

## **Parents as Trainers**

by Jodi Fortier, Equine Journal

It is one thing to teach your child to throw a ball or ride a bike. It's another phenomenon all together to bring your child to the top in the world of riding. It's not just about teaching them to sit well in the saddle or keep their heels down or balance their horse, it's a lifetime of teaching them about compassion, patience, discipline, devotion, and disappointment along with developing a work ethic to carry with them for life. Most of life's skills can be learned in riding a horse and for the trainer whose child develops a serious passion for riding, what a blessing. It is a wonderful gift to pass on to your child, a gift of time well spent together developing a life long love.

There are difficulties in training your own child as you often wonder, "Am I pushing too hard? Am I too forgiving of my own? Do I obviously favor and give more attention to my child, than the customer? Are we providing a well balanced life?" Days in the barn can be endless, with weekends spent going from horse show to horse show. Riders face the challenge of getting school work done, having time for friends and just having normal family time together.

Not all of the children in the family may be interested in riding, so how do you manage getting one to soccer, one to ballet and still provide quality training for the one who rides? It's a balancing act that some manage to do so well. For others, the stress and pressure of the business may turn the child away from riding. For the trainer who works from their home, the strain on family life can be even more disconcerting. It's not like the pair of skis or the soccer ball that you can put in the closet at the close of the season, it's constant care, constant attention and year round responsibility with horses.

**Saddle Rowe in Medway, Massachusetts** is a farm that balances it all too well. Four generations of horseman have left hoof prints there. The farm was the original family homestead for Joe Lombard growing up. Joe met his wife June out on a trail ride one day and the two horsemen married and raised six children at their Bellingham home. In 1971 Joe, his wife and their four boys and two girls and the family horses, settled back in the old homestead in Medfield and as a family, began to develop the Saddle Rowe as we know it today.

The two girls, Cyndy and Tina really took to the saddle. Joe and his wife were very involved with the hunt club and the girls did pony club and local shows. As the business grew and Joe became more involved with teaching, judging and giving clinics.

The girls began training with Melody Taylor-Scott who worked on the farm and took them to rated shows. Cyndy loved growing up with her parents as trainers and felt very fortunate to be born into a family who shared the same passion, but having another trainer was special too, as it made her feel like all the other kids. "I didn't take the constructive criticism so personally. When your parent is telling you about your mistakes it's easier to get defensive because you feel comfortable with having an opinion and speaking your thoughts." Says Cyndy.

This insight has helped Cyndy to understand her own daughter's situation. Her hope is to be sensitive enough to make the right decision to train or not train her own daughter.

Olivia Vandemeer is a fourth generation rider of Saddle Rowe and Cyndy and Frake Vandemeer's successful 11 year old daughter. Cyndy met Frake, another horseman, married and took over the family business with sister Tina in 1995. Together, this first rate team of family trainers continued to develop a quality training facility while inspiring another generation of horsemen. While Cyndy and Frake are often on the road at shows, Tina holds down the lesson program at home while her own young daughter takes priority. "Not only are Cyndy and Tina great partners, they are great friends too." Says Dad.

Cyndy admits that separating family life from business is tough, "but it is an absolute priority! My family needs to spend quality time away from the business in order to enjoy it. We all need to refuel, relax and enjoy other aspects of life so we can give 100%." Cyndy feels fortunate that her husband is from Europe and encourages time traveling abroad and doing things other than horses. "Our customers have another way of life and it's important that we do too."

It is difficult being both parent and trainer. "At most shows, Frake is the trainer and I am the "Show mom". After all, Olivia doesn't need two trainers, but she does need a parent. I sit in the stands, try to keep my mouth shut and just enjoy watching my daughter ride." says Cyndy.

When Cyndy does train Olivia, she admits it can be difficult. "I'm very competitive and so is she. When she is competing, I treat her like any other student. I'm serious, intense and expect her to give 100%." Cyndy expects a lot from Olivia because she knows what she is capable of. Some difficulty can arise when Olivia has made mistakes and has a hard time taking the criticism from Mom. Like many children, Olivia can feel like she has let her parents down. There is a lot of pressure put on the child of a trainer but Cyndy realizes "She is just an 11 year old kid trying to do her best, so I have to remind myself to keep it positive and fun for her".

Olivia get's critiqued just like every other student at the show and Cyndy tries to show no favoritism toward her daughter. Olivia is a talented rider and Cyndy is sensitive to the needs and thoughts of her customers. "My daughter will always come first in my life no matter what I'm doing, but in coaching she is treated the same and it never interferes with my ability to do my job."

Being the trainer's child is never easy, but Olivia is friendly and outgoing and works in well with the customers as well as outside competitors. "She is supportive and helpful all the time and I am so grateful for this." Says trainer mom.

"For now, Frake and I enjoy coaching our daughter and hope to do so as long as it works. When she asks to ride with another trainer or we feel she would benefit more from being under someone else's instruction, then we will ask a fellow trainer to "Take the Reins". Oliva, Cyndy and Frake are happy just to spend quality time together as a family.