

# COWGIRLS

# *Dream*

by KC Reynolds



Over the years, whether in performance or halter, the horse show world has been pretty much dominated by male trainers. There are a handful of female professionals who come to mind, but the vast majority is found in the performance disciplines rather than halter. However, Kathy Smallwood's name is often in the top names on the list of prominent halter horse trainers and exhibitors, regardless of gender.

AQHA Professional Horseman and World Champion breeder, trainer and exhibitor Kathy Smallwood and her husband and amateur exhibitor, Lonn, make their home in Pilot Point, Texas, north of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex and in the heart of what many people consider to be 'Horse Country USA'. Kathy's breeding, training, showing and sales program has produced multiple World and Reserve World Champions in AQHA, APHA, PHBA, and ABRA, as well as Congress winners and Grand Champion horses at all the major stock shows, including the Dixie Nationals. Her journey from a horse-crazy Midwest girl to one of the top halter horse trainers and exhibitors in the industry - male or female - is a tribute to her dedication and perseverance towards that goal.

Kathy was born and raised in Minnesota. She has lived in the Pilot Point, Texas area since 1991. Her father, Ken Wentzell, raised and bred Quarter Horses and brought some of the first registered Quarter Horses into that part of the country. Kathy grew up through the 4-H ranks, and was her dad's shadow as he went to horse sales and shows all over the upper Midwest. Kathy says she owes a lot of her current success to things she learned with her dad, and only wishes he were still alive to enjoy it with her.





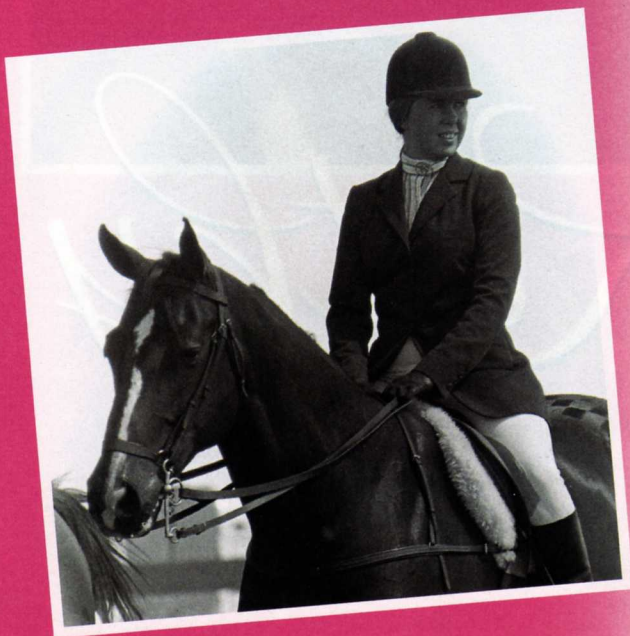


# Kathy SMALLWOOD



## KATHY SMALLWOOD

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"My first AQHA horse was a mare that my father purchased from former AQHA President Roy Parks. She was named after Mr. Parks' wife, Jo Jo, so her name was Jo Jo Parks." Kathy adds, "My father bought her in Texas and brought her home to Minnesota – that was very unusual back then to go that far to buy a horse."

Jo Jo Parks had 10 foals, including the gelding Wimpy Bar Jo, and Kathy had a successful career showing him in the amateur division from 1969 to 1979. With him, she won the High Point Hunt Seat Gelding in the Nation, was second in Pleasure Driving and third in Amateur Western Pleasure.

Kathy left Minnesota to attend Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri, and while there she became a self-described 'lesson junkie'. "The school there had a horse program, but not for western stock-type horses. I learned traditional, true AHSA methods of riding – jumping, dressage, even five-gaited!" Kathy kept up her desire to become a good, well-rounded rider and continued her lessons after she moved to Colorado, where she studied under a former German Olympic dressage rider. The lessons learned during this period served her well when she began her career in amateur performance classes. "This was back in the days when you were just starting to see Quarter Horses shown in hunt seat," observed Kathy. After her training in traditional European hunt seat disciplines, riding a shorter, heavy-muscled, stock-type horse was quite different from the Thoroughbreds and Saddlebreds she took her lessons on, but she experienced much success with her home-bred gelding.

Kathy's appreciation for the balance of a good horse and the eye to envision the finished champion out of a rough prospect comes from her trained artist's eye along with her life-long exposure to all kinds of horses. Kathy graduated from Colorado State University with a degree in Art and also taught Art while she was showing her gelding in amateur, but she gave it up when she turned professional in 1979. "I enjoy working in pencil and charcoal, oils and also pottery." Kathy even thought she might get back into her artwork as a way to focus on something



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away from the horse world, and went as far as to invest in a board and art supplies. She laughs as she admits the items are still sitting, unused, in her house.

While she was still showing Wimpy Bar Jo in amateur classes and teaching art at LeSueur, Minnesota, Kathy was approached by Mary Ann Parris who trained for the Rounds family's MBJ Quarter Horses in Kansas. MBJ not only owned Mr. Impressive, but the Rounds' children, Jonathan and Missy, were competitive exhibitors in AQHA Youth Performance classes in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Kathy sold her beloved gelding and began her professional horse career.

For several years, Kathy trained performance horses and hauled youth and amateur exhibitors to many wins, including the Congress, in pleasure, showmanship and hunt seat. Eventually, however, she began to focus on the halter horses, and began training exclusively for the halter events around 1997.

Kathy never showed under the tutelage of a trainer in her early years showing Quarter Horses. "I don't know why, but I always had a phobia about calling or asking for any pointers or assistance. For years, I was too intimidated by the big professionals to ask for help. Instead, I would go to the Congress and World Show and watch every detail of everything the successful trainers did. I would then go home and try to implement the various things I had observed. Some things worked and some didn't. I would sit on the rail or in the arena and watch, learning by osmosis. I wish I would have known then how approachable these professionals really are – I just thought they wouldn't have the time or interest in answering my questions. My advice for anyone starting out now is to realize that trainers and judges are willing to help and give advice, and these kids shouldn't be afraid to approach them." Kathy recalls watching Tommy Manion, who dominated the halter and performance show ring in the 1970s, and Jerry and Marty Johnson Stanford, two trainers who were big influences in the success of The Investor/Zippo bred horses in the early years. "Jerry and Marty gave a clinic at the Congress one year that probably helped me the most with my pleasure horses," Kathy recalls. "Alan Rieke helped me with Wimpy Bar Jo, and taught me a lot about hunt seat and how to position myself in the ring. He is a master at that and a perfectionist about preparing a horse for a show."

Kathy notes, "Denny Hassett probably doesn't know this, but he was a big influence on my learning about getting a halter horse ready for the big shows. Thanks, Denny!" Kathy admires Carol Harris of Florida, renowned horsewoman, judge, exhibitor and probably most universally known as *Rugged Lark's 'mom'*. "Carol is all about what is good for the horse," says Kathy. "I applaud her for this. She also used to do a great job at showing a halter horse!" Kathy also considers her good friend Jim Fuller as a mentor and major influence in her career. "He is just a master at fitting a horse," said Kathy.

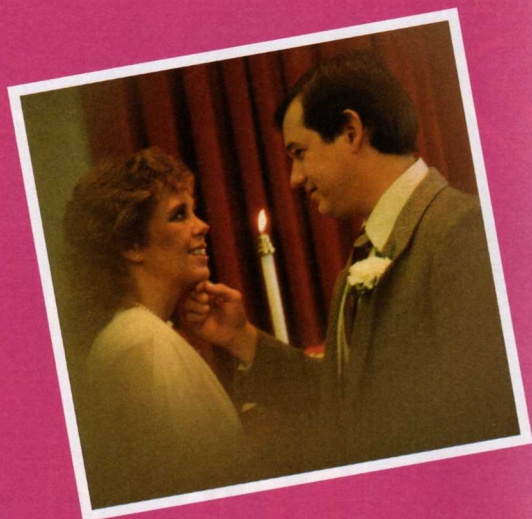
Kathy has been involved in the Quarter Horse world since she was a child, learning about horses at her father's knee. Growing up, she always had a horse, but it was usually a 2 year-old that she had to train and work with herself. Besides owning Quarter





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Horses most of her life, Kathy showed successfully in the early amateur program as well as the many years she has been a professional trainer. Kathy has seen lots of changes in the horse industry, but the biggest one has been the specialization. "I can still remember showing a horse in all disciplines," she recalls. "Specialization became big with the success of the World Show and the development of such specialized organizations as NSBA, NCHA and NRHA." She adds, "Not that specialization is bad – it has created more avenues for people to concentrate on. However, it has been tough on the image of the halter horse." Kathy observes, "I have been doing this a long time, and in my opinion the halter horse has not changed as much as the performance horses have. If you go back and look at the horses winning in pleasure and hunt seat 20 years ago, you will find they resemble more of the modern halter horse than they do the pleasure or hunt seat horse of today!"

Some other changes Kathy has concerns about has to do with halter horses as well. "No longer awarding Grand Champion trophies at the horse shows," she observes. "Also, last year not requiring the judges to line up the horses at the World. The biggest 'plus' about lining up the horses is that you may not be the big final winner, but it sure feels good to the exhibitor and the owner to have their horse called out." It makes it more of a spectator sport for the crowd, also.

Kathy also observes, "I am not sure that developing a new division, Performance Halter, is necessary. The halter horse is supposed to be an example of the horse with the best conformation – so what is a performance halter horse? Isn't that doubling up?" she asks. It does sound contradictory, if the judges are supposed to be using the same criteria for both classes, judging form to function. She adds, "Putting the Performance Halter horses back in for Grand and Reserve may be beneficial to the Grand and Reserve horses, but what about the horse that is 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Aged Gelding class with only 5 horses in the class, when before the Performance Halter horses split that same gelding would have been 3<sup>rd</sup> out of 15, and earned a point?"

Kathy believes that halter could be one of the largest show divisions if given a jump-start. "Look at the numbers at the Select World," she comments. "Halter is NOT dying! There are a lot of people that like to raise halter babies but they need







something to show for. The Equine Chronicle Elite Halter Classic is a great start. We need more events like that. It's nice to get a payback, like the reiners, ropers and cutters do." She would also like to see a Limited Division in the halter arena at large AQHA shows like the Congress does. "It really helped the Congress," she says. "A class within a class does not take much longer to judge than the original class itself."

There are a lot of changes that Kathy likes. She adds, "A great idea was the implementation of classes for the amateurs, youth, novice and select divisions. The Select World was long overdue – what a concept!" One of Kathy's clients, Mary Jane Walker has had much success with her halter mare, Innocent Touch and Shes Innocent at the Select World show in Amarillo. This year Mary Jane will return with Shes Innocent in the 3 Year-Old Mare class, along with fellow barn mates Don Sulots' weanling filly Style N Array and Nancy Gamber and her aged gelding, Amazing Array. Another successful amateur from the Smallwood stable showing in the Select division is Kathy's husband, Lonnn. Although he didn't grow up with horses the way Kathy did, Lonnn has taken to the show ring and has had much success with his horses in the amateur halter classes over the years. From 1999 through 2005, Lonnn won 2 Championships and 2 Reserves at the Amateur World, as well as placing at the Select World show.

Kathy also applauds the AQHA for coming up with ways to educate the judges with workshops, etc. "One thing I wish people would realize is that if you want a change, you need to get it in writing to the AQHA for discussion at the Convention. Grumbling behind the scenes does nothing but create negativity – progress comes forth with positive think-

ing – stand up and be heard!"

Kathy genuinely loves horses. From Wimpy Bar Jo, the horse she bred, trained and showed out of the first Quarter Horse her father bought her, to her current string of winners that come from a three-generation line of mares Kathy and Lonnn have raised, her passion and love for her horses comes out strong and clear. "Having the good fortune to develop a successful breeding program with only a couple of mares is mind-boggling!" says Kathy. "Back in 1997, we were able to purchase the mare Adorable on time payments before she was ever bred. She was by Mr. Conclusion and out of A Beautiful Array. That was a risk we'll never forget!" Kathy took Adorable's first two foals to the AQHA World – one by Touchdown Kid and the other by Coolest. "Cool Innocence won the Amateur World and was Reserve World Champion in the Open Yearling Mares," Kathy recalls. "The weanling filly by Touchdown Kid, Touch Me Mister, was third in Amateur Weanling Mares and World Champion in Open fillies. What a year!"

Thus far, Kathy and Lonnn have raised fifteen foals, with thirteen of them old enough to go on to the World. Of those, three of them have become World Champions, making a total of eight World or Reserve champions – an amazing percentage considering the small number of home-bred mares they come from. They are particularly excited about two-time World Champion Righteous Mister, their yearling stallion by Mr. Yella Fella. "We raised his mother, Cool Innocence, his grand-dam, Adorable, and had his great-grand-dam, A Beautiful Array, in our barn for 17 years," said Kathy. "We just lost Cool Innocence last August, at only 7 years of age. Not





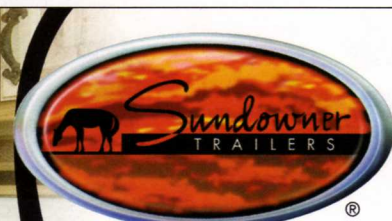
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only was she a producer of World Champion Righteous Mister and multiple World Show Top 5 horses including Innocent Touch and Shes Innocent, but she was a World Champion, three-time Reserve World Champion and three-time Congress winner herself." Fortunately, the couple was able to get six foals out of her during her short life, including two babies this year via embryo transfer – a full brother and sister to Righteous Mister, that they hope will continue the legacy.

Righteous Mister is HYPP N/N, which is of particular importance in the industry due to the recent requirement changes that will be implemented over the next few years regarding H/H horses. Kathy also notes that many of the top halter mares today go back to Kid Clu, and since Righteous Mister has no Kid Clu in his bloodline, he will make a good outcross on a lot of those mares.

Kathy and Lonn married in 1984. Their family includes the 'kids', their dogs Zorro, Abbie and Rufus. Although with Kathy and Lonn's horse show schedule, there is little time for much else, they do enjoy attending concerts, particularly classic rock and country acts, and on the rare occasion they can truly 'get away', the couple enjoys visiting favorite places like Hawaii, Santa Fe, Aspen, New York City, Las Vegas and cruising the Caribbean.

ing the Caribbean.

When Kathy won an Open Halter Championship at the AQHA World Show in 1999, she was the first woman trainer in 17 years to accomplish that. Being a halter trainer was a lifelong dream for Kathy, but it hasn't been an easy road. "It was and still is somewhat a man's world," Kathy observes. "I do love a challenge, however, and I will try to keep knocking on that door as long as I can. I love what I do and wouldn't change it for anything." When asked the path she took to get to where she is today, Kathy adds, "I believe the secret to my success has to do with having total dedication, keeping an objective outlook, perseverance, tenacity, pure determination, strong ethics, great customers, help and trust from my peers, blessing from above, and most of all, love of the animals. Being free to do what I want to do – I am fortunate to be able to spend my life working with an animal as awesome as the horse. I believe a good horse makes a good trainer, and I have been fortunate enough to have those horses come my way. You feel like you have really accomplished something when you have that special communication between you and the horse – it's awesome!"

