Mom had a special place in her heart for Eddie B."

Peter Palmer also has great memories of Mary Jane and her horses.

"I first had horses for her when I was at Blythewood," said Palmer. "She was the best. I was crazy about her. She had a big heart, spoke her mind, and was wonderful to me. She loved the horses as much as life itself. I remember some really nice horses like The Odyssey, A Tradition, and Hell Bent. That Rich Tradition mare was a great producer for her."

Additionally, Mary Jane was known for the beautiful flower arrangements that decorated center ring for the Cleveland/Chattanooga Horse Show, which was her favorite.

A true force of nature, Mary Jane was known to be a "character," holding strong opinions and sharing them, often with colorful language. She was a woman of great humor and wit, a teller of larger-than-life tales that all turned out to be true.

"Mom never met a stranger in the horse business," said Jane. "She always liked to win, but she truly loved horses."

Mary Jane was preceded in death by her husband, Julian Gregory; a sister, Ann Collins; and son, William Julian Gregory. She is survived by her daughter, Jane Gregory Yirak; sister, Patricia Tunno; grandchildren; and great-grandchildren.