

Hey Neighbor



For The Love Of Horses

By Frank J. Buchman

Horse Love And Knowledge Passed On By State 4-H Winner

While it may have taken longer than she might have liked to get her own first horse, this year's state 4-H horse project winner has relished ownership and is anxiously passing that enthusiasm to others with an equine interest.

"My aunt promised me a horse when I was very young, and I never did let her forget it. She thought and hoped I would, but I didn't. I always wanted a horse," insists Samantha Belsan of Topeka.

Desire and persistency paid off when Sam, as the now 17-year-old horse-woman is referred to by family and friends, got her first horse, a Paint named Angel, when she was in the seventh grade.

"Angel was already 19 years old and the perfect horse to start with. I showed her mostly in showmanship, pleasure and trail at local shows," Sam reflects. "Angel has been passed down to my sister, Cierra, 12, and my brother Ryan, 8, and they

still compete in every class, despite her age."

Sam's second horse, a 23-year-old gelding called Red, was given to the family by an uncle shortly after they acquired Angel, and he proved to be a top starter-mount as well. "Red was more of a speed horse, but he was kid-broke and a lot of fun. It was a heartbreaker, especially bad for my brother, when Red died a couple of years ago," Sam remembers.

Her love for horses was so contagious that within a short time all family members including dad and mom, Pat and Lisa Belsan, developed a strong affection for horses and related activities. "We have nine horses now," Sam notes. "We're all involved in participating and helping with horse shows and events, but the best family time with our horses is going on trail rides."

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I attend Kansas State University. "I intend to major in veterinary science with an emphasis on equine physical therapy," she indicates. "I will have a couple of horses stabled at Manhattan so I can ride, and I'm going to try out for both the equestrian and horse judging teams."

Sam's interest in physical therapy was initiated when her Angel suffered a hyperextension, and she was involved in many months of water therapy. "I also studied medications at National Youth Leadership Forum in Phoenix and became even more interested in the subject," Sam verifies.

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panied by constant effort, have paid off. Sam, who's graduated to younger horses of her own and developed winners. "My main show horse now is Tee, who was just green-broke when I got him, but he's making a top horse in both English and Western competition," she credits.

It hasn't been an easy road though, as Sam readily recalls when Tee refused two jumps in state fair competition. "I sure was a little upset with my favorite horse, especially since my grandparents had flown in from Arizona to watch me," she reveals. "I was very disappointed, but I realized there would be another day. We worked even harder after that."

This has been an especially exciting year for Sam as she's training a two-year-old Paint called Riot for snaffle bit competition at the state fair. "I got him as a yearling, and he's been

doing well. He has now figured out which are the left and right leads," she acknowledges.

A two-year-old mare is also owned, with even greater expectations. "I've only ridden her a couple of times, but I intend to make her into a reining horse," Sam states.

Originally participating in open and circuit competitions, Sam's abilities with her mounts have taken her to the state fair 4-H show, where they'll be again this September. "I placed in a couple of events the past two years, but this year I'll be competing in eight classes, including the snaffle bit competition," Sam relates. She's also placed high in several classes in the 4-H horse show at the American Royal.

As excited as she is about her own horse achievements, Sam is perhaps more enthused about her work with others, teaching them about horses. "I've helped

with the horse portion Shawnee County Parks & Recreation's four summer camps each of the past three years," she confirms. "I've taught about horse care, handling, safety, saddling and riding."

"It really is heartwarming to see how some of these seven to 12-year-old youngsters become interested and attached to horses," Sam continues. "One boy named Chris really became my little buddy and wanted to help in any way possible, so he could be around and ride the horses more. Chris really liked Angel, who is a black and white; he called her the cow."

Horseless horse projects are included in the 4-H program, and Sam has become quite involved, providing horses and educating those not fortunate enough to have their own horse. "These 4-H members have such a strong desire to work with and show horses, too,"

Sam declares. "One boy named Grant has been so dedicated that he's won a couple of purples showing Angel. It was a big thrill for him when he got to ride Tee at a lope."

Further expanding horse knowledge to the public, Sam has given many talks on the subject, not only to 4-H groups, but to special public library programs and annual Farm To You events for second graders. "So many children don't have any idea what it's like to have to care for an animal. One child even thought a cow was a pig," she remarks.

Horse evaluation competitions have been an educational and entertaining part of Sam's horse project work as well. "I really like judging," she admits. "Our team was fifth in the state and competed at the American Quarter Horse Youth World contest in Fort Worth, where I was 10th in performance." Sam placed ninth individually at the state event this year and was high individual in her district FFA competition.

Border collies have always been an important part of Sam's work, and she's collected awards on many

fronts. "One of the areas I've really enjoyed is the agility division, and I've even trained one of my dogs to do a musical freestyle program. One of my objectives with my horses is to do freestyle reining," Sam inserts.

Serving many leadership roles in her Shawnee Riders 4-H Club, the Shawnee County 4-H Horse Club and dog groups, Sam is also president of her FFA chapter. "I am keeping records on my horses as part of my vocational agriculture classes too, and will apply for FFA horse proficiency

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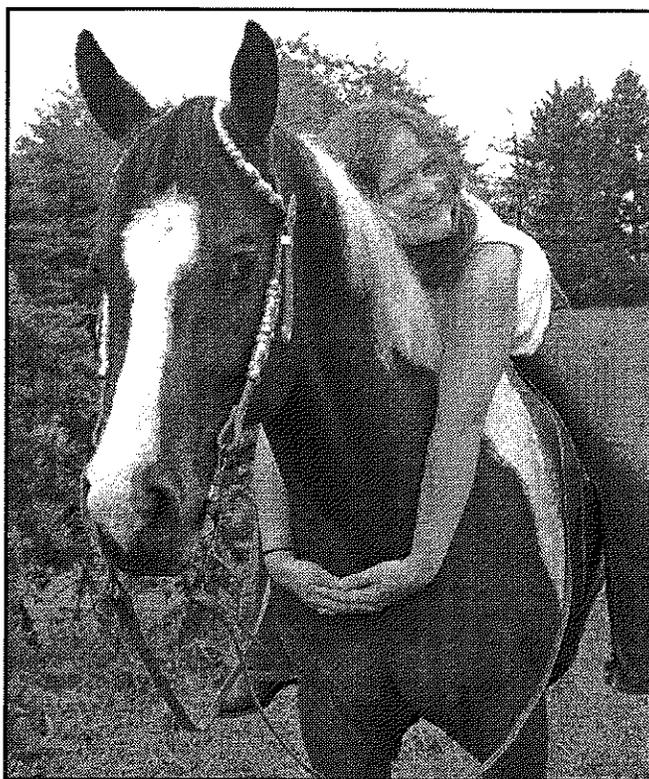
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For her state 4-H award, Sam will attend the National 4-H Congress in Atlanta, Georgia. "I am very excited about the trip and appreciate all of the sponsorship I've received from horse, Extension and 4-H groups," she applauds.



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