

CAPPS OFF TO JANET LEWIS

What is a seventy-four-year-old mother of eight and grandmother of sixteen in Alva, Fla. doing with a Shetland pony? "Having the time of my life," says Janet Lewis.

"I have had horses all of my life. When I was a child, I had a grade Morgan...oh, I always just wanted a show horse so badly...I was awestruck whenever I went to shows." Lewis "competed some [with her Morgan] in English pleasure, trail...I did well but had no one really to help me. ...I had to ride to the shows" for lack of any reliable transportation. Lewis eventually married, bringing her Morgan along with her. Then the children came.

One day a farm down the road from hers in Bedford, N.H. offered her a Classic Shetland. The pony was spotted "and the breeder didn't want any spots at all so he didn't want him." Her oldest child at the time was two years old. Eventually all of Lewis' children trained on Aloysius for equitation (though "everyone said that we would never get good equitation riders setting on a pony"). Aloysius and his young rider won first time out. Lewis trained the pony and her children so well that they "hardly ever didn't win."

"Aloysius was such a small [ten-hand] pony; he was competing with much larger ponies and horses. He had a kind of rocking horse canter and I was worried he might get mowed down as the others galloped by. So I told [my children] 'Stay on the rail.' It wasn't hard to teach them leads and diagonals. By the time they were three or four they knew how to do these well."

As her children grew, they moved on to Saddle Ponies and American Saddlebreds. Many were champions in their divisions. "My children rode in places like Madison Square Garden, Louisville, and the American Royal in Kansas City and a lot of places in between...and in those days we had to do everything on a shoestring," Lewis confides.

J.J. Phillips of Cape Coral, the trainer assisting Lewis with Cappuccino, underlines Lewis' hard work and determination in working with her children. "She worked so hard for so many years and with no outside help. Her children were victorious and envied by the New England show circuit for years. They dominated a range of divisions from Pleasure Pony and 3 Gaited Saddle Pony to Junior Exhibitor 3 Gaited and

equitation. Their wins were so numerous that a trophy room was full and comparable to some of the most prestigious farms. All thanks to Janet's dedication, instruction and training."

Fast forward to 1982, when a brain tumor turned this active woman's life around. She had major surgery. The doctors' prognosis: Lewis would likely be in a wheelchair the rest of her life.

"I didn't do therapy," she confides. "We are do-it-yourselfers. At first, I couldn't walk but I could crawl around on the floor. I had a new puppy, a toy poodle. I spent hours on the floor with my puppy." The

incapacitated Lewis, always the trainer, taught her poodle to walk on a ball and to walk on her front legs. "Eventually, I was able to stumble-bumble along in my flower garden and then I would just drop to my knees. I can tell you that garden was very well weeded," Lewis deadpans.

Lewis and her husband, Jonathan, a veterinarian, had

to sell the animal hospital they had run together for many years. Little by little she pushed herself along, and, even after a relapse, through sheer will she rehabilitated herself. "I was the surgeon's number one star."

A visit to Florida in 1984 convinced Lewis' husband to relocate. "I liked Florida, but I missed the snow and the skiing so much...I would move back [to New Hampshire] in a heart beat, even now. In my family, we were all skiers. We just lived for cold weather and snow. My dad was an Olympic skier and is in the Hall of Fame. My brother, who is 72 years old, still skis every single day. He lives in Boston." Someone suggested Lewis try water skiing. "I always scoffed at water skiing." But Lewis soon found that she really enjoyed it.

One day three years ago, Lewis casually mentioned to her husband that she wanted a pony. At this point she had been without a horse for 25 years. Her husband encouraged her to find one. She called the American Shetland Pony Club, and among other information, was sent a back issue of their journal. She found an ad for a two-year-old and decided to call the owners, Anne and Garry Brumm, who owned a Shetland farm in Indiana. Seems The Brumms had pulled the pony off the market for a while after putting in the ad and had just



photo by: Washburn Photography Terri and Kirk Washburn

Janet and her Shetland, Capp

that day decided to sell the Shetland, who had caught Lewis' eye. "It seemed meant to be," says a still incredulous Lewis.

"I had never heard of a Modern Shetland... The first time I saw Cappuccino, he walked out of his stall on his hind legs. He was a bay with this gorgeous long white tail and white socks and he had such pizzazz!" Lewis was smitten.

Shetland friends cautioned that, though Cap was a great pony, he would never do better than Country Pleasure. But Lewis went on to prove them wrong. Cap did prove to be quite a handful (and still is, she admits), bucking and rearing, but Lewis was determined to take him all the way. In addition to her many past wins, she and Cappuccino won at the prestigious Shetland Congress in St. Louis last summer and have won every time out since.

When Lewis talks about Capp (her nickname for him), she bubbles over like a young girl talking about her first pony. "For those who have had horses in the past, having a pony fills that slot... Capp makes me want to jump out of bed in the morning. I love training him and even cleaning his stall." Lewis adds, "I feel like a million bucks driving him. I love the challenge of his energy.... It's like ski jumping; I get that same wonderful feeling I used to get just before takeoff."

This grandmother admits to wearing jeans with holes in them and dirty sneakers and a sweatshirt most of the time, and then, in the next breath, she talks of her love of opera. She is going to hear La Boheme. "I will wear my Capp coat, a

sequined jacket I bought for night showing....I kind of feel like I am showing off when I wear it. I feel like a matador or a queen."

What is most telling about this tough, determined lady and her rough and tumble pony are the comments of those who know and love her. Wrote Phillips after Lewis' wins at Congress last August, "During tough times you both served as a reminder that dreams do come true and no matter how hard things become, in the end hard work & persistence always pay off." Phillips' awe of this "amazing, wonderful, kind..." woman is apparent, "It has been a tremendous honor to work with... a woman of [your] stature and I hope to be half the person [you are] when I reach that point in my life."

Notes from friends echo Phillips' sentiments. "You are a great role model and inspiration," says one. "I know how hard you worked to get to this point [with Cappuccino]," says another. One humorous note says, "Congratulations! I knew that you would create a champion if he didn't kill you first!" In spite of her wins, it is tough for Lewis to accept praise. Like many very strong and vital women of her generation, Lewis waxes and wanes between sincere humility and pride in her accomplishments.

As for the future, she and Cappuccino "still have a lot of work to do. At six years old he is just coming into his own," she feels. At seventy-four, Janet Lewis is coming into her own... all over again. ■

Roorda Homes, LLC

ROORDA HOMES CAN MAKE YOUR DREAM OF A CUSTOM HOME OR BARN A REALITY...



Milt Roorda, President
Designers & Builders of Fine Homes and Barns

813.920.8166

10025 TARPON SPRINGS ROAD
ODESSA, FLORIDA 33556

WE PROUDLY OFFER:

- 20 years experience in the Tampa Bay area.
- On-site presence & supervision through every phase of construction.
- Personalized & customized design planning to meet your needs.
- A well established, professional group of subcontractors.
- Partnership with the homeowner to promote communication & flexibility from start to finish.