

a conversation with Nancy Ciesluk of Cerulean Farm, Millis, MA

Q: When did you first become interested in horses?

A: My mother rode when I was little, and I remember she started taking me with her at around age five. I was also an avid skater and dancer when I was young. At around the age of 10, my mother said I had to make a choice. Hugging a pony was easier than hugging a pair of skates, so riding won out.

Q: What were some highlights of your Junior career?

A: I am very grateful for the wonderful instruction I received from the likes of George Morris, Victor Hugo-Vidal and Sonny Brooks, but I really have to give my first teacher, Bill Begg, the credit for my love of horses, riding and competing. Debbie Hoyt-Banfield, Mitch Steege and Karen Stives were some of my barn mates who have since gone on to great success. I owned some fabulous ponies and horses as well as having the opportunity to catch ride for many other people. I think my favorite wins were at Madison Square Garden and winning the PHA high score award three years consecutively. That was a thrill!

Q: At what point did you realize that training and teaching would become your lifelong career?

A: At the end of my junior years, I continued showing for different clients. It wasn't until a friend of the family called and asked me to help twin boys with their Shetland ponies that I found my love of teaching children. Frankly, I think he said "If you don't get there soon, I think someone is going to get hurt, and I don't think it will be the ponies." The word got around that I was teaching and pretty soon I had quite a few students. I loved freelancing but it was apparent that I needed my own place, and I was lucky enough to have family members that were willing to help me get a mortgage. That was in 1978, when I purchased what is now Cerulean Farm.

Q: Tell me a little bit about the name.

A: Actually, my mom helped me name the farm by remembering a childhood anecdote. When I was little, I used to love to spend hours drawing and coloring. My favorite crayon color was "Cerulean Blue." I apparently told my mom that when I grew up, if I ever had a horse farm, I would name it Cerulean Farm.

Q: What would you say Cerulean is best known for?

A: Well, in its heyday the farm was host to 12 horse shows a year. The Medal and Maclay was very popular back then, with sometimes 35-40 in a class. I had a lot of kids qualify along with other big barns. I also had some phenomenal ponies that won at the fall indoor shows as well as pony finals. Some of the young trainers in the area rode here at Cerulean, including Krissana Onorato, Kristen Bumpus, the Clemmy Twins, Kate Rice, and Melissa Duven (now training in Arizona). I also have been blessed with some talented horses that we've brought along and sold.

Q: Did you have a favorite horse during that time?

A: One of the most memorable and talented young hunters that I raised and owned jointly with Mrs. Colin M. Cunningham (a most revered patron of mine) was "Rule the Blues," a.k.a. "Spanky."

Q: Why was "Spanky" so special?

A: He was incredibly talented. He was the circuit champion at Wellington four years in a row, as well as all the major horse shows on the East Coast, including Madison Square Garden. He was successfully shown by such great riders as Leslie Lenehan Howard, Brian Lenehan and Nicole Shahinian-Simpson. After such an outstanding career, he has earned a special place in my heart! He is retired now in Southern Pines, N.C., with Cheryl Davis, who has beautifully cared for him since he was four.

Q: At what point did you scale down the operation?

A: In the mid-'80s my show schedule was grueling. As a single parent, that all-consuming schedule was not conducive to raising a teenager. I made the decision to scale back in order to spend more time with my son. I focused more on the younger horses, including the babies I had raised.

Q: When did you leave the horse business?

A: In 1994, after the Florida circuit, I decided to lease my farm and pursue other interests. I did some rewarding volunteer work, continued to care for the farm and had time to play bridge, a great love of mine. I did this for the next 12 years. Every year I would go to Wellington to visit close friends in the horse business, one of which was Tom Wright, the head trainer of All Seasons Farm, owned by the Craig Lindner family of Cincinnati, Ohio. He begged me to come to their barn in Wellington and see a new young horse. I finally conceded. At that point he promptly put me in his golf cart and took me to the hunter ring. I was privileged to sit next to Tom for the next three winter circuits indoors and some of the best outdoor shows. I'll be forever grateful to Tom and his kindness for reminding me how much I had missed the horses and training.

Q: Then what?

A: Last year as it happened Cory Lindner, the Lindners' oldest daughter, who was living in Boston, mentioned that she would love to get back to riding if I were to open up my barn. I thought, "Why not?" and I opened it up to a limited number of committed riders.

Q: What would you say are some important lessons you've learned from the horse business?

A: I've been really blessed. I think it was the time away that really gave me the best perspective. I realized how



fortunate I was to have been a part of it and all the opportunities it afforded me. I was able to give my son a great education, own and live on a beautiful farm, travel, and meet some wonderful people. I think the most important lesson I've taken from it is...I can do anything, and the sky's the limit!

Q: Looking back, is there something that you are especially proud of?

A: With Mason Phelps and others we conceived the New England Equitation Championships. The event began as a single class at one of Mason's horse shows and has grown to be a premier event that we are very proud of.

Q: What do you see as the future of Cerulean Farm?

A: I'd love the opportunity to continue to teach a small group of students. Anyone who knows me knows I'm old school; I really believe in giving my students a solid foundation and enjoy teaching students of all levels. I'm really blessed to have students who are interested in being excellent horsemen as well as successful riders. I'm very proud of one of my current students, Samantha Greenbaum, who has shown exceptional dedication and hard work. As a result, she won ribbons in all the local adult finals this past fall! I will most likely continue to lease out part of the farm to area trainers as well. In this second go-round, at the end of the day I'm fortunate to have a fabulous facility, and hope to continue operating for many years to come!

CERULEAN FARM
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