

# Against All Odds

# TAMMY DeVore

By Erica Faulkner

Challenges have a way of changing you. They can spur you to try harder, or frustrate you until you give up and back down. Obstacles will arise for everyone, at some point in life. How these are handled and how you let them affect you, can determine who you are as a person.

Sometimes, these road blocks on the path to success, cause people to change course, and stop pursuing their dreams. However, this is not the case for Tammy DeVore. A strong-willed, optimistic, determined woman who, according to her students, lives every day with keen respect for opportunity and an appreciation for life and all it entails.

DeVore, owner and trainer of DeVore Stables in Sonora, Kentucky, has overcome adversity to get where she is today. In an industry that is male dominated, DeVore has beat the odds and come out on top a winner in every way. She realizes it take a different type of attitude to compete in this sport as a female.

"At first it was hard to get my foot in the door," she said. "You have to be tough like a man, work like a man and at times act like a man. I even still (joke) to my husband at times that I need to be a girl today I can't take it anymore. But I have a lot of great guy friends in this business. They have come to be some of my best friends."

As a young girl, DeVore was fascinated with horses, just as she is today.

"Tammy always was crazy about horses," said Wanda Westbrook, DeVore's mother and manager at DeVore Stables. Westbrook had horses when DeVore was born, exposing her to horses at a very young age. DeVore rode every chance she could, and eventually took lessons with Saddlebred trainer Lorrie Floyd. It was not long before DeVore was hooked, and she knew that her life was going to be centered around horses, no matter what.

She began working at Floyd's barn every day in exchange for lessons and a chance to show.

"Lorrie began putting Tammy on green horses when she was 10 or 11," Westbrook said.

She goes on to explain that DeVore accepted any opportunity to ride that was presented to her. There was nothing that was going to stand in this



(SA) Kalarama's Ultimate Choice and Tammy DeVore have a connection that is unlike any other. They are pictured here winning the Five-Gaited Jackpot Stake at this years River Ridge Horse Show.

young lady's way. She developed a stellar work ethic, as her family did not have the money to fully support her passion for riding, yet they did all they could to ensure their daughter had the chance to follow her heart.

"Tammy cleaned stalls, groomed and did everything she could to be around horses and to show. We struggled, scraped and did whatever we could to be sure she could continue," says Westbrook.

It was only a matter of time before DeVore's parents purchased her her very own horse, Mr. Showtime. Purchased from Vernon Bettersworth, Mr. Showtime taught DeVore many lessons, and he went on to teach her students as well. At one point, he was even seen in the show ring at the age of 34, with DeVore's youngest son Ethan riding him in leadline.

DeVore's hard work and dedication started to pay off, garnering her the attention of fellow



Tammy DeVore and Zombie Stomp, a top gaited horse she campaigned during the 2008 to 2010 seasons.



Tammy DeVore and CH Twice The Dice. This gaited champion won numerous titles with DeVore as a young horse, and was later Ashley Alden's show horse under the DeVore Stables banner



Tammy DeVore's son, Ethan, currently shows Callaway's I'll Stand By You in the junior exhibitor five-gaited division. They just recently won the Junior Exhibitor Five-Gaited class at the 2017 Chattanooga Charity Horse Show.

exhibitors and trainers. The late Jerry Crick, who at the time was also a customer of Floyd's, saw the talent that DeVore had when she beat his daughter in the show ring.

Crick's daughter was a top competitor showing a great horse, and at

one show DeVore showed up with a horse she was catch riding and beat his daughter. Crick was gracious, and gave DeVore a quality horse of her own, along with a tail-set, show bridle, and saddle.

"That's really how I got started," said DeVore.



Tammy DeVore is talented not only with gaited horses, but with walk trot horses. She is seen here with CH Caroline Brackenridge, a horse she trained and showed to many blues during the 2010 and 2011 season.



*Payton Walker speaks highly of her trainer, Tammy DeVore. DeVore has teamed Walker with numerous champions, one of which is her current show star, CH Callaway's No More Mr. Nice Guy.*



*I'm Ziggy Stardust, owned by Helen Rich and Ali DeGray, is a current five-gaited champion for DeVore Stables.*

She was only 15 at the time, and DeVore accepted the young colt from Crick, taking on the challenge of working it herself. It did not take long before DeVore cashed in and sold the horse for a profit. It was the just the beginning for DeVore, as she continued to buy and sell horses, each time moving herself up the financial ladder. DeVore saw a young horse she liked at the late Randy Tabor's named Town Achievement. She changed his name to Bazooka Joe and sold him to Linda Weber and Elaine Gregory, using the money from the sale to pay for her wedding and as a down payment on her first home.

Still a teenager, DeVore started to take the necessary steps to becoming a full-time trainer, and went to work for Jo Cornell. She spent three solid years at Jo Cornell Stables before taking the leap and opening her own farm.

At first, she rented stalls at a barn in Sonora, Kentucky. She was only 21 at the time. It was during these early years, the DeVore met the Hartley family, and in a short time, DeVore had Lucinda Hartley in the winner's circle.

It was not long before that DeVore had experienced so much success that she outgrew the facility she was in. Having grown up just 10 miles from Steve Crabtree's Hillview Stables, and having shown a walk-trot pony for Crabtree in her younger years, it seemed a great fit for DeVore to begin an association with the famed trainer. Crabtree had a respect for DeVore, knowing that she truly had to work for what she had; that noth-



*A young Tyler DeVore, showing his previous show horse, CH Out With The Ladies. Today, Tyler is an assistant to his mother at DeVore Stables.*

ing was given to her on a silver platter.

It was during this time at Hillview Stables that DeVore turned out her first world champion rider, Lucinda Hartley. During one of DeVore's first trips to Louisville with students she proudly met Hartley and her champion equitation horse Dawn Juan in the winner's circle as they were named the winners of the 10 and Under Walk and Trot Equitation Championship. It was also during this time that she teamed Hartley with the stand out gaited pony, CH Callaway's Sky Rocket.

Eventually, DeVore relocated her farm again, this time to Linda Allen's Clearview Farm in Sharpsville. Hartley also made the move with DeVore and went on to win many blues with the gaited horse Moet. Grateful for all the opportunities she was presented with over the years, DeVore still had the desire to be out on her own and running her own barn.

"It is something I was slowly working towards," she said. And with determination and focus, DeVore did just that, she opened DeVore Stables.

Over the years, DeVore has more than put her name on the map. In the early years, fellow exhibitors and trainers recall the great Jewel's Teton as a prime example of the quality of horse that DeVore put in the ring, and he also holds a special place in her heart.

"I won my first world championship with Jewels Teton in the junior five-gaited division," said Tammy.

Today, she is known as the five-gaited queen, putting such great ones as CH Memories Of Cabo, CH Billy Deluxe, CH Ava Gardner, CH Twice The Dice, and (SA) Kalarama's Ultimate Choice, and many others, in the show ring. However, her talent as a trainer spreads through different divisions.

"I always thought of Tammy as the 'five-gaited queen,' but I definitely wasn't giving her enough credit," said current customer Ali DeGray. "As owners, we have thrown so many strange curveballs at her, and she has been up to every challenge. She didn't have a hunter, but she took Jolly Mong Song as seriously as a gaited stake horse, and that means the world to me. She has been such a tireless advocate for the hunt seat division, which is not surprising. If Tammy believes something is right, she fights like a tiger for it."

Three-gaited, five-gaited, harness, park or pleasure, DeVore puts a winning touch on every horse she sends into the ring.

Eleven years ago, DeVore faced a life-threatening hurdle. She was diagnosed with Thyroid cancer, and underwent a complete thyroid removal, along with 14 lymph nodes. DeVore pushed through, never backing down in sight of the setback.

Then, just three years ago, she was diagnosed with colon cancer. She had 19 more lymph nodes removed, and a colon resection. To some people, news of this nature and a struggle of this magnitude might back them into a corner and



*Northern Asset and Ali DeGray, one of the top three-gaited horses in the country and another prime example of Tammy DeVore's skills reaching outside of the five-gaited division.*

cause them to lose to the desire and will to press on. However, this was not the case for DeVore. She rose above her trials, and came out the other side even better than before.

It was in 2015 that DeVore underwent her surgery, and with her won't back down attitude, she bounced back from surgery and went on to win the Five-Gaited Stallion Stake that year at the World's Championship Horse Show with (SA) Kalarama's Ultimate Choice, (affectionally known as UC), who is owned and loved by Helen Rich and Ali DeGray. This win was just one of many that this team has garnered.

DeVore notes that Kalarama's Ultimate Choice holds a special place in her heart.

"He is so special," she said. "He's the kindest horse in the stall, loves people. He hardly makes a peep unless me or his caretaker walks by. I have a bond with him. I can't really explain it, but we have a connection."

And just like DeVore, the grand gaited stallion is a tough competitor, always giving 110 percent every time he hits the ring.

"His biggest down fall is that he tries too hard. He would work hard if his legs were falling off," DeVore explains. "It has been an honor to be part of his life, and I thank Helen and Ali for allowing me to work with him. He makes me want to be better."

DeGray also recognizes the great connection these two have.

"Her partnership with UC has been really special to watch, because he is so stoic, serious, and hard-going, and she's really melted down his defenses and gotten him to love her. If she goes into his stall, he rests his head against her body,

gently grabs a mouthful of her shirt and keeps her there, snuggling.

"There's a very particular way you've got to do things with him, and Tammy has really taken the time to 'learn' him. That's one of my absolute favorite things about her as a horse trainer and as a human being; she truly loves the horses."

DeGray enjoys watching her trainer train and show UC, and points out that what makes DeVore truly unique as a trainer is how she tailors each training session to the horse.

"It's not a cookie cutter operation, it's not a 'how do we get this horse to the winner's circle?' She is so emotionally involved, so connected to them. That's what makes her different," DeGray continued. "She has so much patience and respect, not forcing the horses but learning how to ask them for more in a way that they are comfortable with."

DeVore has not only built a bond with the horses in her life, but with her customers as well. Each one has something wonderful to say about their trainer. Lexi Pearson, a customer of DeVore Stables for the past six years, credits DeVore with keeping her in the industry.

"I had a five-gaited horse that I was looking to sell and I knew the best place to send her for that was to the 'Gaited Queen.' I was looking to get out of the industry after we sold that mare, but Tammy asked for me to come spend one weekend with her and then make the choice. She let me ride horses that I had only ever dreamed of meeting in passing.

"She reminded me why I fell in love with this sport so long ago and I can't thank her enough for that."



*CH Cherished King and Helen Rich. This horse has won in park and in harness under the training of Tammy DeVore.*

Lexi went on to win her first World's Champion of Champions honors under DeVore's instruction, when she won the Amateur Three-Gaited Park Championship at Louisville in 2015.

Pearson says that she would describe DeVore as, "Tenacious, bold, and alive! I chose alive because there are so many things that have happened to her throughout her life to where she could have just given up. Instead – she is the liveliest person I know, always ready to take on today's challenges."

Pearson also comments on the bond that is between UC and DeVore.

"She had been bed-ridden for quite some time and the doctor had just told her to she could walk around on a horse a few times and maybe try and slow trot."

Pearson suggested she start riding again on the dependable and well-mannered Jolly Mon Song, DeGray's hunter horse. But DeVore was up for more of a challenge.

"Who does Tammy choose? Out walks UC... she hops right on and walks around," Pearson said. "UC knew though. He walked around like an old trail horse and when she asked for a trot he didn't pick up that striking, headstrong trot he comes into the ring with. He bounced off into a relaxed, almost lesson horse trot, allowing Tammy to steady herself and get herself situated and comfortable. He never acted out or wanted to misbehave. You cannot make up a bond like that. What they have is something special."

The impact that DeVore has on the horses and people around her, is awe inspiring. Longtime customers, the Crim family, also speak highly of their beloved trainer.

"Her devotion to bringing out the best in every horse she steps on, is what really sets her apart. She is so gifted in finding the right horse for the right rider, and she is not afraid to take on a challenge," says Ashley Crim, whose children Molly and Blake have both shown under the DeVore stables banner.

Molly and Blake have earned numerous top titles over the years, however Ashley recalls her favorite show ring memories with DeVore, as the times that Blake won the triple crown with WCC CH High Heat in 2004, and when Molly was fresh out of walk and trot equitation in 2016 and she won the Three-Gaited 13 and Under World's Championship with WCC CH High Heat.

Ginny Stanley, customer and friend of DeVore, entrusts DeVore with the care of her granddaughter, Payton Walker.

"I cannot put into words accurately how much Tammy means to our family," said Stanley. "We came to her almost 10 years ago, and from the start, it has been one big family. I cannot thank Tammy enough for all she has done for our family. She is the reason we have so many wonderful memories in the horse industry. She is a magnificent woman, inside and out."

Stanley goes on to describe how her granddaughter strives for perfection in each

ride she has, but no matter the color of the ribbon, her main goal is to please DeVore. It is the approval of her world class trainer and friend, that means the most to her. Not the color of the ribbon.

Justin Cowley, long-time exhibitor and another person who has faced some health challenges, also has a high respect for his trainer.

"She's a very tough woman but is also really sweet. She can be dirty from the barn but still look nice at a wedding." Cowley has had a long-standing friendship and business relationship with DeVore, and he has seen a variety of people come into DeVore Stables' show group.

"She really attracts every kind of person to her. Many people that don't know her think she's scary, but I say well she is scary but she happens to like me well so it all works out," Cowley says with a smile and a laugh. "I introduce Tammy as my horse trainer and she hates it. I always say 'why?' and she goes 'well I'm your friend.' She says she's more of a friend than a trainer, which is actually very true."

DeVore not only puts great horses and riders in the ring, she also has found success as a mother and wife. Her two sons, Tyler and Ethan, both compete in the show ring, and Tyler currently works as the assistant at DeVore Stables. DeVore notes that she loves watching her children show and compete.

"It is my absolute favorite thing," she said. And, although she gets nervous when they go through the gate, she says it's not because she's scared.

"It's because I'm excited and I want them to succeed."

And succeed they do, as Ethan and Tyler both have won numerous blue ribbons during their years in the showing. One of her favorite memories with Tyler happens to be with the great gaited horse, CH The Champagne Lady.

"We brought her up out of the field when she was 21," she said. "Tyler worked her himself, mostly. They went on to a world's grand championship title."

DeVore is equally as proud of her son Ethan and all he has accomplished in and out of the ring. He has shown such noted horses as CH Ava Gardner, CH Callaway's Born To Ride, Callaway's I'll Stand By You, and CH Heirison Ford; obviously his mother's talent with a gaited horse has been passed on to him.

DeVore continues to put her best foot forward, in and out of the show ring. Her customers are her family, and her horses her friends. Despite a lengthy list of challenges, DeVore has risen above, and beat the odds, to put herself on the map as one of the greatest woman horse trainers of our time.

With the help of her family, Wanda Westbrook, Derrick Westbrook, and husband Mitchell, DeVore has built a farm that is more than just a show stable, but a home for everyone who comes through the door.