

## **TAHSSD Open Show High Point Award**

*Congratulations* to the winners of the Dianne Skidmore Memorial High Point Award at the *TAHSSD* Open Horse Show! This show is held the first Saturday in June.

- ◆ 2007 Caitlin Weber
- ◆ 2006 Olivia Minnaert
- ◆ 2005 Colleen Bevers
- ◆ 2004 Melanie Mammenga

### **Memorial Tribute to Dianne Skidmore** *The Bridlewood Days by Karen Moore*

It was probably 1961, in the springtime when young fillies are taught to carry riders, and mine had piled me twice. I heard of a lady at the horse riding place north of town, who started colts on lines. That was a radical thing in a time when horses were expected to comply with a saddle being cinched on and a rider climbing aboard, out of the blue. This lady taught them to walk, trot, canter, turn, and stop before anyone ever got on their backs--and they never bucked! Radical! I called her, and thus began an era of my life.

She was Dianne Skidmore. She described the process to me, and even over the phone I realized I had a lot to learn. She agreed to train me along with my horse. I loaded Pepperoni into my sister's Morris Bros. two-horse trailer, pulled by her 1957 Chevy 4-door sedan, and we went out to Glenwood Stable. We began to learn an approach to training horses that emphasized kindly tact and consistent discipline within a philosophy of taking things step by step, and always building on what the horse had been taught before. Horses trusted people because they were never given good reason not to. New things were introduced only when the horse was ready to learn the next thing. Horses were praised and rewarded when they'd earned it, and the horse became a partner and a friend.

Well, Pepperoni was pretty naughty during those first training sessions. She set the basic attitude of cooperation between horse and handler when Peppy tried a few standard evasions. Dianne's skill with the lines quickly impressed the horse she wasn't going to get away with it. I was impressed. I became one of Dianne's fans for life! And Peppy became a memorably cooperative horse.

Dianne and Gene soon moved their operations to the fairgrounds, and named the place Bridlewood Stables. There, they trained horses, boarded horses, and taught riding lessons to mostly little horse-crazy girls who wheeled their parents into acquiring horses, who then lived at Bridlewood. Some of the kids seemed to live there, too. Dianne got so busy with training that some of us adult students would help out by readying the next horse and then cooling-out the one she had just finished. We'd meet her with a colt in hand and a Coke for her to gulp down,

and off she'd go. It was, in her words, "Work a colt, drink a Coke, work a colt, drink a Coke."

Over the months and years while we were acquiring skills, there was something else going on that might not have been evident at the time. We were working hard at something we loved. We were riding and doing a wide variety of horse activities. There was saddle-seat, hunt-seat, western, and my favorite, jumping. We read books and went out to apply them. We were generating all the things that happened--the funny stories we tell now at the Christmas party each year. We tell them like we've never told them before, and we all laugh like we've just heard them for the first time. And probably they're told word-for-word the same every year!

Horsemanship consists mainly of sweat, flies, dust, shovels and forks, manure and hay, and horse baths with horse and mud, shampoo, and brushes. All with the beloved incentives of glistening coats, memorable performances, classic attire, golden trophies, and congratulations. Photographs taken at the peak of the action. Horse smell and saddle-creak. Whinnies and nickering and sounds of grain being munched, and hooves thudding and clacking with the fine gravel of the arena smacking in a spray against the walls, or the uprights of a jump. The warm, moist puffs from a soft nose who knows which pocket the treats come from.

We each had our thing, our horse, our objectives and dreams. And the one at Bridlewood who was there for each horse and dream and person was Dianne. She and Gene were the proprietors. They offered and rendered services. But it was much more than that. For one thing, there was teamwork. Dianne insisted that kids encourage and help one another. At a show, for example, I saw where one person came out of a class--say, an English class, and had only one class until her next one, which was western. A flock of kids met her, someone to change bridles, another two or three switching saddles, the derby came off, the Stetson went on, chaps zipped over jods, gloves, spurs, spit and shine and off she'd go! Competitors helping each other. Maybe that wasn't easy--kids can be scrappy, but Dianne made it happen.

Of course, everybody wanted to win, but we learned how to place anywhere in the lineup with grace and pride. Every horse there for training got an honest daily workout and realistic evaluation of its talents and strengths. And they were fed right. Parents dropped their kids off at Bridlewood, secure in the knowledge that they were in a riding stable that had rules in place for their safety. But they were in a mini-society where the values of honesty, work for achievement, and well-earned success were foremost. The sportsmanship of helping, winning or losing but still having fun. These weren't just talked-about, they were lived. Kids' years at Bridlewood were formative. It was fun at Bridlewood! Fun because we were learning how to best enjoy our horses! Quality in horses and equipment were good investments because everybody grew in the climate of Bridlewood Stables. It was during the Bridlewood years that many of us knew more than just the

partnership of good horses. I knew at the time that Dianne was more than a horse training instructor, she was a friend. One of those life-long, special friends. She was that to many people.

When Dianne was in high school, when she was evaluated for future career choices, she was told she ought to be a Social Worker. I just know dozens of people could be interviewed, and dozens of stories would reveal that Dianne did, in fact, influence dozens of lives. Horses were the vehicle. Individuals' successes with their horses would enable them to pick up the pieces of their lives, or to face changes and challenges, or live through disappointments. People in need of confidence, courage, focus, or diversion found in Dianne a listening ear, an optimism, a common-sense even keel to depend on. She cared. Here was a lady who was truly a Social Worker with a barn! As years went by, and those of us with our Bridlewood Kid (or Adult) Credential all went our separate ways, and Valerie came along, and everyone's situation changed, Dianne remained a respected horse person in the Sioux Falls area. She kept track of her former students and was quick to brag on their successes.

As recently as last fall when I was stumped in the training of a pony belonging to my sister, I was again calling Dianne. She, as always, came through with sage advice. She built my confidence. She applauded our gains. She was just the one to call! Dianne seemed always to specialize in keeping the big picture in mind. The minutia of correct riding always fit into the overall look and performance. The gains with our horses brought us pride and confidence away from the stable as well. Our families and professions were the better for it.

It was during the Bridlewood Years that my heart and mind got together to form some of the most profound analogies of the ways God deals with us, based on the horse/handler relationship. Hands on the reins, and weight in the saddle, together with the horse's exquisite sensitivity and response, provided easy, familiar transitions to some of the most imponderable of the eternal verities! Dianne loved God and His ways and she chose to live that out rather than blow a horn about it. And in the midst of the sunny, hot days, or the cold snowy days at Bridlewood, there was the catalyst, the setter of the tone, the encourager, the voice of common sense, of thriftiness, of honesty and hard work. And every now and then she could be heard to shout, "AW-RIGHT!" She was our equine advisor. She was our voice of wisdom--horse or otherwise. She was a mentor to many. She is on my short list of very good friends. She is the lady we honor today.

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