

Biography

November 17th, 2008

Desiree Smith-Johnson

Desiree Smith-Johnson was born in Redwood City, California in 1960 and reared in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia.

Desiree began her riding career at age six and by age eight was a member of the Loudoun Pony Club and then the Blue Ridge Hunt Pony Club. Desiree's family were members of the Blue Ridge Hunt and she rode to hounds with her mother, Dorothy, every Saturday. Twice, on Junior Hunt Day, she was honored to be Junior Master of Fox Hounds. She also rode to hounds side saddle and competed in the International Horse Show in Washington D.C. in the side saddle class at age 10.

Outgrowing ponies and interested in Combined Training competition, Desiree appropriated Foxie, her mother's field hunter, an Anglo-Morgan. Dorothy had trained Foxie from the age of four in jumping and he had been her field hunter and completed two 100-mile endurance rides in addition to dressage lessons at the Potomac Horse Center in Maryland.

Having successfully competed in the lower levels, Desiree began Preliminary level horse trials at 14, the minimum age. Dorothy coached Foxie and Desiree through their first Junior International competition on the Area II team at the Preliminary level. The pair caught the eye of a prominent member of Virginia's horse society and one of the founders of eventing in America, Alexander McKay-Smith, also a member of the Blue Ridge Hunt. When it was learned that the U.S. was to host the World Championship Three Day Event in 1978, he suggested that she work with Jim Wofford and prepare herself and Foxie for the selection trials for that event. His encouragement and belief in their talent was

crucial.

Desiree spent the next four years as a working student at Jim Wofford's farm in Upperville, Virginia. Jim coached them for her Intermediate Level at 16 and Advanced Level at 18. Desiree and Foxie attended two training camps with Jack LeGoff at team headquarters in Massachusetts.

Desiree and Foxie competed in all five selection trials carrying up to 50 pounds of lead weight to achieve the 165 pound weight requirement. Jim encouraged Desiree to 'slam' milk shakes to tilt the ratio away from 'dead' weight. She and Foxie won a spot to represent the U.S. as an Individual. In the 1978 World Championships at the Kentucky Horse Park in Lexington, she rode an eager Foxie in a well controlled dressage test. On cross country day they jumped clean to the second element of the Serpent, fences 24, 25 and 26, in the final quarter of the course. Foxie had never in his career been a quitter. When he put his chest to, and head over the second element, Desiree, realizing that he was exhausted beyond his bravery and ability to go forward, withdrew.

After the World Championship Desiree galloped race horses for two seasons in Middleburg, Virginia, and Aiken, South Carolina. She then taught Combined Training at the International Horse Center in Alpheratta, Georgia. In the fall of 1982 Desiree moved to California, where she became an Instructor at the Los Angeles Equestrian Center and was an Instructor for the Piute Mountain Combined Training Team, Monte-Nido Pony Club in Malibu, CA, and was the resident Combined Training Coach at the Paddock Riding Club in Los Angeles, CA.

Desiree applied the discipline and competitive spirit cultivated during her young riding career to all aspects of her life over the following 15 years spanning modeling, membership in the Screen Actors Guild, Japanese and Korean styles of Karate where she excelled in Forms Competitions, and even competitive billiards. Desiree received her Paralegal Certification in 1988, and was very successful working in the corporate world from 1990 to 2000 in Southern California.

In 2002 Desiree married, moved to Kennewick, Washington, purchased horse property and Thoroughbred - Warmblood crosses, and resumed her lifelong passion, Combined Training. For the last 5 years Desiree has been training her young horses, teaching, and taking clinics with Jim Wofford, Don Sachey, Peter Gray, Mogie Bearden-Muller and training with Pat Kabasa in Classical Dressage. Recently, much to Desiree's advantage and delight, her mother moved to Kennewick and is again working with her daughter. Only 20 minutes from the new Cross Country Facility at Tulipsprings Farm in Kennewick, Desiree now trains out of her home facility, Hawk Hover Farm. She currently has three mounts in training/competition and is looking forward to the 2009 season.

Desiree is currently promoting weekend clinic instruction locally and out of town. For information please contact her directly.

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Gypsy gold does not chink and glitter. It gleams in the sun and neighs in the dark.

- Saying of the Gladdagh Gypsies of Galway