

Gayle Lampe

A long time ago — let's just say that Gayle's current crop of students hadn't been born yet — I mentioned to her that I wanted to stop smoking. That same week, two motivational "how-to" tapes arrived in the mail from her.

When she taught riding in Los Angeles at Jim Bennett's barn in the Griffith Park Equestrian Center, I asked her if she would give me "English" lessons, since I rode dressage, not saddle seat. She wouldn't let me pay for the lessons, so every week I took her to Marie Callender's for a late lunch. She loved the place. "It has lumpy mashed potatoes!"

she'd exclaim, as though lumpy mashed potatoes were the pinnacle of civilization. (Full disclosure: Gayle taught me to post, something three dressage trainers had been unable to do.)

This past August, at Louisville, she told me how excited she was that I was writing for *Saddle & Bridle* again, and gave me the names of half a dozen people I "needed" to interview. After the show, at the party to celebrate her winning the Audrey Pugh Gutridge Award, Gayle hardly gave me time to congratulate her before grabbing me by the elbow and steering me towards somebody on her "you need to interview this person" list.

For those of you who don't know Gayle, these three short anecdotes will tell you almost everything you need to know about her. She's a giver, not a taker; she has pronounced likes and dislikes; she has the energy and enthusiasm of a Jack Russell terrier and is always doing something (her resume is a whopping 39 pages); and she's as loyal as the day is long. The only other thing you need to know about Gayle is that she was born with horses in her blood.

Gayle came from a privileged family in Louisville, Kentucky.

Her parents, the late Judge Stuart Lampe and his wife Elizabeth, must have been mystified when their only child ignored the dolls they gave her and instead spent hours happily playing with her plastic toy horses. Gayle remembers that some of them had blankets, but thinks they probably came with the horses. "My mother made my clothes, but I don't think she made them for my horses," she laughs. Under her quick, decisive speech — honed from years of lecturing to students — Gayle still has



Gayle as a young girl.

a faint Kentucky drawl: "Mah mother made mah clothes."

Like most horse people, Gayle is drawn to all animals. When she was very young, she received a fluffy yellow duckling for Easter. In an attempt to teach him to fly, she kept tossing him down the front steps of the house. "That was so awful," Gayle says, shuddering. "Not a happy memory at all." But before Gayle managed to kill the duckling with kindness, her mother explained that he couldn't fly; he didn't have his adult plumage yet. Gayle still owns ducks — in fact she's the only person I know who shows ducks. "I think waterfowl are beautiful," she says simply.

While Gayle's parents didn't understand the duck obsession or the horse obsession, they did arrange for her to take riding lessons at Brown's Riding Academy — which became Hillbrook Riding Club — and eventually at Rock Creek. When she was about 15, her parents even bought her a Saddlebred —

a palomino named Silver, who came with his own saddle and bridle, as two hundred dollar horses often did in those days. But Silver was navicular, and the following year her parents sold him. Rather than buy their daughter another dud, they sent her to horse camp. It was one of the best decisions they could have made. For the next seven summers Gayle attended a camp in Missouri held at the farm of Annie Lawson Cowgill, one of the great early-day women riding instructors. By the final summer, Gayle had become Annie's assistant.

When it came time to go to college, Gayle chose Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri — because Annie taught there, and because they had a horse program. They also, whether the administration was aware of it or not, had a white Pekin duck named Samantha that lived in a pond behind Gayle's dormitory. During the day Gayle often visited the pond with a loaf of bread under her arm where she sat and shared her thoughts — and her bread — with Samantha.

When Gayle graduated, there was an opening at William Woods College, which also had a horse program, in nearby

Fulton, Missouri. Annie recommended her, and so did Dot Backe, an instructor at the college. Gayle got the job. It was 1968. Except for a one-year-sabbatical she spent teaching in Los Angeles, she has taught there ever since.

As the World's Championship Horse Show program noted, when Gayle arrived at William Woods, it had "a lovely brick barn with 16 stalls and a four-stall annex. Today, William Woods has five barns with over 100 stalls and two huge indoor arenas." One of those barns is named



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after her. Because of Gayle's single-minded dedication and hard work, William Woods, which is now William Woods University, was the first four-year school in the country to offer an Equestrian Science major.

Have I mentioned Gayle's energy level? I've roomed with her — while she was teaching in Los Angeles, we took a road trip up the coast and prowled around Carmel and Monterey and the Big Sur. I can remember falling into bed one night and drifting off to dreamland almost immediately, only to wake up to Gayle's plaintive question: "Want to go see the ocean with me?" ("No, I do not. I'm exhausted — you wear me out. I want to sleep!" Gayle went by herself.) This inability to sit still means that when Gayle's not in the show ring herself, or teaching students how to ride in the show ring, she's either showing her ducks or judging horse shows. In addition to Saddlebreds, Gayle is/has been certified to judge Andalusians, Hackney Harness, Roadster, Arabians, National Show Horses, Morgans, Parade Horses, Paso Finos, and saddle seat equitation. It's her ambition to judge shows in all 50 states — so far she's judged in 42 of them. And in her spare time she wrote *Riding for Success: Both in and out of the Show Ring*, published by *Saddle & Bridle* in 1996, an indispensable guide to riding and showing Saddlebreds. Even two cancer scares didn't slow her down.

You'd have to have a heart made of frozen yogurt not to be moved by Gayle's dedication to horses, her can-do personality, her ability to forge life-long friendships, and her sense of humor. She claims she can't remember exactly when she started showing ducks, but thinks she was already teaching at William Woods when one of her "exotics" won a blue ribbon at the Kentucky State Fair. At that time the fowl exhibit was near the warmup ring at the end of Stopher's Walk. Frank Bradshaw, whom she had known and worshiped since she was in her teens, commented on Gayle's blue ribbon. When he won a blue ribbon on the six-time World's Grand Champion gaited mare My-My, he said to Gayle, "You got yours before I did." Gayle remembers two things about the incident. One: "Ah was so thrilled that he stopped!" Two: "Mah blue ribbon was just a little bitty scrap of a thing and his was, oh, it looked seven feet long. But they were both the same color."

Gayle's story wouldn't be complete without mentioning one of her most treasured friendships — with Callaway's Born To Win. Early in 2003, she had taken some students to Betty Weldon's Callaway Hills, and trainer Bob Brison asked her if she wanted to ride a stallion. Her initial reaction was that she had been teaching all day and didn't feel like riding a stallion. Besides, she didn't have her saddle or her boots. But one of her students just happened to have her saddle, and another student's boots were exactly her size. Gayle had the ride of a lifetime. By the time she dismounted, she was wishing she could buy Born To Win herself, and show him. Then Bob rode the stud to the end of the barn aisle, where the stud pricked his ears and peeked out the open doorway. When Gayle asked Bob what he was looking at, Bob replied, deadpan, "His geese friends. He just loves ducks and geese." Gayle bought the horse, had him gelded, and won the Ladies Five-Gaited World's Grand



Gayle's beloved Fred.

Championship with him at Louisville that same year, with her home-town crowd — as well as half of the Saddle Horse world — cheering her on.

Recounting the story, Gayle admits that Hoppy Bennett, who stands the blue-ribbon breeding stallion Undulata's Nutcracker and has been her friend for over 40 years, had orchestrated the whole thing. "It was a complete set-up," she laughs. "And I fell for it."

Her loyalty to her friends is legendary. She first met K.K. Gutridge — she calls him Eddie — when she was still in high school. Eddie helped Jim B. Robertson at Rock Creek with what she terms "the more difficult or time-consuming horses," including Tres Chic and CH Princess Julia. Gayle walked to school every morning, and every morning she'd stop at Rock Creek to talk to Eddie. "He showed me all kinds of interesting trainer tricks," like how to use shackles correctly on a horse that needed them. "All kinds of things." Gayle adored him. And when Eddie, then in his 60s,

married a woman he'd been engaged to for 17 years, Gayle adored his new wife, too — the former Audrey Pugh. (No relation to more of Gayle's favorite people, Missouri horse trainer Dale Pugh and his wife Glenda.) "The minutes I met Audrey I was just as crazy about her as I was about Eddie. Audrey and Lloyd Teater had started the first public barn as we know it today. She trained horses — she was the Helen Crabtree of her era. Audrey paved the way for women like me to be something other than riding instructors."

Although Audrey was a gifted and highly successful trainer, she let Eddie be the star of their show and went to work at the Kentucky State Fair for manager Bill Mumford. Gayle and Audrey remained friends until Audrey's death. "She was an intense person, and she cared more about the Saddlebred business than anyone I've ever known," says Gayle. "She always made sure that everybody got what they wanted."

One of Gayle's favorite stories about Audrey concerns the renovation of Freedom Hall. Once upon a time, the riders coming down the chute had to ride up to the ring. Gayle was on spring break at William Woods and had come home to Louisville. On her way, she stopped by to see Audrey, who was so upset at the renovation — and knew Gayle would be too — that she took her inside Freedom Hall. The construction work, undertaken to create additional seating for basketball games, had lowered the ring, and as Audrey led Gayle to the seating area, all Gayle could see was "a big old dirt hole." No more private boxes. Freedom Hall as they knew it was gone. "Audrey was considerate and protective of me," says Gayle. Audrey wanted to make sure that she was with Gayle when Gayle saw the "improved" ring and seating arrangements, and didn't find out about it by accident, or from somebody who thought it was a great idea.

Audrey's concern for people, her generosity, her lifelong involvement in the Saddle Horse business, her perfectionism — do they remind you of anybody? Like Gayle herself?

Sometimes the awards given out at Louisville don't match the people who receive them. But this year's Audrey Pugh Gutridge Award was a perfect fit for the intense, talented, profoundly loyal fireball who's Gayle Lampe.