



The View From A Top,

at



HIGHVELD FARM

BY ERICA FAULKNER

Burlington, Kentucky, located just south of Ohio, in Boone County (home of the Boone County Fair), is growing by leaps and bounds with new housing construction and warehouses being built by the retail mogul, Amazon. Amidst all the commercial growth, there is HighVeld Farm, a gorgeous new facility that Cydni Simmons-Meintjes and Francois Meintjes, proudly call their home.

Just a short six miles from "downtown" Burlington the spacious 25-stall training barn sits atop a 25-acre high flat point in the topography of the area (known as a "veld" in Afrikaans). A beautiful and functional 200 x 60 indoor arena and a 180 x 80 outdoor arena (which is currently being finished) provide ample space for the development of the

show horses and riders that make up the HighVeld customer base.

Cydni and her husband Francois officially began their journey together when they said "I do" on September, 30th, 2017. They exchanged their vows in front of family and friends at the iconic Walnut Way Farm in Shelbyville, Kentucky.

Although their time together is fairly new, both Francois and Cydni have a long history of equestrian experience, of their own.

Cydni was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, but spent her young years growing up in Burlington, while Francois was born and raised in Vryburg, South Africa, (which is a Northern Provence region) to which Cydni commented that he "was quite literally

born in the backseat of a car on the way to the hospital." Obviously, he was quite anxious to make his entrance into this world.

"He still continues to enjoy getting places quickly whether or not everybody else is ready for it," she said.

ABOVE The new construction of HighVeld Farm, in Burlington, Kentucky, boasts an impressive 25-stalls, and large indoor and outdoor arenas, where Cydni and Francois Meintjes work together training and preparing show horses and ponies. HighVeld Farm's spacious indoor arena and immaculate and airy aisles resemble a place of paradise for any horse trainer.



Jeff is often on hand at the shows to lend a helping hand when needed. Here he put the final touches on customer Nina Izquierdo's tie before one of her rides.



Cathie Simmons looked on as Cydni shared a moment with her prized CH Sammyshine who made a guest appearance at her wedding.

Francois made the trip to the United States from South Africa, around 2011, to follow his dream of becoming a farrier. His first horse shoeing jobs came when he worked with Suriada Loepshur in South Africa; he was just 17 years of age at the time. When he came to the United States he apprenticed with the world-class Bud Willimon. It was also during these years that he and Cydni began their courtship.

"Originally he traveled back and forth between the two countries, spending his summers here and winters in South Africa," said Cydni. It was 2016 when Francois made his home here in the United States.

Cydni's childhood years was filled with all things horses, thanks to her family's involvement with them.

"My Grandma and Grandpa (Virginia and Ray) had a very nice combination horse named, Vanity Herself. Uncle Scott would do most of the showing, and my father (Jeff) would ride at home as he says 'in a full bridle, with a western saddle, down the road to the neighbor's house.' Mom (Cathie) had always wanted to be around horses growing up, but finally was able to get involved with horses and riding when she married my father. If I remember correctly, her first riding lesson was an anniversary gift."

Cathie and Jeff both showed show horses throughout the past years. Cathie was successful with horses such as Picabo Street, CH-EQ All About Charm, Ms. Sophie Tucker, Catch The Moon, Captain Kangaroo, and her beloved CH Cheetah's Admiral whom she showed in the country pleasure division. Jeff also showed Captain Kangaroo, CH-EQ All About Charm, Catch The Moon, alongside his wife, as well as campaigned Aluminum Johnny and Handsome Heir.

Cydni grew up with a love for horses just as her parents did. So, becoming a horse trainer was just about the only thing she saw as her career choice. She rode her first horse at the age of 11 months and showed in a lead line class at 18 months. Her first riding lessons were with Stephanie England-Gray at Little Britain Stables, and from there she went on

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Francois grew up around horses, competing in endurance events in South Africa with his trusty partner, Abudan.

to ride with Cape Cod Farm, and finally to DeVore Stables.

"It practically took an act of Congress or God to get her off the horse. She has been riding ever since," her late mother Cathie said in an earlier Saddle Horse Report interview.

"The horse bug was inevitable as a child, and training horses was the only thing I could imagine myself doing, but it was always discouraged by those who knew how tough of a lifestyle it can be," said Cydni. "Some part of me wanted to prove to myself and others that I can be successful as a trainer and instructor. Luckily, I have had nothing but support from my family and mentors, and found a husband and a partner who is just crazy enough to do this with me."

It is no surprise that her husband supports her passion, as it's the same as his. His parents, Andre' and Ansie Meintjes, supported his love for horses and he grew up riding and competing in endurance events with his gray Arabian, Abudan.

From the time they got together, it was evident that Cydni and Francois would end up with their own facility. Although a special pony may also have played a big role in Cydni's career choice. That pony was the many times world's champion, CH Sammyshine.

"He may just have been the reason that I did all of this," she said. "It is thanks to Grandma that my whole family got into the Saddle Horse business, but when it comes to horses, the credit goes to Sammy."

The partnership of Cydni and the exceptional five-gaited pony CH Sammyshine is one that many remember. Their time together, both in and out of the show ring, largely sculpted who Cydni is today as a trainer and as a person.

CH Sammyshine was born CF Chief's Kentucky Colonel at Caughman Farms in Eastover, South Carolina on June 22, 1990. He was purchased as a yearling by Anne Neil and Sam Stafford, and was shown by Anne's niece, Key Everhart. A year later it was Toni Knight who had the opportunity to show him, winning his first five-gaited pony championship at Lexington Junior League with Knight in

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the irons. From there he went on to win for Laura Cooper, and in 1999 he became Cydni's.

Cydni had already experienced show ring success in her young years with the late CH The Mustang Sally showing both in equitation and in the three-gaited division. It was time for her to step up, and the speed and thrill of the five-gaited division had sparked the young rider's interest. Her parents searched for the best of the best to pair with their daughter, and in doing so, found the sporty CH Sammyshine, who was owned by Midge Hunt at the time.

Their first year together was the year 2000, and they did well, improving with each ride. However, it was at the end of the year that this pair really hit their stride when they left Freedom Hall with what would be Cydni's first, and Sammy's third, Five-Gaited Pony World's Championship win. Cydni was just 10 years of age at the time.

Together, Cydni and Sammy won all over the country, including shows such as Bonnie Blue, Dayton, Rock Creek, Asheville Lions, Saint Louis, and of course, Lexington Junior League, Louisville, and Kansas City. Together, they took home a total of eight world's championship titles.

However, it's not just the blue ribbons that hang on the walls that tells the story of these two. This team grew up together, both physically and mentally. Cydni matured from the chubby young pigtailed girl, to the elegant and studious black-haired woman she is today, while Sammy grew up to be a true peacock of the show ring, with flair and attitude, gameness and spirit. The two of them were, and always will be, the perfect complement to one another.

"Sammy is the reason I am doing this (training horses)," said Cydni. "He gave me confidence, the confidence I needed to be successful in this industry."

Today, Sammy is still a part of the Simmons's family, making his home in Jeff's backyard alongside his full-sister Atlantis Chief, When Heiry Met Sally (out of CH The Mustang Sally), and Junebug, Cathie's little black mini that Cydni said, "rules them all, let's be honest."

"He still thinks he is a stud," Cydni said with a laugh.

He even played a part in Cydni and Francois wedding, where he made a guest appearance, entertaining the guests and posing for the camera.

Today, Cydni is passing on all she learned from Sammy, and her other horses, to her students at HighVeld. Her talent comes from her experience in the show ring, but also from her time working under the watchful eyes of other trainers.

"The first person I worked for was Martin Teater while a sophomore in college. I was always close to Sarah (Crane) Teater. Martin introduced me to the colt breaking process and really allowed me an opportunity to gain some vital experience with young stock, as well as giving me the honor of being the groom for Promise Keeper. Some of my best memories there were the times I got to sit in the tack room and listen to Ed Teater's stories."

After suffering an ACL injury, Cydni came back strong and went to work for Nelson Green just before he moved to Blue Willow Farm. Cydni fondly recalls her time with Green.

"We all know how particular Nelson is with his horses' turn-out, whether it was just a normal day's work or for the show ring," she said, pointing out that she carries the same expectations of presentation and care of the horses at her own farm today.

"He also gave me so many opportunities, like showing David Mount's young Design Star, but he really instilled in me the importance of turning a horse out to a 't'."

After graduating from the University of Kentucky with a Bachelor's of Equine Science, she moved to Louisville and joined the staff at Alliance Stud, where her main focus was developing young stock and helping with the breeding stallions. It was long hard hours, but she said thanks to her experience at Teater's she was prepared for it.

From there, it was on to work as the assistant to Gerhardt Roos.

"While he was leasing stalls at Jo Cornell's, I was lucky enough to spend time working with her as well, learning how she teaches and creates some of the strongest riders in our industry."

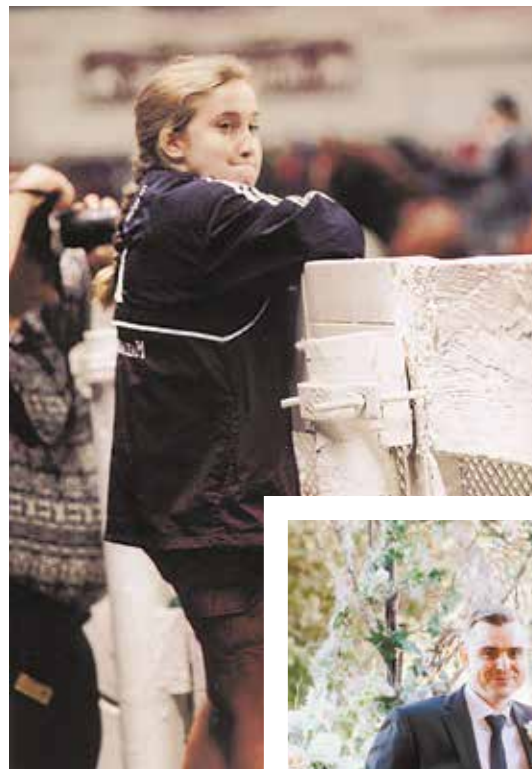
Cydni recalls even getting a lesson or two with Cornell and her notorious "box."

"I loved every minute of it no matter how tough, because she also gave me some of her very valuable knowledge and lesson teaching tools I will always be able to use."

One of the first years Gerhardt was on his own, Dr. Pugh's Street Legal GRS and Coked-N-Ready came into the barn.



Cathie Simmons kissed her beloved CH Cheetah's Admiral during the line up at the World's Championship Horse Show. Cathie always had a love for horses, and passed that love to Cydni.



Cydni leaned over the white fence of Freedom Hall, envisioning her future. It would not be long before she was racking down victory lane in Freedom Hall herself, aboard CH Sammyshine.



Grandma Virginia Simmons was an integral part in Cydni growing up around horses. Her smile was ear to ear the day she watched her granddaughter get married.

(pictured: Francois, Grandma Virginia, and Cydni)

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"On top of really getting the hang of gaiting colts, some of the best experiences I have working there were being "Larry" and "Rudy's" jockey, and being a part of their first world titles. I have been hooked on the road horse and pony divisions since then because of their influence."

Today, Cydni and Francois use their combined experience to train their customer string of 18 horses, a number which is quickly growing.

Our Sally Rose is just one of the horses at HighVeld, and she has a special place in Cydni's heart.

"Rosie is out of CH The Mustang Sally, who was my first show horse, as well as a world's champion." Cydni said. Recently this mare has been campaigned in the three-gaited pony division with Chelsea Dragan.

Koekie DeVillers (who is Sammy's niece) and Nina Izquierdo, Roselane's Starry Starry Night and Angie White, and Alex Curry and Rin Tin Tin are just a few of the teams that are gearing up for a stellar 2020 show season with HighVeld.

Each customer plays an important role at HighVeld, as Cydni said one of her favorite parts of her job is teaming riders with their horses. She takes pride in presenting well skilled riders who are thoughtfully matched with their mounts.

"This year we are really looking forward to seeing our new teams hit the ring!" said Cydni, "as well as our teams from last year, with a little more experience under their belts they are looking exceptionally sharp in preparation for

this show season. Shows are a blast when our clients are more like family, we are so lucky to have some of the best people in our barn."

The general consensus amongst the customers is the same. They too feel as though HighVeld is more than just a barn, it's a place where everyone is family.

Teresa Izquierdo, Nina's mother, said, "I can't say enough wonderful things about Cydni and Francois as well as both of their families! Cydni is an amazing instructor, trainer, friend, and most of all, excellent role model for Nina. While she knows how to push Nina harder each time in pursuit of her goals, she leads her along this path with positive support and never-ending encouragement. Her kind heart and supportive nature are always present in her work! We are very grateful to be a part of this experience with Cydni and Francois at HighVeld Farm and are excited to see what lies ahead for them in 2020!"

It's just Cydni and Francois holding down the fort at the farm, as Cydni pointed out, "we both train the horses, teach lessons, groom and of course, Francois is also our farrier!" When not working horses, the couple enjoy spending time with their three dogs, Sakkie, Fritz and Fiona, as well as their cat.

"Is there really life outside of horses?" Cydni joked. Rarely, but when there is, Francois enjoys casually picking his guitar, and periodically the two will bartend at Jeff's bourbon bar, The Brass Ring, in downtown Burlington, on the weekends. But nothing trumps the love and passion that Cydni and Francois have for their new HighVeld Farm, and all the horses and customers that make it their home.



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Cydni and CH Sammyshine had an incredible career together, winning an impressive eight world's championship titles over their years in the show ring. Today, Sammy is retired at her father's house, happily keeping the broodmares company.



While working for Gerhardt Roos, Cydni showed Street Legal GRS, earning the World's Champion of Champions Roadster Under Saddle and World's Champion Open Roadster Under Saddle titles in 2016. Cydni said that it was during this time when she truly fell in love with road horses and developed a need for speed.



CH The Mustang Sally (left) stands with her baby, Our Sally Rose (right), which would be her last foal before she passed. CH The Mustang Sally was Cydni's first show horse; Our Sally Rose is currently part of the winning string at HighVeld Farm.