

My Dressage Mentor

Top riders share memories of their early instructors

BY KAREN MCGOLDRICK



BELIEVE IN ME: Most successful riders can trace their start to an encouraging instructor. Former USEF national dressage youth coach Jeremy Steinberg watches young rider Katrina Hiller (WI) on The Toy Soldier at a 2012 Platinum Performance/USDF Jr/YR clinic.

A few years ago, while visiting my home town of Claremont, CA, a friend and I decided to stop and see my former riding instructor.

Now in an assisted-living facility, Mora Cela-ya had always been tiny, but now she had shrunk to an even smaller size. However, she was still brimming with energy and seemed glad to have visitors. We were talking horses and riding and remembering the old days when Mora said, “Karen Jaffa was the best rider I ever taught.”

Her statement left me momentarily speechless—and flattered—because I am Karen Jaffa McGoldrick.

When I tried to tell Mora I was indeed *that* Karen, she didn’t believe me.

I realized a couple of things at that moment: first, that Mora was now suffering from some level of dementia; and second, that I had never expressed my gratitude for what she did for me when I had the chance.

I did not come from a “horsey” or a wealthy family, but I was besotted with horses from an early age. My buddy Melissa had a horse and rode Western, so I rode with her occasionally; but I dreamed of riding “English.”

One morning I saw a help-wanted ad in the *Claremont Courier*. Mora, who had just returned from a year in England and had earned her British Horse Society Assistant Instructor certificate, was looking for a working student.

I applied for and got the job. I was twelve years old.

I don’t think any money ever changed hands, but I was there for years, riding a scruffy assortment of safe equines and tagging along to California Dressage Society meetings and activities, including monthly Charles de Kunffy lectures and clinics. I practically memorized the British Horse Society books and learned about things like trace clips and rollers and how to make a wisp. I also learned vaulting, which later led to other opportunities. In short, it was a great place to be.

After that final visit with Mora, I began wondering about other top riders and how they got started. I knew they had stories to tell about their early days and about the people who were formative to their riding.

Although not every dressage enthusiast will reach the levels attained by the riders who agreed to share their memories and photos for this article, I think you’ll find that their stories are not so different from your own, or mine.

I hope that reading these stories will inspire you to pick up the phone, write a note or an e-mail, or just thank your lucky stars for the good instructors who helped you along the way. And if you run across a twelve-year-old who’s besotted with horses, maybe you can be that person who sets him or her on a good path forward.

My Mentor: Anne Walker

By Katherine Bateson-Chandler

My first real dressage instructor was a lady named Anne Walker. She was living in New Jersey, where I was; and her husband was my farrier. She had two young children, so on the weekends I would travel around to lessons with her and baby-sit her children. In exchange I was given lessons. It was the only way I could afford lessons, and it worked out perfectly.



ON THE TEAM: Canter into the Rolex Arena with Nartan at the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games in Kentucky

I had a very special horse named Kiss Lynne, a nine-year-old Standardbred pacer who had never been ridden. I was determined to make him into a dressage horse, even though he had two gaits: walk and pace!

Anne saw that I worked hard and was determined, so she gave me an amazing amount of her time. She had an extremely classical background of instructors, such as Erik Herbermann. I was hungry for knowledge, and she was so generous with all the information she had. She taught me from the age of 12 until I was about 16, when she moved to Virginia.

We still keep in touch, and I’m so grateful for the base of knowledge she gave me, and that she understood how serious and intense I was about horses and learning all about the fundamentals of dressage.



FIRST TEACHER: With dressage instructor Anne Walker

Katherine Bateson-Chandler went on to groom and train under Olympian Robert Dover before starting her own dressage training business in Wellington, FL. With Jane Clark's Nartan, she was a member of the US dressage team for the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games. She placed tenth in the 2014 Dutta Corp./USEF National Grand Prix Dressage Championship aboard her new mount Wellnetta, also owned by Clark.

My Mentor: Hilda Gurney

By Charlotte Bredahl

I grew up in Denmark on a small island named Møn. My dad was the local sheriff and didn't have money to get me regular lessons. I rode every horse that people would let me ride, and they all taught me so much. Lessons were few and far between, but I did make a point of going to shows to watch the best riders I could find. I learned a lot from that, and I still do.



OLYMPIAN: *With Monsieur at the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games*

I was 19 when I came to this country and started working as groom at Bell Canyon (CA) Equestrian Center. I started taking lessons with [Olympian] Hilda Gurney, when I could catch a ride for my horse. I didn't own a trailer and was riding an ex-racehorse named Freddy.

Hilda helped me bring my first Grand Prix horse along. He was owned by a client, and his name was Copenhagen.

Hilda also helped me bring along my Olympic horse, Monsieur.

With her horse Monsieur, Charlotte Bredahl, of Solvang, CA, was a member of the bronze-medal-winning US dressage team at the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games.

She has won numerous national titles and is also an FEI 4 judge and a member of the USEF Dressage Committee.*



IN THE SWIM: *Atop her pony in her native Denmark*



MENTOR AND STUDENT: *Bredahl (right) with Hilda Gurney on Willy the Great at the 1992 US dressage Olympic selection trials in Florida*

My Mentor: Jan Royce Conant

By Kathy Connelly

My passion and love for horses began when I was eight years old. That is when my family moved to Glastonbury, CT, and I saw horses in a pasture near my house.

I owe all my early education in riding and horse management to Jan Royce Conant, who was the leader of our Glastonbury Pony Club.

Jan is a person of many talents. She was a gifted rider, and she also has written and published books. She is a nationally renowned artist whose equine portraits have graced many *Chronicle of the Horse* covers and have been exhibited around the United States. She is responsible for innumerable invaluable contributions to young people's lives as they developed through the Pony Club programs.

The Glastonbury Pony Club became a national leader thanks to Jan's development of top riding teams, which won numerous regional and national team and individual awards. But most important of all to Jan was that we would win the Pony Club stable-management and sportsmanship awards.



MODERN MASTER: Connelly (pictured at the 2012 USDF/USEF Young Rider Graduate Program) is a sought-after coach, clinician, and trainer



MENTOR: Jan Royce Conant in an undated photo

Remarkably, Jan achieved all of this by getting horses donated to our Pony Club, because most of us could not afford to buy one. Together with her teaching, we would train the horses from Training Level to the Pony Club "A" level. Her emphasis was always on the welfare of the horse and to always do the right thing, whether or not it was easy. She expected honesty, kindness, integrity, and good sportsmanship from us at all times. As we advanced up through the levels, she taught us how to teach, and we would teach the younger riders who were coming along. ➔

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Jan regularly brought in such clinicians as [Olympians] Jessica Ranshousen and George Morris. How fortunate were we! To this day Jessica Ranshousen is a good friend of mine, and I met her when I was 11 years old when she came to teach us in clinics.

Through Jan's tutelage, I was fortunate to earn my "A" Pony Club certificate. At that time, less than 1 percent of US Pony Clubbers were "A" level. Of those who were, Jan had trained many. I won the "A" division of the USPC National Rally at Leydard, MA, on Desert Song, a horse Jan had gotten donated to our Pony Club. At that time, that competition would be comparable to winning the FEI North American Young Rider Eventing Championships today. The following year, when I was 19, I was chosen for the US "A" three-day team to go to Australia to compete against teams from Great Britain, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and Japan. And after college, I went on to make this my career—all because of Jan Royce Conant, my equestrian mentor. We are dear friends to this day. Thank you, Jan, for all of your love, support, and goodness to me. You are a legend to so many.

International trainer, clinician, and coach Kathy Connelly has represented the United States at the FEI Dressage World Cup Final and the North American Dressage Championships. She is a USEF "S" dressage judge and currently serves as vice-chair of the USEF High Performance Dressage Committee.

My Mentors: A Trio of Instructors

By Robert Dover

I started my riding in Canada. The farm where I rode was the place where Trakehner horses were first imported into North America. It was a good place to start because I spent a lot of time going 'round and 'round on the lunge line to develop my seat.

Then we moved to the Bahamas. My bar mitzvah present at age 13 was my very first horse, Ebony Cash. There could not have been a more perfect first horse. My dad and I found him in south Florida at Phil DeVita's farm. I'm guessing he was a Thoroughbred cross and that he had some kind of gaited horse in there because although he could walk, trot, and canter, he also could do a very fast running walk.

That horse did everything I asked of him. He jumped, and he played polo, and he did a 50-mile endurance ride. I even led tourists and dignitaries on beach rides, usually riding him bareback.

My instructor in the Bahamas was Myra Wagner. She was a wonderful British Pony Club instructor.

When I was 15, my family moved to south Florida, where I



PINNACLE: Winning team bronze with Kennedy in his last Olympics, the 2004 Athens Games

was taught by Margo Kern. It too was a great place to be with a lot of other kids. Margo was the one who introduced me to [former US dressage team coach and *chef d'équipe*] Col. Bengt Ljungquist. I was fortunate that he took an interest in me.

Next we moved to Atlanta, where I was taught by Elizabeth Lewis, who also worked with Col. Ljungquist. Elizabeth made a huge impact on my life, and by that I mean much more than her riding lessons. Elizabeth always came into the barn with a smile on her face. She had a great way of relating to her horses, and she always put her horses first. When she was traveling, she let me ride her horses, and of course I could not resist sneaking behind the bushes to piaffe them!

I remember that before the Lewises had an indoor arena, wet weather meant we trained around the perimeter of the barn under the roof overhang on about a 10-foot strip of sawdust and dirt. It is incredible what we got accomplished on that small track around the barn.

I bought Jonathan Livingston Seagull from



GETTING STARTED: Competing aboard Blue Monday in 1979

Elizabeth. He had been a conformation hunter and was just beautiful. Jonathan was the first horse I was long-listed on for the US Equestrian Team, in 1977.

At that time I began taking extended trips to Maryland to work with Col. Ljungquist at Linda Zang's [Idlewilde Farm in Davidsonville]. It was all top riders there, and we all received a tremendous education.

After the death of Col Ljungquist, I had four more trainers: [German masters] Willi Schultheis, Georg Theodorescu, Herbert Rehbein, and Reiner Klimke.

I was really very lucky to have had amazing instruction.

Robert Dover, Wellington, FL, competed in the 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004 Olympic Games and is a four-time team bronze medalist. In 2008, he was inducted into the Roemer Foundation/USDF Hall of Fame. He is now the chef d'équipe of the US dressage team.

My Mentor: Rudiger Thielke

By Jan Ebeling

I started riding at the age of six at my grandmother's suggestion, even though I really wanted to play soccer. We joined a local riding club, where I soon spent every day grooming horses, filling water buckets, sweeping barn aisles, and



WORLD-CLASS: With Rafalca (at the 2014 Dutta Corp./USEF Dressage Festival of Champions), Ebeling represented the US at the 2012 Olympics

cleaning stalls in order to afford one riding lesson a week.

The part that I loved most was that all the other kids did the same thing; there was a strong social aspect to the club. We went to the movies, had barbecues, and did a lot of things

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IN THE CLUB: Ebeling (nearest camera) and members of his riding club in Germany in an undated photo

together outside of the riding. We loved riding, but we also enjoyed each other as an extension of our love of horses.

After a few years, I got my first horse and switched to a different club with a better instructor, named Rudiger Thielke. He was a young, dynamic person who was an eventer at heart. He really understood how to motivate and challenge us. We jumped, trail-rode, and evented, but my heart was in dressage.

Rudy taught us the basics of horsemanship and pulled everyone in our club together to support each other in competitions. It was an honor to show for our club, and we really felt the camaraderie within our club each time we went to a show. I try to incorporate this feeling at our barn daily.

I learned from my beginning days in riding that riding is a commitment and following through is important. None of my success has come easy for me or any of my colleagues. It has taken a huge effort, but I have loved the lifestyle and lived it; and out of that life, I have pursued my dreams. My dreams have come true, I believe, due to my earliest experiences in the horse world, loving each and every moment with the horses and the people around the lifestyle. I really feel that I am lucky to live that life each and every day.

With Rafalca, Jan Ebeling was a member of the 2012 US dressage Olympic team. Prior to the mare's retirement, he and Rafalca were long-listed for the 2014 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games in France. Ebeling teaches and trains at The Acres, Moorpark, CA, which he co-owns with wife Amy Ebeling.

My Mentors: Sue Malone Casey and Jessica Ranshausen

By Todd Flettrich

I started my first lessons in dressage with Sue Malone Casey. [Casey first taught Flettrich in his home state of Louisiana; later, she moved to Alpharetta, GA, and the teenaged



TEAM RIDER: At the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games veterinary inspection with Otto, owned by Margaret Duprey

Flettrich spent summers there, riding.] She taught me and inspired me to ride. She really helped develop me to be the person I am today.

After working with Sue, I became a working student for Olympian Jessica Ranshausen at her Blue Hill Farm in Unionville, PA. Jessica played a huge role in my development as a rider. She motivated and inspired me and gave me the opportunity to become a rider. She was my second mother and mentor.

Robert Dover was my idol throughout my young-rider years.

Oded Shimoni has been my longtime friend and trainer.

I was a working student for a total of 12 years, from the age of 14 to 26. After that I ran my own stable for many years, training my own students. Of course, I still am a student, but now I am fortunate to have support in another way. I now have a very wonderful support system in Margaret Duprey [owner of Cherry Knoll Farm, West Grove, PA, and owner of mounts for Flettrich]. She has given me the opportunity to fulfill dreams.

I hope to keep giving back to the sport that has given so much to me.

In 1992, Todd Flettrich became the inaugural individual



ADVICE FROM THE TOP: Among Flettrich's equestrian mentors was Roemer Foundation/USDF Hall of Fame inductee Jessica Ranshousen (front). She is pictured as the chef d'équipe of the team bronze-medal-winning US squad at the 1994 World Championships in The Hague, Netherlands (with riders Robert Dover, Carol Lavell, Kathleen Raine, and Gary Rockwell).

dressage gold medalist at the FEI North American Young Riders Championships. Riding Otto, owned by Margaret Duprey, he was a member of the 2010 US World Equestrian Games dressage team. He is based in Royal Palm Beach, FL.

My Mentors: A Supportive Group

By Adrienne Lyle

Everyone has heard it said that "It takes a village to raise a child." Well, it also takes a village to raise a rider.

This couldn't be truer than on Whidbey Island, WA, with the village of wonderful "horse moms" I was lucky enough to have.

First and foremost among them is my own mom, Ann Lyle, who gave me the opportunities to follow my love of horses from a young age. She was an enabler but never a pusher of the horse world.

I was fortunate enough to have a wonderful and very active chapter of the United States Pony Clubs where I grew up. The South Whidbey Pony Club had a ton of amazing, supportive, and enthusiastic parents. Joanne Keefe, Lynn Swanson, Kathy Tauscher, and Georgia Gerber were all incredible "horse moms" to me, and each played a critical role in helping me learn about horses—from hosting pony summer camps, to walking my parents through what riding clothes and tack I needed, to running our Pony Club chapter, to taking me to my first-ever horse show and showing me the ropes. I have no doubt that I wouldn't be the horsewoman I am today without all these wonderful ladies who helped me along the journey.

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DREAM COME TRUE: Adrienne Lyle and Wizard at the veterinary inspection at the 2012 London Olympic Games

The one thing all these incredible people had in common is that they let us (yes, there was a whole gaggle of us horse-crazy girls on Whidbey Island) truly learn how to enjoy and love our horses, our way. They were patient horse-haulers and camp directors, but they mainly allowed horses to be “our thing.” We had to be responsible for our own horses, and while they were happy to help when we wanted it, they were also fine taking a back seat and letting us run wild and have fun and learn as we went.

Then came some wonderful instructors who really opened my eyes to the great world of dressage. Trenna Atkins was patient enough to put up with me on my fat little Arab pony and then my crazy Thoroughbred mare. She would even let my friend and me stay overnight at her house and watch dressage videos, and she would make workbooks for us to fill out and discuss. She gave me my first glimpses into the upper levels of dressage, and there was no turning back for me. I was completely and utterly hooked.

When my family moved, just before I started high school, I was fortunate enough to



LITTLE GIRL ON A BIG HORSE: Child rider Lyle in an undated photo

run into Carol McArdle, Oak Harbor, WA, and she became an incredible mentor. Her innate understanding of horses and her empathetic approach to training are things I still carry with me today. She taught me not just what to do when riding but why you do it, and further opened up my eyes to the complexity and greatness of dressage.

Adrienne Lyle, who now calls Ketchum, ID, home, went on to apprentice under Olympian Debbie McDonald. Along the way Lyle got the ride on Wizard, owned by Peggy Thomas. Lyle and Wizard competed as individuals in the 2012 London Olympic Games, and at press time they were long-listed for the 2014 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games.

My Mentor: Bob McDonald

By Debbie McDonald

I think back to my early riding days when I was a working student at Bob McDonald’s barn—yes, the same Bob McDonald who is my husband today! What I learned from him about good horsemanship and work ethic is truly what has molded me into who I am today.

Bob had a pretty large hunter/jumper barn, and it meant mucking out stalls, cleaning tack, and just about anything



LEGENDARY PARTNERS: With Brentina

else that needed to be done. He would give me lessons, and I would fall off every day. But he never gave up, I think because he knew I was a very determined girl, and then one day I finally started to get it.

I knew very early in my life that horses would be what I would end up doing. Since I did the hunters and jumpers for more than 25 years before moving to dressage, I would say that Bob McDonald is and was responsible for who I am and the career I was fortunate enough to have had.

With the mare Brentina, owned by Peggy Thomas, Debbie McDonald became the first American rider to win the FEI World Cup Dressage Final, in 2003. The pair won team silver at the 2002 FEI World Equestrian Games and team bronze at the 2006 WEG, and Olympic team bronze at the 2004 Games in Athens. Now retired from riding, McDonald, of Hailey, ID, is the USEF's national dressage developing coach.



BEFORE DRESSAGE: *McDonald got her start as a working student and hunter/jumper rider for her future husband, Bob McDonald*

My Mentor: Major Dezso Szilagyi

By Cathy Morelli

As a youngster, my mom had me riding all types of horses—Saddlebreds, then hunters and jumpers, and later I did some barrel racing, pole bending, and arena racing on Quarter Horses.

It was after I was married and had a break from horses that I entered the world of dressage by sitting next to Major Dezso Szilagyi in the old indoor arena in Gladstone, NJ, at the US Equestrian Team headquarters during a training session. Just hearing him talk about the way that horses should go made me want to learn more from him.

His main passion was to train horses to be elegant, supple, and happy according to the principles of traditional dressage. He wanted them to move through a soft, swinging back and not just be “leg movers.”

Along with then-USET jumping coach Bert DeNemethy, Maj. Szilagyi acquired his equine education in the Hungarian cavalry, which was the Hungarian equivalent of the Spanish Riding School of Vienna. It was not as well known because it was destroyed by the Russians during World War II.

I only had the good fortune to learn from “the Major” near the end of his life, but I will never forget some of his

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UNDER THE LIGHTS: *Grand Prix Freestyle with BeSe at Dressage at Devon (PA) 2008*

pet phrases, such as “Love is the best training” (which is self-explanatory) and “The dime drops slowly” (in the days of pay phones, you put a dime in, and you had to wait for it to drop down and register!). To this day, some 30 years after his death, I still have moments of discovery as I am riding, and I say to myself, “Oh, *that* is what the Major was talking about!”

Riding R.H. MacKinney, Cathy Morelli represented the US at the 1990 FEI World Cup Dressage Final. With BeSe, she has won many Grand Prix titles. She is based in Wellington, FL.



“THE MAJOR”: *Undated author photo in Szilagyi’s book, Basic Classical Dressage (Xenophon Press, 1989; out of print)*

My Mentors: Teachers...and One Horse

By Michael Poulin

I grew up in Maine, where I began by working for Skipper Bartlett. He had a barn full of horses, and I got to ride them. Many were Grand Prix horses.

Then I went to the ADI [American Dressage Institute] in Saratoga Springs, NY.

I spent about two years going back and forth to Germany to study with Herbert Rehbein. I would stay for about six months, and then come home to my wife and then head

Ode to Early Instructors

Riders who canter to square halts
And salute to tremendous applause
Long ago had no clue to their own faults
‘Til someone came to point out their flaws.

Here’s my ode to those early instructors
Who taught on horses less than athletic
In rings dusty they were the conductors
So that children found riding aesthetic.

Shouting “You must sit thusly
Put your heel right under your hip
If I find you riding unjustly
Well, we have a use for the whip.”

Said “You must care for your horse first
Even though your supper is cold
In horsekeeping you must be well versed
To do right from the day he is foaled.”

Said “You must learn to be patient
That slow is fast in the end
That after the ribbons are ancient
The horses must still be our friends.”

Said “Your knowledge is never sufficient
The learning is never complete
It’s not enough to be simply proficient
It’s your mind that must fathom the deep.”

Said that winning is simply delightful
But the failures show who you are
To yourself put the blame that is rightful
Win or lose, your horse is your star.

Those lessons so early stay with you
Though the teacher may well be long gone
Here you are on the path where they set you
Their voice in your head is still strong.

—Karen McGoldrick

back over. While in Germany, I also had a chance to work with Willi Schultheis.

For many years, we had Franz Rochowansky come and teach at our farm for extended visits. He was the best, and my wife adored him too. I also had a chance to work with [Olympian] Tina Konyot’s father, Alex.

But my real education has come from my failures and from the horses themselves. One horse in particular, Medallion—well, I’ve never had a relationship like that in my life like I had with him. I was in love with that horse, and I still am.

Aboard Graf George, Michael Poulin won team bronze at the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games. A longtime trainer and



TRAINER'S TRAINER: With 1992 Olympic Games partner Graf George

instructor, he helped to establish the USDF Instructor Certification Program and later founded the Young Rider International Dream Program at The Dressage Foundation. In 2012, he was inducted into the Roemer Foundation/USDF Hall of Fame. He and his wife, Sharon, own and operate The Dressage Center in DeLeon Springs, FL.

Common Threads

As I heard from the experts who contributed to this article, I was struck by the similarities in their stories. One was the abiding love of the horse that has not waned through the years, but still sustains our top riders.

Another common refrain was that someone "took an interest in me." Taking a genuine interest in a young enthusiast is perhaps the most powerful thing an adult can do, and it is food for thought for any riding instructor. Clearly, instructors are developing much more than riding skills when they work with young people. ▲

Karen McGoldrick is a USDF-certified instructor/trainer through Fourth Level who teaches and trains at her Prospect Hill Farm in Alpharetta, GA. She is the author of the novel The Dressage Chronicles and its newly released sequel, A Matter of Feel (TheDressageChronicles.com).

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