

# THE HORSE LIFE IS REALLY LIVING

by Suzanne Norton Jones

**"And God took a handful of southerly wind, blew his breath over it and created the horse." –Bedouin legend**

At birth each of us is given a gift or a talent. While this gift is ours, we must pass it along to others. A feel for horses was put in my bassinet, much to my mother's sorrow.

My father was an officer in the U.S. Army Cavalry, so my gift had a logical beginning. Like most officers' children, I grew up riding horses, beginning at about age 3. My father's job took us from Fort Bliss to the Philippines, and from the Cavalry National Guard in Santa Fe to the New Mexico Military Institute in Roswell. All the while, horses possessed my time and even made school bearable.

I went to college at a girls' school in Virginia that had horses. Then it was on to the University of Arizona in Tucson, where I rode with the rodeo team and a women's club called Desert Riders.

After graduating with a degree in English, it was time to pursue the world of the horse. I was involved in English and Western riding as well as dressage. I traveled to Kansas City in 1950 for the American Royal Horse Show to show jumpers and hunters. In 1951, it was off to Mexico City for training in jumping. Then I joined the international show circuit. There was winning and losing along the way. At Madison Square Garden, I won first place in jumping in the Professional Horsemanship Association Stake, which included the second largest prize of the time of \$1,000.

Defeat, sorrow, happiness, friendship, pain, hunger, tears and smiles all traveled as companions. The greatest thing of all, though, was the knowledge gained not only about the horse but also about the riders of these horses.

In 1954, I married a race-minded rancher from Tatum, Punch Jones. My marriage put the horses in the backseat. You have heard of backseat drivers? The horses were truly back-seat drivers, because they often questioned our route in life.

Next, it was a different world--a different game--introducing the horse to our four children and bringing other children and people into the horse world, as a way to build mutual understanding and trust. What a challenge! I began volunteering as a 4-H horse project leader in 1962.

In the mid-1980s, NMSU's Cooperative Extension Service was getting feedback that the 4-H program should better answer the needs of horse-oriented youth. So the 4-H Horse School was started in 1982 at the state fairgrounds in Albuquerque with just five instructors, including myself. I've been called back to teach each year since.

The weeklong school has grown to be one of the best-known in the United States. The current program not only covers horsemanship skills, but also safety, feeding, first aid, packing, horse psychology and etiquette. In 1997, there were 168 students and 13 riding instructors, using five rings from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.

The requirements for a happy, well-adjusted life are the same in the horse and human worlds. When children understand how to bring a horse to its full potential, they begin to understand the structure of society--discipline, friendship, respect, understanding, companionship and mutual trust.

The more I've taught (or led), the more I've learned about this gift that was given to me. May I give it to you? May you know what I have learned. May you feel what I have felt. May you see what I have seen.

*Editor's note: In 1992, the 4-H Horse School was renamed the Suzanne Norton Jones 4-H Horse School.*