



Saddlebreds and Family: A Wealth of Holiday Traditions

by Dr. Mary Jensen



The horse shows are pretty much over for the year and the holidays are upon us. What do you do with your horses for the holidays? I get those big crunchy really pretty apples that are in the grocery stores now. My horse make the coolest nicker, nicker, nicker as I cut them in to go with their oats. I hang cute little stockings and put up colored lights in the barn. At first, the colored lights were a little *snortingly* scary and the horses were acting like, “I don’t want to walk by those things”. But they each became used to the color and festivity of the decorations and the holiday music playing on the little radio in the barn.

Jingle Bells has been on the radio a lot. It is probably the most famous holiday horse song. It’s funny – some little kids’ impression of the words to songs. You know the *Marsiedotsandosie-dotes...* song? When I was little I thought it was one long nonsense phrase, sort of like Super-califragilisticexpialidocious! Mares eat oats and does eat oats... Hmmm. Here are two more examples I found:

When I was little, I thought I knew *everything* about horses. But around Christmas time, when we sang Christmas songs in school, I could never figure out what a “one horse soapin’ sleigh” was. It wasn’t until a few years later that I came to understand that the words to Jingle Bells included a “one horse open sleigh” – and also that I didn’t actually know *everything* about horses after all. (Katherine Blocksdorf from <http://horses.about.com>)

“Dashing through the snow...” Come on, sing it with me! “In a *two-horse open sleigh...*” Huh? Two? When I was a kid, those were my lyrics to “Jingle Bells.” I worried that the one horse would get lonely and have a hard time pulling that sleigh all by himself. (Christy Corp-Minamiji from www.Equimed.com/blogs/)

Music, families, horses, and holiday traditions just seem to go naturally together. Horsey holiday decorations, cards, and sparkly horse jewelry from all the catalogs and horsey websites are plentiful. I covet the gold Fine Harness horse head brooch from Churchwells. This fancy pin totally reminds me of my horse, Magic. ...Maybe someday... After I win the lottery.



Speaking of treats, right *after* Christmas is the absolute best time to buy bags of peppermints. I wait until they are marked down to 75% off. Then I go around to the stores and buy them up. You can’t wait too long though. I think other horse people also have figured that out.



Uncle Wayne Jensen

This family holiday story is dedicated to my uncle, Wayne Jensen from Elkhorn, Wisconsin. During the relatively short time I have had my American Saddlebred Horses, Uncle Wayne has

been a great and consistent source of support about every horse thing I have needed to know since I built my barn and moved Magic, Wild Blue, and Billie home. Uncle Wayne has given me tips on the best quality oats and hay, training and exercise, and just general good horse sense ideas. I don't know what I'd do without my Uncle Wayne to call.



Uncle Wayne bred and raced Standardbred harness horses. His most successful racehorse was a mare he bred, trained, and drove named Pat-Ti-Way. She was very successful in and around the Wisconsin racetracks. Pat-Ti-Way won 25 of 27 starts in the 1970s. Uncle Wayne was 90 on his birthday this year and is still going strong.

Thinking about my Uncle Wayne made me start thinking about family and how so many Saddlebred stables are run by families who work hard together every day to take care of their horses. I did a little survey to

learn about the stories and traditions that families have started with their gorgeous Saddlebred horses.



Polly Paintbrush

Many of you have met *Polly Paintbrush*, AKA Polly Holabird at horse shows around the country. If you are not familiar with Polly's whimsical, fanciful, and capricious artistic renditions of Saddlebreds, Morgans, Arabians, and Standardbred horses, check out www.pollypaintbrush.com. The artwork below, by *Polly Paintbrush* is called *The Class*.



As Polly's photos can attest, she has had a varied and colorful history with her American Saddlebred horses. Polly currently resides in Ashby, MA but grew up in Chicago and has lived in Kansas City, Missouri and Colorado, too.



*Long Tail
Artwork By
Polly Paintbrush*

Early Memories: Learning to Ride

While growing up in Chicago, Polly learned to ride Saddlebreds at Parkway Stables right across from her school. She also rode at Delaine Farm in Morton Grove. This was Polly's best friend's grandfather's brother's place! (WHEW!) Polly fell in love with and always rode Saddlebreds while she was growing up.

Polly came to own her first Saddlebred when she was in college. Even then she decorated his stall and always included him on her hand-drawn Christmas cards. (Polly should draw sets of cards for her website store!)



*Shadowdanz
Artwork By Polly
Paintbrush*

Summer vacations for Polly were always to places where she could ride. She relates that her mother was scared watching her daredevil riding antics and would just not look – and read a book when Polly took off bareback down the beaches of Michigan, or jumping cacti in Mexico! The sidesaddle picture is Polly as Godiva in a costume class.



Polly and Majestic Mountain Stonewall

Here is a picture of Polly and her National Champion, Majestic Mountain Stonewall. However, no one in her family actually got to see her show her great pleasure horse, Magic, to all of his championships!

Now Polly has Banner. He is an almost 18-year-old Saddlebred who Polly bought and trained as a two-year-old. Polly says, "I can't be a horse artist without a horse... and especially without a Saddlebred!"



Carla and Mike McIntosh

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Mike and Carla McIntosh own and operate a Saddlebred training stable in Whitestown, Indiana. They provide horse training, riding instruction, and breeding.

My middle horse, The Wild Blue, was bred and raised by Mike McIntosh and his family. Blue is gorgeous and brilliantly smart and sensible. I attribute his talent and wonderful personality to the McIntosh's. It was always a pleasure to see them at the shows where they would stop in to see Blue. Mike told me a funny story about how his daughter, Courtney, then just a little girl, came in the house one day and announced that she had just haltered Blue *all by herself* for the first time, when he was a feisty little weanling colt. *YIKES!*

Mike is one of those trainers who is such a good rider; he looks **GOOD** on a horse. (I took this picture of Mike from the stands at the Midwest Charity Show.)



Holiday Brunch Memory

Each year we host a “Holiday Brunch” as a way to thank our customers for their patronage, to celebrate our accomplishments from the previous year, and to look forward to the year ahead. Mike enjoys playing Christmas music through the speaker system at the barn, as he has quite a collection of holiday music on his iPod. We are greatly entertained as each owner rides their horse.

For the brunch, everything is made from scratch. Our nearly grown children, Courtney, James, and Travis help with the baking and cooking. Plus, Mike finds things for them to do at the barn so that all the horses are standing ready for their owners when they come to ride that day. It is a very busy day that we look forward to each year, both with dread; because of all the work involved, and excitement too, since we all enjoy it so much.

A Favorite Horse Show Memory

This is a description of one of Mike and Carla’s favorite horse show memories: One of my favorite memories is the story of a little filly we raised. Her registered name is “Wicked Sensation” but we called her “Lilly.” Mike had gaited this filly and he had already shown her a couple of places. We took her and several customer horses over to Twin Rivers in Ohio. After they got to the show, Mike was not anxious to show this filly, as she was not working well in the practice ring. He was certain it would not be good. He showed her anyway. Lilly was good, in fact she was VERY good and she won the class!!! It was one of my favorite moments. It’s always nice to get a blue ribbon with a baby you have bred and raised! Plus, we got such a nice picture of all of us after the class. In the picture, “Lilly” seemed to be giving us all a big hug. There have been so many other wonderful memories as well, but this was the first one that came to mind. “Lilly” got sold after that and we sort of lost track of her and worried a bit. The new owner/trainer had experienced challenges and did not keep her. We heard from Brian and Susan Reimer that they had bought her and were planning to breed her to their stallion. What a relief! Brian and Susan would give her a very good home!

Florence Merkin

My good friend, Florence Merkin, from Walworth, Wisconsin, has been involved with Saddlebreds and horse shows since her now grown up sons, Bob and Peter Archer, were little boys. They started out the way many families do, just by taking riding lessons at the local stable. Her sons showed horses while they were growing up and Florence did, too. The boys showed in a variety of classes and Florence has shown in both pleasure riding classes and in fine harness driving classes. The horses had a big, positive influence on the boys. After Bob grew up he went on to be a veterinarian. Pete became a successful horse trainer.



Favorite Horse Show Memories

Florence's favorite horseshow memories date back to the early years when they first started showing. Bob and Pete were both showing – often times in the same class. They traded off on winning - one time Bob won and Pete got second and the next time Pete would win. Florence said it just sort of depended on who got to ride which horse.

Their first horse was named Our Best Bourbon. Both brothers showed him. They took him to Gene Oder for training. At that time the horse was just a young three-year-old and Gene started calling him "Bones" because he was kind of skinny. Unfortunately, the name sort of stuck. The whole family has fond memories of Bones. They kept Bones for his entire life. Pete successfully

showed Bones in three and 5-gaited pleasure classes in Illinois and Iowa.



Spring Valley's Enchanted Evening was another of the horses Florence affectionately remembers. Pete won at Louisville and was Reserve Champion at the Royal with this mare.



CH Tasty Charm, AKA Charlie



Florence's favorite fine horse was Charlie (CH Tasty Charm). Pete bought Charlie at an October Tattersall's sale in 1996. Charlie was the fine harness horse that Florence showed for 10 years. Florence said one of her most fun horse show memories was when she and Pete took Charlie to the Royal in Kansas City and she got to show him in the Fine Harness class there. She kept Charlie until he died of colic just last year as a 23 year-old.

Margaretha Headley
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Margaretha Headley, her husband, Ed, and their son, Brian are my newest horse friends. I came to know Margaretha when I donated all of my driving vehicles, harness, and tailsets to the **Team American Saddlebreds** (501-c approved organization) an American Saddlebred Rescue Group that she created. Margaretha got all the paperwork for my donation organized in a very businesslike manner. If anyone else has horse equipment that is not being used, and could be donated to benefit the **Team American Saddlebreds** Rescue, you can be very confident in contacting Margaretha to handle the transaction competently and professionally.



Henry and John Paul

I got to meet Ed and Brian when they drove all the way up to Macomb, Illinois from Columbiana, Alabama to pick up the equipment I was donating. Ed and Brian are the quintessential polite southern gentlemen! They brought me a bag of the most delicious Alabama pecans from their own trees! Talk about Christmas treats! YUM! Brian and Ed loaded all the equipment onto their pick up truck in the pouring rain –all the while telling me it was sunny and 70 degrees in Alabama. I told them we were just lucky it wasn't snowing.



Early Horse Memories

When I was a little girl growing up in Chilton County, Alabama, located in the Heart of Dixie, as most older folks called it during the early years of the 1950s & 60s, the economy was not good and local people were trying very hard to survive. Many depended on mostly farming. My father opened up a local grocery business with a feed store attached. My job, as an eight year old, was to pump gas and help the farmers in the feed room.

Next door to my father's business was a horse farm with beautiful fences and a few horses. In my spare time, I would go and "hang over the fence" to give the horses treats. But then I would hear my dad calling me to come back to work and I would have to leave quickly. I asked my parents to buy me a horse as they had the acreage to accommodate that request, but I was always turned down. Therefore, my lifelong dream was to someday own a horse.



The Best Christmas Memory

Years of college and marriage put my dream on the back burner. One Christmas, at the age of 50, I decided I had waited long enough. I bought myself a horse as a Christmas gift. I purchased Fort Knox Money Maker. I tried professional training over a 2-year period, but really wanted to have my own barn. I began the process of buying land and designing my own horse farm. I built a barn with ten stalls and brought Fort Knox home. After that, I purchased some mares, did some breeding, and got involved with Saddlebred rescue. My dream of owning a horse has come true! All the stalls are full on our beautiful little hobby farm. We have ten Saddlebreds who all live happily on their farm.

Christmas Traditions

Since I own my stables, I always place a wreath on each horse's stall door and hang a large round wreath on the wall upon entering the stables. I purchase a large container of peppermints for the horses. I tune the radio in to Christmas music. Therefore; the spirit of Christmas is in the air at the barn.



Favorite Horseshow Memory

Ed and I have been to several shows here in the southeast, plus Louisville. I will have to say my favorite horse show was in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. That particular show was eight years ago, but the excitement of my horse placing 4th out of 11 participants just made me so happy. The location was great. It was just a fun show!

John Willis

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Christmas Memories

Christmas for us was like most other times. We rode our ponies everywhere all day long. Every neighbor and every family I knew had ponies. The ponies all lived in a little backyard barns.

Our favorite heroes were all horse-related: Zorro, My Friend Flicka, Fury, Mr. Ed, Bonanza, the list goes on and on. All the top show TV were about horses and we pretended we were our heroes as we rode for hours.

So here is my family's Christmas picture from the 1960's on our horse and ponies with wreaths around their necks (Mama's idea). I'm the one with the little elf ears on the left.



Favorite Horse Show Memories

As for horse shows in the deep south during the 1960s, the thing I remember the most was everything was based around being entertained and having a good time. This is my favorite picture with my mom and dad on the far right with their friends at a one night show having cocktails.

Notice Mr. Miller, the taller

gentlemen drinks his bourbon from a silver cup. The fancy silver cups and silver flasks were common at the horse show parties back then.



Horse shows were different than they are now. At the one night shows, Big Daddies would pull their big Cadillacs right up to the ring, which many times consisted of a roped off baseball diamond or football field. There was no complaining about the footing. There was no complaining to your trainer. In fact, I don't remember if there was even any complaining to your mom and dad. You just did as you were told back in those days. Like Dawn Atlas said,

"There are no little princesses in this barn". The day of the cuddling and pampering hadn't yet arrived.

The trainers were the old grumps like Seabiscuit's and in order to become one, you had to apprentice under these ungrateful old buzzards! But there were also the wonderful social aspects of it like the exhibitor's parties. All the one night shows had an exhibitor's breakfast when the show was over, usually around 11:00 o'clock at night. Many times you wouldn't get home until 3:00 o'clock in the morning. I'm sure other areas of the country were different but these are my memories from where I grew up and they are priceless.

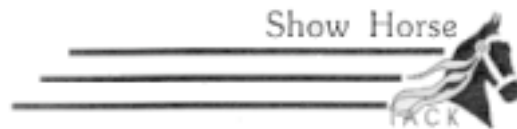
Cathy McKinley

Show Horse Tack

McKinley Training Stables

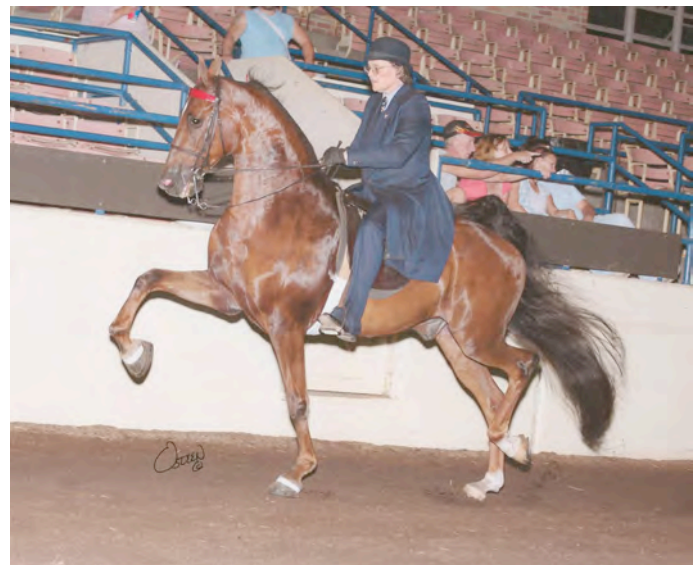
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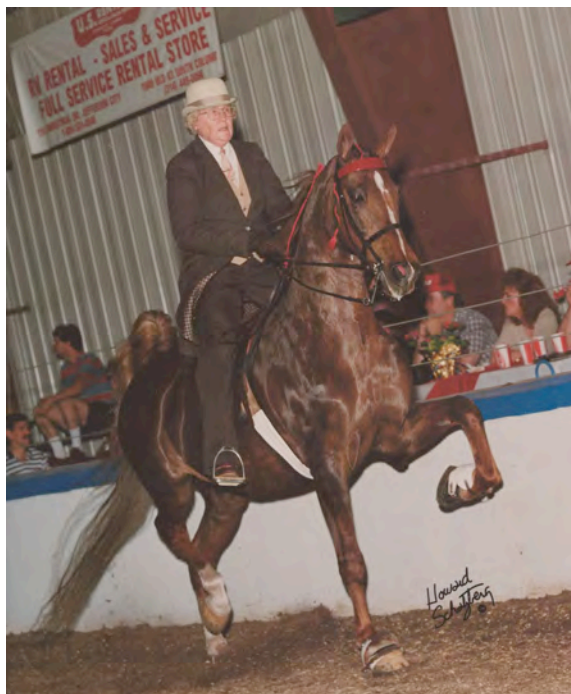


The McKinley Family consists of Cathy and her husband Marvin Huber; Cathy's father, Dan; and her mother, Joyce. Cathy and the Show Horse Tack van are always a welcome sight at the horse shows. Looking at the vast array of horse products and other goodies Cathy has in stock is always a fun pastime. Whatever you need for your horses or yourself, Cathy has it. Show Horse Tack is an enjoyable and friendly spot to stock up on equine necessities.

Horse Show Memories There are so many memories, but perhaps the best is when my mother, father and I all competed in the St. Louis Charity Horse Show with different horses and in



different classes. Each of us came out of the ring with a ribbon. Saddlebred horse shows are truly a family participation event.





Cathy's Christmas Morning Story

Nothing is more satisfying than going into the barn on Christmas morning and greeting the various Saddlebreds with a "Merry Christmas". Invariably we get a greeting back as little nickers break out all over the barn. Each horse with its unique personality and maturity gives us a communication.

Feeding time, on Christmas morning, finds just a little extra feed in the manger for each animal. Then, when all have been fed, the only sound in the barn is that of the munching from the

many stalls. Horse munching is the most contented peaceful, satisfying sound! Someone should make one of those relaxation tapes with the sounds of horse munching! All of the animals are well, warm, safe, and have no worries. That munching sound is the best Christmas morning sound there is.

Another Favorite Christmas Memory

Christmas Eve... not a chance for snow the weatherman says... another Christmas without snow... they say. Despite the weather report, a few snowflakes began falling on the way to church for Christmas Eve midnight service. What a joy! By the time church was out there where several inches on the ground; enough for a sleigh ride.

The peaceful silence of a midnight sleigh ride on Christmas Eve is truly magical. Our 5-gaited American Saddlebred was glad to oblige. The sleigh bells ringing jingled across the calm, quiet countryside. A neighbor said later that she heard the bells and was convinced that Santa was flying that night. We have had many sleigh rides since but none have been as special as that one magical Christmas Eve night.

Happy Holidays to all of you and to all of your beloved animals. Please give all your babies a special treat and remember the animals in need. Support your local rescues, shelters and humane associations during this happy holiday season.

