



When did your passion for horses begin? My mother says I began asking for a horse from the moment I could talk. At the time we lived in a sixth floor downtown apartment in Washington DC, and she doesn't think I'd ever seen one. But I wanted a pony from as far back as I can recall.

What got you started in dressage?

I've done about everything there is to do with horses: western, trail riding, barrel racing, reining and cutting. I even worked on a large commercial farm for a while and learned to work cattle while riding herd on them in unfenced Mississippi River bottom lands. It was enough to convince me that indoor jobs are to be desired! In my teens, I got a taste for jumping. But, having my bra ripped off a couple times by that pesky saddle horn convinced me to try riding English. I never looked back. I'd read ANYTHING I could get my hands on about horses, so I've known about classical dressage (a la Spanish Riding School) for about as long as I have known about horses. I've come to love dressage for its own sake. The meditative intensity of concentrated schooling is very seductive.

Horse(s) you currently own/train: I've been fortunate to have owned a number of nice horses. However, 21 years ago, when my oldest child was two years old, I found that I couldn't afford horses AND children, so the horses had to go. (The state frowns on selling your children.) I did without horses for years. In 2002, after leasing several mounts, and buying a schoolmaster for my daughter, I was offered the chance to ride *Norad*, a seven year old, off-the-track, Thoroughbred. Although he was an athletic and talented jumper, he was green, spooked easily, and had no brakes. The first time I rode him it took three people to get me on and all I could do to keep him calm. It was not a very auspicious beginning, but I didn't have anything else to ride unless I stole my daughter's horse, so I kept trying. Mostly we just skittered sideways across the arena. But something special was happening, because after a couple months, my husband John started to say "You should buy that horse." He doesn't know much about horses, but he knew I was a much happier person every time I came back from fooling with "that horse". *Norad's* sale price had been reduced to where I could swing it, and the rest, as they say, is history. I spent the better part of a year concentrating on rehab ground work. He turned eleven this year, and Tori McEwen, a 15 year old, braver jumper than this old lady took him on his first outing. I like to think that



KDA Member Profile

Annie Skaggs

four years of patient ground work and dressage are the foundation that has made *Norad* a balanced, relaxed hunter.

Riding achievements of which you are proud:

Of all the things I have done in my life, I have to say changing *Norad* from a strung out, scaredy-cat to the "normal horse" he is now is my finest achievement. Even if we never win much at shows, I'll be satisfied that I've helped him gain the confidence to go places and perform without falling apart. He seems to be happy with his life.

Tell about your best riding memory:

My best memories are of carefree summer trail rides from 1972 to 1982 when I went on the *Nine Day*, an organized trail ride held in the Shawnee National Forest in southern Illinois. Every August my

friends and I would haul our horses and tents into the woods and set up camp. We'd ride all day, then tie our tired horses to trees at night before climbing into somebody's pickup for the 15 mile trip to Golconda for a \$1 shower at the Riverview Mansion Hotel. Sporting clean jeans and a splash of "foo-foo water" (perfume) we'd head back to camp to dance into the night. The next morning, we'd be up at dawn, ready to hit the trail again. If it stormed and we couldn't ride, we'd all jam into somebody's tent to play poker and mix up margaritas. Do you know how many extension cords it takes to cross a 15 acre pasture to plug in the blender? I don't either, but it was a lot!

Riding goals:

My goals are two-fold. First, I want to help *Norad* be as steady and relaxed on the cross country course as he is in the stadium. We do "cross-country dressage", meaning we do flat work on the cross country course, and when it is going REALLY well, then I let him hop over a few small jumps. It is a work in progress, because he still gets anxious outside the security of an arena. My second goal is for Tori to ride him at the KY National H/J Show at the Horse Park in September. Long term, I'd like to move up to First level at Snowbird next winter.

One of the things I love most about riding is that it is a lifelong growth process. At 46, I feel that I am just really coming into my own as a dedicated beginner, and *Norad* likewise is really just reaching the point at which real training can begin. I hope now we can really begin to explore our limits for concentration and cooperation. My personal growth point this year will be learning to push him and not get scared and to back off when he gets frustrated. He's ready, even if he thinks he's not. My job is to show him that.