

NANCY

McConnell

by Bob Funkhouser

The American Saddlebred community lost one of its kindest, most compassionate souls with the November 22 passing of Nancy Bridgman McConnell at the age of 74. The Paris, Kentucky resident was surrounded by family and friends.

Nancy Bridgman grew up in Western New York with her parents, Jack and Catherine as well as siblings Kathleen and Jack. The elder Jack got the Bridgman family interested in horses and the three kids rode at all the local shows and county fairs. All three also turned out to be trainers who in turn had children who became trainers.

Renowned horseman K.K. "Eddie" Gutridge was training nearby when Nancy was a teenager. Her brother Jack went to work for Gutridge and their love for the American Saddlebred was solidified. It was also there that Nancy met her future husband, Frank McConnell.

Nancy grew into a complete horsewoman, not only having the gift of training horses, but also teaching and putting the right combinations together became her forte. Her attention to detail and her calm, cool, patience gave her a special ability of connecting with her students and not only putting them on top, but also making horsemen and women out of them. Several went on to be outstanding performance riders.



Nancy enjoyed many aspects of the horse business, including judging. She officiated at all the major shows in three different breeds: American Saddlebreds, Morgans and National Show Horses. She pictured here judging Southeastern Charity where her son Pat was the learner judge.



Many will remember Nancy aboard the great walk-trot horse CH Match Point.



Nancy was Heidi Weber's instructor when she won the World's Champion of Champions Saddle Seat Equitation title.

Remembered For Her Kindness To Everyone



Putting Phillip Galbreath aboard C.C. Chardonnay and winning the World's Champion of Champions Junior Exhibitor Show Pleasure title before it was split into age groups was one of her favorite memories.



Beth Ann Pippin was the World's Champion of Champions Junior Saddle Seat Equitation rider under Nancy's guidance.

In addition to instructing World's Champion of Champions Saddle Seat Equitation rider Heidi Weber, she developed and/or instructed young riders like Jan Morganson, Sherry Ballah, Barby Thornton, Matt Morel, Cindy and Suzannah Sherman, Beth Ann Pippin, Phillip Galbreath, and the Pettry siblings, Donna, Kristen and Tom. One of her proudest moments was putting 11-year-old Phillip Galbreath together with C.C. Chardonnay to win the World's Champion of Champions Junior Exhibitor Show Pleasure title before all of the age group splits were introduced. They beat all the big kids at Louisville and Kansas City that year.

Nancy's proudest moments were saved for her son Pat for his Louisville wins on Classic Vintage and later Town Rose. As a family, the McConnells had many top horses that Nancy was involved with, including Coe's Commander, Match Point, Irish Shamrock, C.C. Chardonnay, Jennifer Logan, Something Tasty, Real Class, Kilarney Shamrock, Wild Temper and My Sweet Innocence. Later in their professional careers, Nancy would be part of the team at Ann Fitzpatrick's where they had such stars as CH Eleanor Rigby and Great Day's Came The Son. It was also there that she became instrumental in the breeding program and a life-long passion for bloodlines was utilized. That love for the breeding industry also followed her to her last job as part of the staff at Misdee and James Miller's Hillcroft Farm.

Like her peers who have been held in the highest esteem, Nancy was not only successful as a trainer and teacher, but she also gave back greatly, whether that be judging, helping various associations, helping create the winter tournament program, or heading the DuPree family's American Saddlebred Riding Lesson Foundation. One of her favorite projects was the Update On Equitation program with Marilyn Macfarlane, Jane Bennett, Lillian Shively and Anne Judd.

While Nancy did so much good for the sport of showing horses, it was her kindness and friend-

ship that was valued most. When word of her passing spread, the comments came from everywhere about what a kind and caring person she



Nancy (c) worked for and with many prominent operations over the years, including Donna Moore. She is picture here with Melissa and Donna Moore.



The only place Nancy and Pat enjoyed as much as a horse show was Rupp Arena for a UK basketball game.

was. So many had stories about how she had reached out to them at one time or another.

Personally, being a longtime close friend of Pat's, I've also grown up knowing that care and compassion. Several of Pat's friends considered Nancy like a mom. With every conversation she asked about and was genuinely concerned with every aspect of our lives. She followed our careers, she followed our children, and she was just an amazing friend.

Other than Pat, the American Saddlebred and Kentucky basketball made her light up like nothing else. She was so happy for everyone's success when it came to nice horses and ponies.

Jane Bennett previously said when commenting on Nancy receiving the prestigious Audrey Gutridge Award at the World's Championship Horse Show: "I have known Nancy for almost 25 years and she is the single most dependably consistent person I have ever known. Nancy is a true professional. Her patience and kindness are unwavering and never more evident than when she is with the young children she teaches. Little kids idolize her because she cares for them. As a friend, no one could ask for a more loyal, kind-hearted, considerate person. When I need to count on someone for something important and not have to worry about it getting done, I call Nancy."

At her Celebration of Life, held at the American Saddlebred Museum, there were many other stories that friends and fellow professionals shared. As one friend said, "Nancy would have been very humbled by this gathering but at the same time she would have enjoyed seeing and catching up with so many friends. It was really lovely."

In addition to her friends and peers, Nancy's sister Kathleen Bowen and brother Jack Bridgman, along with their children and extended family, were on hand for the Celebration of Life. It is a celebration no one wanted, but all were thankful for the outpouring of love and respect for a woman we'll never forget.