



You Only Thought You Knew

Cecilia May Hylton of Hylton Quarter Horses.

By Christine Hamilton

SHE'S HAD A CRUSH ON ACTOR SAM ELLIOT FOR YEARS, BUT don't tell. Her first job was scraping paint off windows for her dad at age 12. Her favorite words are "Quarter Horse! What else?"

In the public eye, she's president of The Hylton Group of Prince William County, Virginia, a real estate and development corporation her father, Cecil D. Hylton Sr., founded in 1947; and she sits on the board of the Cecil and Irene Hylton Charitable Foundation – the family's charity.

To the American Quarter Horse world, she's a breeder and exhibitor with top-notch horses at big shows across the country.

But there's a lot more to Cecilia Hylton of Gainesville,

Virginia. And though you'd never hear it from her, you don't have to dig very deep to find positive pockets in our Quarter Horse family that she had a hand in supporting.

The Virginia Quarter Horse Youth Association could tell you how she gave it her wardrobe of show clothes and saddle pads to sell as a fund-raising effort for the Ford AQHYA World Championship Show team.

The Reichert Celebration could tell you how she started the high-purse Hylton Maiden 3-year-old and Over Western Pleasure slot class to give people "incentive to bring horses along more slowly."



CHRISTINE HAMILTON

Cecilia and her retired show gelding, Lotto Flash, at home. Lotto Flash and another of Cecilia's show geldings, Doctor J Flash, are by Flashy Zipper. They were the reason Cecilia eventually purchased their legendary sire. Flashy Zipper was inducted into the National Snaffle Bit Association Hall of Fame in 2007.

LARRI JO STARKEY



In January 2008, Cecilia was surprised with a trip to the American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame & Museum where an image of her mare Invite Moonlight, aka "Ivy," was used to represent the western pleasure horse in the museum. Gary Carpenter, executive director of the American Quarter Horse Foundation, presented it to her.

And the American Quarter Horse Foundation and Colorado State University could tell you about her impact on equine reproductive research specifically through the Foundation's Flashy Zipper Fund – named after Cecilia's prize stallion.

When you visit with Cecilia, you find she's a shrewd businesswoman who's quick to spot a rat. And there's a look in her eye that says she's equally quick to laugh. Down to earth, hard-working and a supporter of what she believes in – that's the Cecilia Hylton to know.

Journal: *Your father is best known for building Dale City – Washington, D.C.'s, first modern suburb. What was he like?*

Cecilia: I guess, overall, he was a gentleman. He was a big man, over 6 foot 2 inches, but he was a very gentle person. He would keep a pad of paper and pencil beside his bed, and he would wake up with ideas in the night and write them down.

He had the ability to drive down a street and be able to tell what kind of condition a job was in, whether or not the contractors, or the landscape or excavating crews were doing what they should be doing.

And he had the ability to go into a problem and make it turn out. We had a concrete strike at the batch plants. That's where they mix the concrete and put in the trucks to deliver for basement slabs, sidewalks and front stoops.

So he had me go buy concrete trucks. I found a batch plant about 15 miles away from Dale City that would batch the concrete for us and load it on the trucks. And we kept building houses.

Journal: *What do you remember learning from him?*

Cecilia: I guess, back in that day and age, women could be nurses, but they couldn't be doctors. They could be secretaries, but they couldn't be CEOs. But he taught me that I could be whatever I wanted to be. If I had the ability to accomplish it, I could

accomplish it. And this was when (construction) was a man's world; women did not enter into this world at all.

He taught me about heavy equipment, every area of our company. I started working in customer service, and I wouldn't go back there now! (*She laughed.*) And then I worked in contracts and purchasing, sales, every aspect of our organization. We have an excavating company, apartment units, shopping centers that we lease, and we build homes.

I did not go to college; but I think I learned more about life and what goes on and how to get through it – how to swim with the sharks without being eaten – just by being with my dad and learning from him. And not realizing that I was even being taught.

I believe God puts people where they need to be. Whatever somebody needs, he'll put a person there. Believe me, there were many times that I would go into the basement of a house that was under construction and cry. But I never let them see me cry.

Journal: *Did the horses?*

Cecilia: (*She smiled.*) Oh, yeah. Many times, I would cry into a horse's neck.

Journal: *Who was your first horse?*

Cecilia: My first horse was a small, Heinz-57 type. I was about 9 or 10 years old. Of course, my dad knew by then that I was horse crazy and was never going to be over it. Ever. He came home from work one day and brought this horse with him. His name was "Midnight." He was the meanest little thing you've ever seen.

All I ever wanted was a horse, right? So I get on this horse



CHRISTINE HAMILTON

Knee surgery hasn't kept Cecilia from riding, and she's counting the days to when she'll be able to shift on her Harley trike.



Cecilia Hylton with Hylton Quarter Horse trainers AQHA Pro Horseman Steve Meadows and his wife, Becky.

and my dad is walking, and the horse is following him. Dad takes off running, and so does this horse. Well, I'd never been on a horse before. I'm screaming and carrying on, let me off this horse!

A week or so goes by, and dad comes home and says you're going to have to ride this horse. He put me on him, and I broke out in hives, all over my body. They had to take me to the hospital and get me a shot. He never again tried to make me ride Midnight.

Journal: *So what happened?*

Cecilia: My dad left me alone. And I would go and sit on the

fence, or go sit in the barn and watch that horse. On my own, I started getting braver about doing things, and I did it myself.

When you'd go to saddle him, he'd reach around and try to bite you. He would swell up so the girth was loose when you'd try to get on. He would try to put his foot on your foot, and if he accomplished that, then he would scrunch it into the ground. He would buck with you; he would run against trees; he would run under limbs; he would lie down in the creek. There was no trick in the book that this one did not know. I learned all his tricks, and I learned how to get around them.

He was my first love. I had no lessons, no real experience; just getting on and riding him was what I did. We lived on a farm that was 100-plus acres, and there was vacant land all around us; it was on a dirt road. I just spent hours on the back of that horse.

Journal: *How did you get into showing?*

Cecilia: I showed a little bit in the '70s. But I really got serious when my dad passed away. That's when I needed an outlet.

Journal: *Why Quarter Horses?*

Cecilia: I just love the Quarter Horse's ability to do so many different things. How unique is that? For one breed to be able to cut cattle, to do reining, to do working cow horse, to go over fences – something Thoroughbreds are known for – and the pleasure.

My gelding, Doctor J Flash, I showed him western, I showed him English, I did all-around with him. There's nothing they can't do.

Journal: *A lot of people outside our industry think – it's a horse*

HYLTON HORSES

AQHA Pro Horseman Steve Meadows and his wife, Becky, went to work for Cecilia in early 2005. They handle the training and careers of the Hylton horses.

Cecilia shows as do her son, George Markley (her farm manager), and daughters Kelly and Jamie. Their current show string is an enviable group of pleasure and western riding horses including Invitation To Flash, Invite Moonlight, Impulse To Sparkle, Regal Intention, Radical Yet Fancy, I Can Only Imagine and Invite Gracie

The majority of Cecilia's broodmare band and her stallions Slowly Passin Breeze and Zippin Sweet N Slow are at AQHA Pro Horseman Gene and Bobbi Parker's place in Orrum, North Carolina. She also stands a reining stallion, Slip Slydun Away, at Casey Hinton Quarter Horses and Cedar Ridge Stallion Station.

As far as the horses go, "As long as I am able, I will be on the back of a horse," Cecilia said.

CHRISTINE HAMILTON

show, big deal. What does showing mean to you?

Cecilia: I love the people; I love the horses; I love the competition. It is a total different world than the business world where I am so absorbed. When I come out of business meetings, I feel like my brain has been taken out, wrung out and put back in. I am totally washed out.

But when I go to a show – that’s my real world. Don’t get me wrong, my businesses are real world, too, but if I didn’t have the Quarter Horses and that part of it, I don’t think that I could survive.

Journal: *You’ve shown hunters, you have halter horses and reiners – why is western pleasure your favorite?*

Cecilia: I don’t think there’s anything prettier – it’s poetry in motion to watch the western pleasure horse just use his natural ability and move. It’s just beautiful.

Keep in mind: You’re like a flea on a dog when you’re on the back of a horse. That horse doesn’t have to do what you ask it to do. But the Quarter Horse does, and that is so awesome to me. That you can ask him to do whatever, and he’ll do it.

Journal: *Where did you learn to give?*

Cecilia: My dad grew up poor, selling vegetables door to door. Once he became successful he just felt like he owed something to the community in which he became successful. So he started giving back – to the churches, schools, hospitals, Boys and Girls Clubs, the Boy Scouts, fire departments, youth clubs, ball fields. He taught my brothers and me that way of thinking. We just picked up on that and have carried forth since my parents passed away.

I just feel the same way with the Quarter Horse. Quarter Horses have given me so much that I just feel like I have an obligation to give back to the industry.

Journal: *Of all the community projects your parents left behind, what best represents who they were?*

Cecilia: The Hylton Memorial Chapel (in Dale City, Virginia). My mother, Irene, decided when my father passed away that she was going to build a nondenominational Christian event center. She started that project. My brother, “Sonny,” Cecil D. Hylton Jr., was the project manager.

It’s a magnificent building, a beautiful building. They don’t hold church services there. They hold seminars, ministerial meetings and concerts. We’ve had Randy Travis there, Mercy Me, Amy Grant, Vince Gill; we’ve had the WOW Awards there, the Christian music awards. It was a gift to the community.



Hylton Quarter Horses’ main farm is near Gainesville, Virginia.

Journal: *What comes to mind when you think about what might be your legacy?*

Cecilia: I am very blessed and proud to be a part of the Quarter Horse industry. My dad passed away in 1989, but his legend is still living on in Prince William County; people all know what the Hylton name means, the good he did there. I hope for that in the Quarter Horse industry, too.

Christine Hamilton is a field editor for The American Quarter Horse Journal. To comment, write to chamilton@aqha.org.

9 THINGS TO KNOW

- Family:** five children and eight grandchildren
- Chocolate or vanilla:** Chocoholic
- Favorite colors to wear riding:** Black and white
- Her mother used to say:** “A woman who would tell her age would tell anything.”
- Favorite Quarter Horse bloodline:** Invitation Only on Flashy Zipper, of course
- Caught horse bug from:** Her grandmother on her father’s side. “She rode sidesaddle.”
- First Quarter Horse trainer:** Connie Christopher, Manassas, Virginia
- Pet Peeves:** Talking in the morning and riding after dinner
- Who would play her in a movie:** Cher

CHRISTINE HAMILTON



All in a day’s work at the home farm in Gainesville: Steve Meadows often uses the show string to pony, to give them something else to think about and do.