

# BRINGING OUT THE BEST AT *Wallen West Farms* AND RIDING ACADEMY

by Erica Faulkner

Sunny California may not be the most popular area for saddle horse enthusiasts but those that do reside there are often on the list of the 'who's who' in the industry, and Robb and Betsy Wallen have made sure their Wallen West Farm is on that list. Their state-of-the-art facility is home to a diverse group of champions, and it is where riders of varying ages and skill levels call their home. Through the past years of family history, to the future that is in the hands of Betsy and Robb themselves, Wallen West Farm has put their name on the map.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME

The Wallen family name is a familiar one, both in and out of the horse industry, and spans five generations. Robb's parents, Dick and Marilyn Wallen, operated Dick Wallen Stables in Sioux City, Iowa, where many champions from all different breeds were created and trick horses trained, with Silver Flash IV being the most prominent and well-known. Their establishment was one of the largest saddle seat equitation school during that time.

Robb credits his mother with being the "unsung hero" of the family, ensuring that all 12 of her children (six of whom took up work in the horse industry) stayed in line. She also played an important part in instilling a strong faith for Jesus Christ within Robb. Robb pointed out that it was this foundation in Catholic education, cultivated by his mother's selfless sacrifices, that helped him develop the strong values and upstanding characteristics that he exhibits today.

Dick was most comfortable in the barn, as his life's work was to run the family farm. He stood out from his equestrian peers not only for his exceptional training of show ring champions, but also for his ability to turn out a trick horse, a talent that he passed on to Robb. Dick would spend his days while serving in World War II, entertaining the soldiers with his trick-donkey, as well as put on numerous performances with his famous white Saddlebreds during the early 1940's.

Robb spent his childhood years working alongside his father and siblings, in what his father said was 'the school of hard knocks,' developing a love and admiration for everything horses. His babysitter as a young child, was a 21-year-old, 16-hand chestnut Saddlebred gelding, Mr. X.

When Robb and Mr. X were not going for their leisurely rides around the property, Robb was off and running, partaking in any physical activity that stroked his fancy at the moment. He dabbled in football, basketball and wrestling (where he was the city champion at one time). A "closet pool player" as Betsy would say, he was also known to hustle others for money, using his wit and secret pool playing skills. However, his real love was for time spent in the great outdoors.

"When I was younger I left Iowa for Oregon to pursue my interest in forestry. I attended Chemeketa Community College in Salem, where I enrolled in the Forestry Program (with a minor in Psychology) which then lead me to job in the Cascade Mountains," Robb said.

However, looking back, Robb said that becoming a horse trainer was "meant to be" for him. Growing up in the industry, it seemed the best fit.

"I am thankful for the chance to follow in my father's footsteps. What a nice life this industry has given me and my family!"

His professional training career essentially began when he was 15-years-old. While in high school, Robb and his father worked together training Robb's horse at the time, Yankee Sensation, a beautiful 16-hand, flaxen mane and tail, American Saddlebred. Robb and Yankee Sensation were Robb's high school football team's mascot.

"When our team would score a touchdown, I would draw my sword, rear my horse, and charge down the sidelines. That year we won the state championship."

After attending college, he followed his roots back to the horse industry, accepting a private job in Rancho Santa Fe, California, at Kenalbee Farm. While there, he put many champions into the ring and caught the eye of Dr. Gene Scott. It was not long before he made the



Located in Temecula, California, Wallen West Farm is home to world-class horse and rider teams, organic produce, and the most amazing views of the Santa Anna Mountains (with a distant view of Big Bear Mountain).



Betsy and Robb Wallen said "I do" on Catalina Island, November 9th, 2002, amongst family and friends. (Pictured: Dick and Marilyn Wallen, Joyce Viets, Betsy and Robb Wallen, and Art Perry.)



Robb and Kenalbee's I'm No Angel, a junior five-gaited mare that Robb trained and later sold to Misdee Wrigley Miller. Miller credits Robb and the challenging mare with helping her build her early success in the Saddlebred industry.

move to Bradbury, California to work for Dr. Gene Scott at his Silver Oaks Ranch.

He continued to climb through the ranks thanks to his abundant success in the show ring and eventually went to work for Scripps-Miramar Ranch. While at Scripps-Miramar he was proudly part of the team that put Michele Macfarlane's CH Sky Watch and CH Buck Rogers in the ring for their 1988 winning world's championship performances.

It was during these early years, before going out on his own, that Robb worked a horse he said "catapulted my career." That horse was Kenalbee's I'm No Angel.

"She was the first gaited horse I worked when I came to California in 1987," Robb said.

A black junior five-gaited mare, Kenalbee's I'm No Angel was by Carey's Midnight Hour and out of CH Bonheur's Wild Raven, she was exciting, and challenging, as Robb said, "did she ever fit her name."

"I remember that year, how she really peaked at the Santa Barbara National Horse Show. And it was a good time for her to do so."

It was the junior five-gaited class, and Robb and the game black mare were in the ring with some of the best in country, including the world's champions three-year-olds from sections A and B at Louisville the previous year, and a junior mare that would be named the reserve world's champion junior five-gaited horse that year at Louisville.

"It was a highly competitive class," Robb said. "When the dust settled, Angel and I were called from the line up to pick up our blue ribbon. She gave me a world champion ride that night."

It was at that moment that Robb realized he truly could ride with the best of them. A couple years down the road he sold the exceptional mare to Misdee Wrigley Miller, who happened to be a customer at the time.



Betsy and her heart horse, homebred BVW Miss Scarlett (Tug Hill Whamunion x VHMf Miss Field of Dreams), have enjoyed much success together, competing and winning all over the west coast since 2010.

"I had mentioned to Misdee that she was available for purchase and that she was challenging. I told her that if should master this mare, that she could ride anything. And she did, she mastered that mare. And as Paul Harvey would say, 'and now we know the rest of the story.'"

It was more than evident at that time, that Robb was on the right path. Now, he just needed the right partner to accompany him on the journey.

## FINDING HIS BETTER HALF

Betsy's father was a college professor, and although her mother had an admiration for horses, she did not have a career built around them. However, Betsy herself was horse crazy from the very beginning. Her riding career began under the tutelage of Mary Woolverton with additional equitation instruction from the accomplished Mary Cockriel.

"She was the 'go to' person if wanted to learn equitation," Betsy said with admiration.

Throughout the year's Betsy won numerous champion honors, both in equitation and performance, with both Morgans and Saddlebreds, eventually adding Friesians to the list.

Having competed in variety of disciplines including everything from saddle seat to dressage, hunter over fences to western, and aboard an array of different breeds, Betsy has made many memorable show ring moments. She earned Top Ten placings in Hunt Seat, Saddle Seat and Western Seat medal finals (all in the same year), won all of the AMHA medal and equitation classes regionally in all the aforementioned seats, over her junior exhibitor career, and earned World Champion and Grand National Champion titles with Intrepid Behold GCH at the Morgan Grand National and World



Betsy competed at the 2002 Saddle Seat World Cup event held in South Africa. She is pictured riding Flaming Orchid, one of the donated horses provided for the competition.



Robb and his horse Yankee Sensation were his high school football team mascots, entertaining the spectators with their elaborate outfit and trick-horse performances.

*She gave me a world champion ride that night.*



The Wallen West family is a large one with Robb and Betsy along with some of their customers represented here. From left to right: Ashley Jeppesen, Brenda Bernstein, Betsy Wallen, Anna Christy, Robb Wallen, Austen Wallen, Anthony Palos, Ayva Palos, Delphine Bernstein and Stephanie Palos.



Robb and Betsy were pictured with the bronze of Robb's father, Dick Wallen and his trick horse Silver Flash IV sculpted by Maretta Kennedy, at the American Saddlebred Museum

Championship Horse Show. However, traveling to South Africa with the Saddle Seat World Cup Team in 2002 ranks near the top of the list of her achievements.

"Being a member of the World Cup Team in was amazing! Traveling to South Africa was an experience I will never forget on so many levels. The country was beautiful. Our hosts and the people we met so welcoming. They went out of their way to make sure our trip was memorable."

She also recalled the athleticism of the horses overseas, and how the classes during the competition often lasted much longer than most classes do today.

"I remember my first impression of their horses as well. They were big, solid boned with a deep heart girth and had so much stamina and power. Each class was long. You showed at each gait, going five or six times around a huge outdoor show arena. I loved everything about that trip!"

That trip to a foreign land helped Betsy learned what she was really made of, and the effects have been lasting.

"Besides learning about the wonderful country of South Africa, I also learned a lot about myself. It was kind of an introspective time in my life, and I feel like I learned how to rely on myself, trust my intuition, believe in myself a little bit more. I came back from that trip feeling more confident and stronger."

With so much positivity coming from her experience on the World Cup team, Betsy continues to support the program by encouraging the riders at Wallen West to partake in the process, with the hopes that one day they may follow her lead and become a part of the team.

"We have encouraged our riders to think about the World Cup team. I think it is a fabulous experience. At the California Futurity in October, 2019, the Young Rider's Team held their competition, United States vs Canada. Our riders were able to watch the rail classes and patterns, I think it gave them a much better sense of what is involved. I really hope they take the opportunity at some point in the Junior Exhibitor careers to try out."

Throughout her career, Betsy has had the honor of showing a number of champion horses, however, one horse stands out among the rest, BVW Miss Scarlett.



Betsy and Robb Wallen share their love of horses and competition with their son Austen, who shows Someone Pinch Me in the academy division.



Gayle Lampe and Robb Wallen took a drive through the Wallen West orchards with WC Murry Dickson. Lampe visits her friends at Wallen West Farm whenever she gets a chance to get to California.

Bred, raised and trained by Betsy herself, this expressive bay Morgan mare is out of VHM Miss Field of Dreams and by the late Tug Hill Whamunion.

"I bred her, raised her, and trained her. She is my go to horse at the barn. She will do anything for me."

Together this team has built and impressive list of wins since their first show in 2010 where they were victorious in the Amateur Morgan Hunter Pleasure class Betsy and Robb Wallen share their love of horses and competition with their son Austen, who shows Someone Pinch Me in the academy division.

at the Jingle Bell horse show. From there, the wins kept rolling in everywhere they went. Del Mar Charity Fair, California Futurity, Spotlight and Morgan Medallion Regional are just a few of the shows from which the left as the champions, most predominantly in the hunter divisions.

"She is a wonderful example of the Morgan breed that I am very passionate about," Betsy said.

Her love of the Morgan shines brightly as Betsy donates her time for the betterment of the breed. As young girl she was involved in the AMHA youth programs, acting as the American Morgan Horse Association's Regional Vice-President for Youth, the Youth President, and at age 18, the Morgan Youth Of The Year. And now, for the last 10 years, she has worked on the Morgan Grand National and World Championship Horse Show Committee. This year, she stepped up to a new challenge, and will be the Chairman for the show for 2020.

## BETTER TOGETHER

Betsy's and Robb's paths had crossed from time to time on the west coast show circuits, however it was not until Betsy was afforded the chance to write an article on the Wallen family that she would truly get to know Robb. It was from this interaction that their spark was ignited, and their futures became one.

Today, their Wallen West Farm sits atop 10 acres in wine country Temecula, California. Meticulously kept up by the Wallens and their employees, the farm is more than just a horse training facility; it is an organic

It was kind of an introspective time in my life, and I feel like I learned how to rely on myself, trust my intuition, *believe* in myself a little bit more.

farm as well. The organic orchards add beauty to the landscape and bear fruits such as ruby red grapefruit, persimmons, apples, lemons, pears, and more.

The farm itself is impressive. Boasting a large 1,200 square foot barn of which the 26 stalls are almost always full, with 16-foot-wide aiseways Robb commented that "there are plenty of areas to work a horse," citing the large outdoor arena, a bullpen the track around the entire perimeter of the property, and the rows through the 600-tree orchard. He also pointed out that even if the barn is full, they do their best to open up new space when needed to help accommodate anyone who may be interested in joining the barn family.

"The commute to work is all downhill," laughed Robb, as he explained that his day starts with a golf cart ride down to the barn, where he gets his music going, coffee in hand, and prepares to start the day, which includes everything from working young horses, to giving beginner through advanced riding lessons to children and adults alike.

"We like to start with the younger horses when we start our day," said Robb.

Giving the youngsters his utmost attention is important to Robb, as one of the goals of Wallen West is to produce quality show horses with good foundations for other trainers to build upon. The farm's breeding venture produces a manageable four to five foals a year, all of whom get nominated to all available futurities and sweepstakes.

"Our customers enjoy being part of the breeding process. It is not a huge portion of our farm, but it is part of it. We feel it's a great way for our customers to learn about the horses and really have a part in what goes on from start to finish with the training aspect. It's also our way to try to give back to the industry we love so much," Betsy said.

Robb handles most of the instruction and training at the barn, with Betsy working alongside him, giving her input from the ground, as well as helping with the lessons. Betsy quickly pointed out that one of Robb's top qualities is being able to teach a rider how to really ride not just sit atop their horse.

"I think Robb does a really great job at teaming a horse and rider," Betsy said. "Our kids are able to accept challenge of a sometimes-difficult mount, because of Robb's instruction. We are proud that our riders can get the most out of whatever they have for a horse."

And that goes for beginning riders, all the way to the ones at the top, such as former Wallen West client, Misdee Wrigley Miller. In an earlier interview in Saddle Horse Report Miller said, "He brought me a long way as a horsewoman. I always will credit him with that."

## DEFINING WALLEN WEST

Whatever you desire within the horse industry, Wallen West Farm can fulfill it. The Wallen's pride themselves on offering a range of services for their customers. Their focus does not lie in one aspect of the industry, but rather all of it.

"We really try to strike a balance," Robb said. "We really have to being out here in California. It's different out here. You can't survive if you just focus on one thing."

"We are not just focused on one thing, such as amateur riders or young horses," Betsy said. "We do our best to be all inclusive and offer a variety of experiences."

And it shows with the diversity of their show string.

The customers at Wallen West Farm enjoy a variety of activities at the farm; riding is just a small part of what the Wallen's offer. The farm is a place of fun and entertainment for all the customers, and visitors alike. They come together to go out to dinners, have parties, enjoy trips to exciting destinations, partake in camps, among other activities. Their ASHA Youth Group, Wallen West Golden Spurs (led by Cindy Kelledy), is an important part of the farm, offering a place for the children to get active within the industry. The group has accumulated numerous awards, donated their time to therapeutic riding facilities, held fundraisers and participated in the UPHA Ribbons of Service program. Weather someone wants to be a competitor in the ring,



Robb and his son Austen share the joy of competition and entertainment, bringing smiles to spectators during a costume class.

or just enjoy a horse, Wallen West will welcome them to the family.

"We don't like to pressure anyone to show. We, of course, pride ourselves on teaming top horses and riders, however, we also understand that, that is not the route everyone wants to go. And we appreciate that. Everyone is welcome here," said Robb.

Betsy and Robb not only love sharing their passion for the horses with their customers, but also with their son, Austen, who currently competes in the academy division. Betsy and Robb were proud parents this past year as Austen made the 5th grade honor roll, as well as graduated to a Boy Scout. For Austen himself, a personal thrill was during the Jingle Bell Horse Show when he exited the ring after his win and got to give an interview to R.H. Bennett of Richfield Video Productions.

This year, Betsy and Robb attended the UPHA Convention in Kentucky where Robb was awarded the title of UPHA Chapter 1 Horseman of the Year for 2019. While at the convention, they stopped by the American Saddlebred Museum to view the bronze sculpture of Dick Wallen and Silver Flash IV.



Betsy, Austen and Robb share a moment on the farm during a Kubota tractor commercial shoot.

"Attending the reception at the museum was special," said Betsy.

"We walked into the museum and seeing the bronze of my father, right there in front of us, center stage, was just a really great moment," Robb said.

Robb is also a large R judge, following in his father's footsteps, yet, "never really filling them," as Robb said.

Looking forward to the coming year, the Wallen's are excited to watch their young riders progress to new divisions and as Robb says, "close out their 13 and under careers with a bang!"

They take pride in each and every one of their riders, citing that watching their riders improve from last season to this coming one, is just one of the things they are anticipating for the 2020 show season, along with the hopes to return to Louisville, Kansas City and the Morgan Grand National and World Championship with a competitive string. And of course, watching Austen progress and move up to his next level of horse competition will be icing on the cake.

Betsy and Robb welcome visitors at any time, and as Robb said, "you may just get your photo taken with a trick horse or two."



Robb is a lover of everything outdoors and spent time as a ranger in the Cascade Mountains before turning his life over to the saddle horse industry.