

Pony Club has had a great influence in my life since I joined the Saskatoon Pony club in 1956. The club had been started by Nonie Mulcaster and Russ McQuarrie in about 1945. Clifford Sifton had come to Saskatoon as owner/publisher of the Star Phoenix and as a member of the Exhibition Board, he was influential in having the Livestock Pavilion built on the Exhibition grounds. He was a supporter of Pony Club, as the first Canadian Pony Club was started in Toronto at the Eglinton Hunt Club. He arranged that the new indoor arena could be the home of the first Pony Club in Western Canada.

My parents were patrons of the art community in Saskatoon and I had been introduced to Nonie as a very young art student, along with many other children who enjoyed “group” art lessons on Saturday mornings in the basement of the King George Hotel. A few years later my mother was doing a story about Nonie and the Pony Club and I went along with her. By this time I was saving my allowance for the horse of my dreams.

I still remember the magic of the smell and sound of the horses and the envy I felt for the young riders as they trotted around the ring. Within a year or so I became one of those riders although, as we all have discovered, those “dream” horses were not always as thoughtful of their little riders as we imagined they would be.

There was a saying about not becoming a rider until you had fallen off your horse 100 times. I reached that goal in my first year of riding I think and I have to confess that I felt quite discouraged for awhile at least. Russ McQuarrie was the “uncle” to us kids and in his unconventional way he encouraged us to dust ourselves off and get on the horse again. He kind of bragged about how tough we were and we somehow made it come true. I would say that few of the horses were well schooled in those years.

My first horse was Bobby Sox, a part arab mare who was inclined to spook at the bleacher end of the arena, then run down to the other end and turn quickly to leave me at the wall in a heap. I eventually got control enough to stop her and to stay aboard. I bought Bobby with my own money (125 dollars) which included her winter blanket. She had belonged to Paula O'Reilly who was also a mentor to us horse crazy kids. Board in those years was 25 dollars for a tie stall and 28 dollars a month for a box stall. It did increase over the years but was always very reasonable.

Nonie did her best to educate us in proper horsemanship but we spent lots of time being “cowboys” and playing rough and tumble games. One of these games was bareback wrestling, the goal of which was to drag one another off the horse. Bobby was quite good at this game so as long as I could hang onto her mane she would keep pulling until the opponent was freed from his or her horse. There were sometimes adults in these games and they were not for the faint of heart.

In those years we did not take part in many other activities besides our horsey pursuits. We could take the bus to the Ex so parents did not have to drive us. We spent many hours at the Pavilion and there were a good number of adults around whom we regarded as friends but also who kept an eye on us. We did have serious lessons and Nonie brought in a number of very good clinicians so we became educated as riders apart from our fun and games.

The friends whom I still treasure and keep in touch with are my old Pony Club pals. Some are still involved with horses: Valerie (Johnson) Matheson, Elaine(Russell) Partington, Robbie Pattison, and others. Janet McGregor is no longer in touch with horses but she, Valerie and I stay in close touch by phone and visits to the West Coast. John Ross and Aileen Andrew were in Pony Club in the late 50s and 60s. They and Robbie live near Delisle and are still in touch with horses.

Horses have been an enduring part of my life since those early days in the 50s. I have been involved in Pony Club for most of the years since then and have a small outdoor Pony Club at my acreage South of Saskatoon. The club is called Kingskettle which is the name of my place.

When I wasn't riding I was involved with harness horses. I travelled and trained the horses during university years as my summer job and spent a couple of years full time with the Standardbreds. They were lovely horses to work with and I enjoyed the driving part. I returned to riding when I settled again in Saskatoon.

I am fortunate to have good health (perhaps because of my horses) and to have young folks around me who share my passion for these wonderful creatures. I am still working full time but manage to ride nearly every day when work and school is over. I am looking forward to retiring soon and plan to spend more time in the saddle. One is forever learning from the horse!

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