

I Remember Doris

BY RENEE M. PAGE



Left to right: Doris Ryan with Mark Bodnar; Kathy Firch & Doris; Doris with Thunderbay in Oklahoma.

How does one write about someone who has been a part of your life for half a century? I remember... Yes, so many wonderful memories and experiences come to mind. One always believes those we care for will forever be with us and in a way I suppose they are as they are ever present in the corners of our mind long after departing this world. If you are thinking I am having a difficult time with this you are correct.

Doris Jane Ryan passed from this world on December 7, 2009 just one day before her eighty-eighth birthday. I was shocked when I received the call that morning. She was in such good spirits and seemed so well just a few months prior when she attended the Jubilee. Suddenly she is gone.

I remember my first meeting with Mrs. Ryan. That was also the day I met her mother. Mrs. Greenwalt was very warm and easy to get to know. My family and I along with Neal and Pat Werts attended a MVMHC meeting in Ill. Mrs. Greenwalt was also attending and invited us to visit their Highview Farm that day. After seeing the horses, Mrs. Greenwalt suggested we could go on up to her daughter's farm which as she pointed out was "just down the road." Well, fifty or so miles later we arrived at Irish Lane. Doris was most cordial, but I found her somewhat intimidating. To that end I called her Mrs. Ryan for quite awhile. Some time later she just said, "You know you can call me Doris." I was adopted that very day.

Her mother had become my "adopted Grandmother" in a very short time. I spent many weekends in Springfield soaking up all the Morgan knowledge she could impart. She encouraged me to travel with Doris who was an AMHA Director. Those were wonderful adventures. I met so many prominent individuals from coast to coast. I believe I must hold the record for attending the most judging seminars as I accompanied Doris to 30 of those early ones. Doris gave the impression to most as a no nonsense school teacher, but when she let her hair down she could party with the best. Yes, those were fun times.

Life at Irish Lane was never dull. You went to bed when before the sun set and you were up at dawn. I remember spending one weekend watching Doris work horses. She was jogging one of these on that particular day and having a great go. Her mom as usual shook the plastic to air up the harness horse. He bounced and flagged his tail in fine fashion. Then Doris stopped right in front of me, got out of the cart and handed me the lines and said get in. One did not argue with Doris. It was an experience never to be forgotten driving Beamington that day.

Doris Ryan was born into a family rich with tradition and noted for their outstanding Morgan horses. She had the opportunity few children ever dream of- to know J.C. Brunk as grandfather and Helen Brunk Greenwalt as mother. Just as her Grandfather and Mother before her, she inherited the incurable addiction for the Morgan Horse as well as the thrill of competition that the show ring offers. Doris was just seven years old when she made her show ring debut riding her pony. She and her cousin spent the entire time talking as they trotted around the ring. Future years would see a much more serious Doris when competing.

What a wonderful youth she must have had. Just think of all the grand Morgan Horses that played a part in her life. Flyhawk had a special place in her heart. She cherished Jubilee Joy. What fun she had those summers in Wyoming at the LU. And what wonderful stories she related.

She graduated from High School then went on to MacMurray College where she majored in Biology and minored in Physical Education receiving her degree in 1943.

She met Ed Ryan through their horse related interests and they were married in 1948. At this time she took a teaching position in Delavan. Teaching required a great deal of her time, however she and Ed continued to train horses for her parents and began taking a few client horses. They began breeding their own Morgan Horses using the Irish prefix in 1957.



Ed & Doris Ryan

That same year they headed east to Northampton with a string of horses. One single class lives on in infamy when she rode Stuart Hazard's Brown Falcon to perfection to win the Junior Park Saddle Championship over John Lydon and Waseeka's Nocturne.

Doris and Ed returned to Northampton to win again with Irish Breeze in 1964 and 1965.

Doris was a strong competitor. She could out ride just about anyone and she certainly could drive with the best. Proof positive of

this can be recalled as she drove Beamington to win the First World Park Harness Championship in 1973 in a class of twenty over the likes of Bob Whitney, Percy Lock, and Joe Parker,

Throughout her lifetime Doris remained dedicated to her teaching career or perhaps to the students she influenced. She and Ed had no children of their own, but young people always played an important part in their lives. One could always find young people at Irish Lane listening, learning and soaking up all the knowledge the atmosphere offered. I was fortunate to be one of these along with Ron Canopy, Mike Goebig, Art Perry, Terry Jones Brennan, Tami Lankenau Johnson, Judy Nason, Helen Anderson, Carolyn Winslow, Allen Rutledge, Annette Cisco, Eric VanNaken, Kathy Minder, Dan Ramsour, Jerry Watkins and Eugene Mura. We were all adopted by Doris Ryan.

Doris was also one of the Morgan breed's most respected judges. She judged the Grand National on four occasions. She served on the AMHA Judge's Standard's Committee and helped set the current Judge's Standards. She was AMHA Woman of the Year in 1974. She was inducted to the AMHA Hall of Fame in 1997.

Sadly the Irish Lane stock was dispersed in 1987, but in retirement Doris kept a watchful eye on the Morgan world and all of her adopted kids and delighted in their success.

Doris Ryan's life was rich and rewarded by the wonderful Morgan family and friends she was blessed to know throughout her time on this earth. And we who were privileged to know her are richer for it. She will be missed. □