

2003 Father of the Year – John Swanson

I would like to nominate my father, John Swanson, for the Father of the Year award.

My dad and I were newcomers to the horse show community this year. I had always dreamed of learning to jump and competing in the hunter ring but had never had the chance to do so. This year with a lot of help from my trainer Linda Worley, a wonderful horse, and my father, I managed to progress from timid trot-a-course rounds to the 2'6" division.

In many ways, I'm sure my father is not uncommon. Like most fathers of green riders, my dad started the year off as a horse show rookie. At the first bitterly cold schooling shows at Mt. Hood, I doubt he could tell the difference between a Percheron and a pony. I know he couldn't feel his toes.

My dad, however, was a quick learner. He mastered mane unbraiding and horse bathing. He learned about the appropriate times for martingales and eq. boots and how to find them when they disappeared in the bottom of the tack trunk minutes before a class. He perfected the art of bobby pinning my hair so that it would survive a long day of showing. With the back gate box in one hand and the class schedule in the other, my dad swiftly became a great groom.

While dad provided lots of practical and logistical help this show season, his most important support was significantly deeper. My dad intuitively realized that I needed a special kind of help to be successful in the show ring this year. I needed someone to believe in my dream.

Dad believed.

He was there for the tough times. He watched from the in-gate as I fell off at The Country Classic and gave me a leg-up to get back on my horse. He was there to celebrate the good times, too, when I left the show grounds on Sunday afternoons with a trunk full of colorful ribbons.

While my dad initially came to the shows entirely out of love for me, he soon began to truly love the horses and the shows as well. He shared in my triumphs and failures and was willing to "talk horses" with me when none of my other family members were really interested. By the end of the year, my dad could pin an eq. class and critique a hunter round with reasonable accuracy. His knowledge of Oregon and Washington geography included new places such as Jefferson and Monroe. He was clearly having a great time on the show circuit.

What most impresses me, however, is that my dad has offered me so much help when I show in the pre-Adult division. I am 24 years old. I don't need my dad to sign the release on my entry forms or even pay for my horse expenses. I do all that myself now that I am a college graduate with a full-time job. Officially, his parental duties are over. What my dad understood though is that, regardless of my age, I still need a person to care about my dreams and to give me a helping hand.

After this show season, I know my dad will always be there to support my horse dreams and remind me that I am very much loved. After all, he recently bought boots guaranteed to keep your feet warm to minus 40 degrees. He thinks they will be just about perfect for this year's winter schooling shows.

Heather Swanson