

RANDY TABOR

THE FRIEND, THE HUSBAND, THE FATHER, THE TRAINER, THE BREEDER

BY BOB FUNKHOUSER

Even with the arrival of spring, these past several days have been considerably darker. The reason being, one of this earth's brightest lights was suddenly extinguished with the unexpected death of Scottsville, Ky., trainer/breeder Randy Tabor. His light was at its brightest; it never had a chance to grow dim and fade away.

A devoted husband to Paige and father to a daughter Elliott and son Will Henry, Tabor, 48, lost his life in an explosion while working on an oil tank located on one of the family's farms. The third generation horseman and his family have long worked the land in addition to breeding, developing and selling countless show ring stars. Tabor was hands on with all aspects of 3-T Farm. That's the way the Tabor family has done it for generations.

"Good foundation. Good businessman. Talented horseman. As astute a breeder as there was in the business," is the way longtime family friend Dr. Jerry Blevins, describes the late Tabor. "He was a Christian man who lived his faith. Randy was also a man that never let the little boy out of him."

One of his earliest nicknames was Rainbow. He remained vibrant throughout his life and his happy go lucky attitude rubbed off on all those who were around

him. He had a profound effect on many people

"I've known Randy since I was six years old," said fellow trainer Todd Miles. "We grew up in the horse business and became best friends. I told Paige [Tabor] that most people have lots of friends but their true friends you can count on one hand. Randy will always be on my one hand."

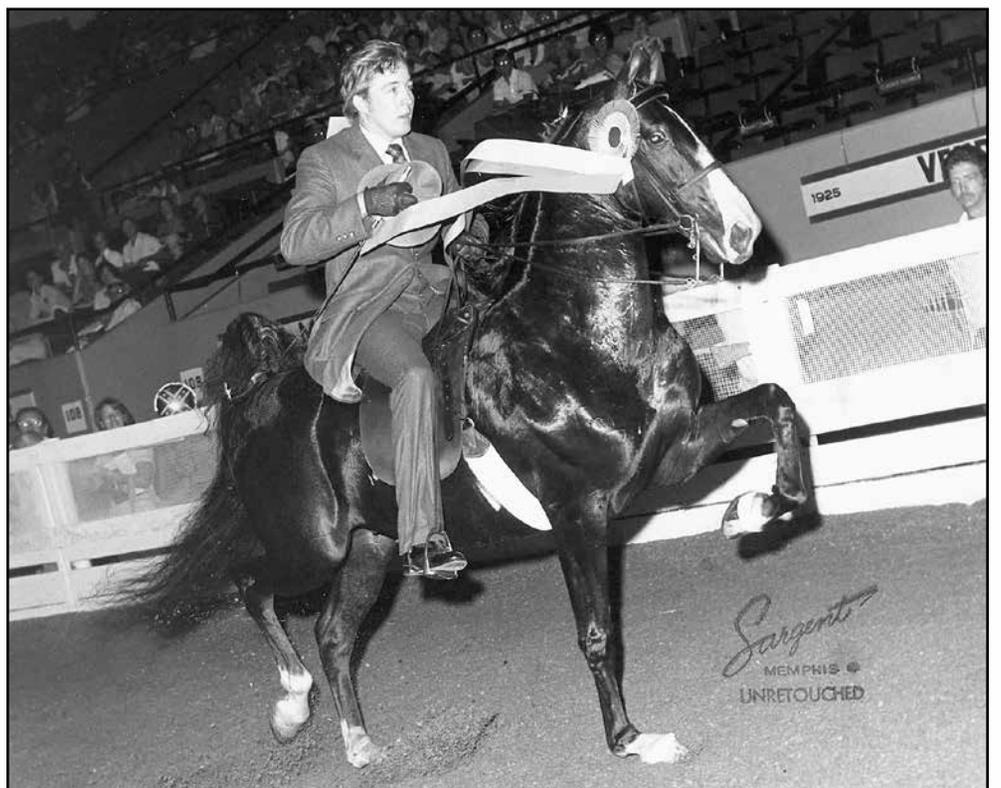
"Everyone had a great relationship with him. I was fortunate enough to enjoy many aspects of Randy. We had the horses, golf trips and ski trips. Our sons have grown up together and we have enjoyed that aspect as well. He was a fantastic family man and a very good husband. I doubt there's a better husband out there."

"Randy was always full of life. He had a special gift in every day life. In a few minutes after meeting Randy he made you feel like he was your best friend. I have tried to imitate that, but I can't do it like he did. Will Henry's got it. There will always be a part of Randy with us in Will Henry."

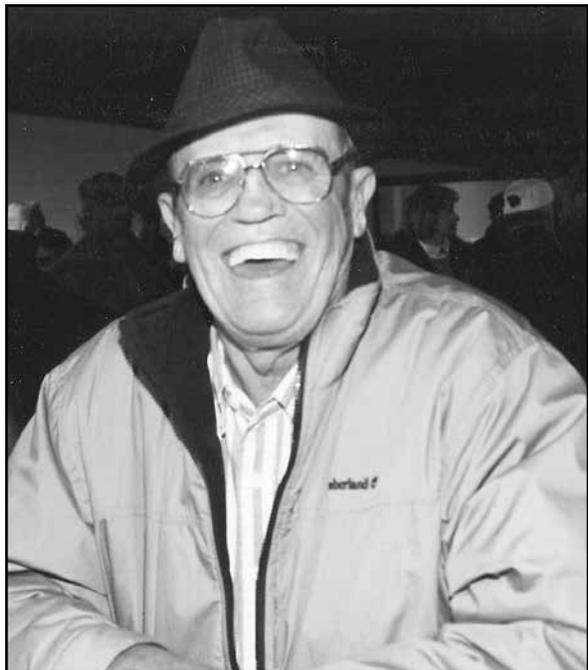
"He was a special person. I'll never have a better friend," said Mike Felty, another



The loss of horseman Randy Tabor has shocked the industry.



Riding Sport N Life, Randy made victory pass after victory pass.



Randy and his father Glyndle (pictured) turned 3-T Farm into one of the greatest modern day Saddlebred nurseries.

fellow horseman and golfing partner. "For me and Steve Crabtree it was like losing a brother."

It's amazing the number of stories and great memories that were shared with Tabor. His circle of friends might have been as large as anyone's. You can't find a person with something bad to say about him. He was a person with so many good qualities that different people took different parts of him to try and duplicate.

"The Tabor family has been a huge part of making our 'horse life' fun, winning, challenging, and always entertaining," said Elizabeth Deknatel. "We met more than 20 years ago because of the horses, and our friendship has grown to so much more! Randy had a way of always being on the right side. He was energetic, sharp minded, a great storyteller and a true and honest friend. We are blessed to have known him and we will miss him every day.

"One of his most admirable qualities was being completely present when you were with him. He gave you his all. You completely had him. My children have picked up on that and tried to use it in their lives. I told Paige, 'Thank you for sharing him with us.' I can't imagine Randy's calls not being a part of my life anymore."

"His ability to get along with people. His way of getting what he wanted done and make you think it was your idea is something I'll never forget about him," added Carriage Lane trainer and close friend John Conatser. "He could come into a room and disarm people with his personality. I've tried to



This collage of family pictures was present for the funeral. Life at 3-T Farm revolved around family.

utilize that, but can't come close to the way he did it.

"He also had the ability to not let problems bother him or weigh him down. I haven't been able to do that nearly as well either," chuckled Conatser. "He's one of those people you don't want to do without. I've never known any person with more reason to live. He had the perfect life, as good as it gets. On our golf trips we would talk about always remembering these special times because there's no guarantee of tomorrow. Randy told me that when that time came, 'I'm ready.'"

Tabor's radiant personality was matched only by his faith in God. That has been the one comforting piece of this earthly tragedy. This strong faith was a family trait that has been the glue for the Tabors, generation after

generation. As we say in the horse business, he was bred right. Tabor's parents, Glyndle and Nadine, are the salt of the earth. He got his good nature and attitude from them and his love of God and life was infectious to all that were around.

"He made life fun. He always told you something to make you laugh," said Nelson Green. "If he ever had a bad day in his life you never knew it. Randy was the most unique person I've ever known in the horse business. I was just crazy about him.

"His wit and sense of humor were outstanding. His intelligence was something. He could figure out a way to build a better mousetrap every time. He knew how to do business and was real innovative. Randy had a country boy persona, but not a country boy mentality.

"The horse business will miss him," continued Green. "He raised a lot of horses and they would train and sell. Randy could train a horse. Used to, you could go down there and buy three-year-olds that were just about ready to show. You would do really well with them and then everybody started going down there and buying colts. Now you're lucky to get a green two-year-old. We will not replace him."

Green had great success doing business with Tabor. Over the years he bought stars like Worthy Memories, Net Worth, In Reality, Trust Worthy, and Peppermint Sonburst at 3-T Farm. Another trainer who has enjoyed great success buying young horses from Tabor has been Minnesota trainer Tom Scott.

"I've done a lot of business with Randy," said Scott. "He was a horse trader and he got what he thought they were worth. He stood behind his product. If something didn't work out he'd trade back for it. He was a delight to do business with. That's why we kept going back.

"I bet 80 percent of the colts I've bought from him have worked out. I got Victoria Lynn, Linkin Park, Indigo Joe, Heir Dazzle and My Pepper Ann from him. Right now I've got the best colts I've ever had and they came from Randy. Half of my barn right now is Tabor. I was just out there hugging them. I still can't believe he's gone."

Tabor and his father Glyndle also had nice horses that they developed. Some they even showed, but most of that was early on. Randy had his ponies, Cheerful Charlie and Beau's Chocolate Chip. Later would come Fancy Miniken who went on to be a multi-titled world's champion with Ellen Ogletree. One of his first top gaited horses was Sharp Tack who also went on to garner championship after championship.

Tabor developed a business relationship with Linda Cummins at Silver Lining Stables and purchased, among others, the dynamic, little black gaited horse Sport 'N Life and the colorful gaited mare turned three-gaited world's champion, In Reality.

Glyndle Tabor gave his son a great start



In Reality came out with Tabor as a gaited mare but never really liked to rack. He figured it out and came back to Freedom Hall with her mane off and she became a celebrated world's champion.

in the training barn. That's all the young Tabor ever wanted to do, was be a horse trainer. To help pursue that goal he left the family nest and worked for Hall of Fame trainer Bill Wise at his Valhalla Farm in Danville, Ky. While there he developed several nice horses including the top gaited mare Valhalla's Black Angel.

"I was judging a show and Randy was showing a gaited pony against the current world's champion Little Sister. She hardly trotted one way of the ring so I put them on a workout and Little Sister ended up beating Randy and his pony. She came back and beat them again in the championship but Randy came to talk to me after the show and thanked me for the opportunity to try and beat her.

"He also asked me if I ever hired anyone and I told him that I did. He said that when he got out of school that he would like to come work for me. I told him that would be fine and when he got out, he called and said he was on the way."

Tabor was working with and showing horses for one of the best. According to Wise he was watching, listening and learning. He was also a better horseman and worker than he thought he would be.

"I was so happy with him I called him into the office to give him a raise. I said, 'Randy, I want to talk to you about your

work.' His face turned white as a ghost thinking I was disappointed with him. I told him I was giving him a raise and when he left the office his feet were off the ground higher than a hot air balloon.

"He had only been working for me about a year when I had to call him into the office and tell him that his dad had a heart attack. I told him his dad was stabilized so not to go tearing down the road, but that he needed to go home and be with his family. He came back a few weeks later and said he didn't know what to do. I asked him what he thought he should do. He said, 'I think I should go home and help out.' I hated to lose him, but I would have been disappointed if he hadn't wanted to go home. That's when he started calling me 'Daddy Bill.'"

The education Tabor received while at Valhalla Farm helped round him into the horseman that he became. That education was particularly helpful when the Tabor family joined W.L. Sigmon in purchasing the breeding stallion Worthy Son (Supreme Sultan x Jasper Lou) from Vincent Glad. A long line of useful show horses were born at 3-T and began their careers under Tabor's guidance, then sold to trainers of all levels across the country. Whether it was a star on the regional circuits or in the spotlight at the national level, trainers and owners alike were happy with their purchases.

"He had a knack for it. He thought like a horse," said Wise of Tabor's training ability. He was a natural talent. Randy could get a horse's head up where it belonged."

"I don't mean this in a bad way, but Randy could get more done doing less than anybody I've ever seen," said best friend Todd Miles. "He could figure things out quicker. He'd find a way to get it done."

Horseman after horseman praised Tabor's training abilities. There are many lofty comments from some of the most successful in the business.

"Randy was a great horseman who chose not to pursue the show ring," added John Conatser. "His horses were really high headed and light footed. He got a lot out of a horse

without overworking it and taking its bloom away. He was a master salesman and had a business model that fit his approach. He was like Frank Sinatra. He did it his way!"

The Tabor family jumped deeper and deeper into the breeding business. After a few years of Worthy Son being the headline act at 3-T Farm, Roseridge Heir, a.k.a. Reggie, joined the prolific sire in the breeding shed. Actually it was in the breeding pasture. That was another unique trait Tabor was known for. His high conception rate from pasture breeding has been well noted.

Roseridge Heir (Madeira's Gift x Cedar Creek My Red Rose) was a stallion Tabor sold to Dr. Jerry Blevins and his family in nearby Bowling Green. They bought him for a harness horse to show locally, but it wasn't working out for them.

"I called Randy and told him that this wasn't working and we wanted to sell him. He said he didn't really have any interest in buying him back, but I said, 'You don't know how badly I don't want him.' I told him what I wanted for him and he said he'd be over with a trailer that afternoon. Who would have guessed he turned out to be the breeding stallion that he did?"

Roseridge Heir died this past summer. He left behind a group of top champions he had sired over his the course of his career including Coe's Gifted Heir, Nice Doing Business, Aisling's Treasure, James Lewis, The Rose Lady, Himalaya, Have You Ever, Here I Am Again, Yes I Have, Miss Outta My Way, Heir Dazzle, Linkin Park and Captain Roseridge.

The offspring of Worthy Son and Roseridge Heir were enough for the industry to recognize Glyndle and Randy Tabor as the 2001 ASHA Breeders Of The Year. It was one of the few times they stood in the spotlight. Their approach has always been from behind the scenes. While trainers and knowledgeable owner/breeders held Tabor in the highest esteem, many Saddlebred followers have said, "Randy who?" And that was fine with him.

Before his death, "Randy who" became one of the largest owners of American Saddlebreds in the country and right up there with Callaway Hills as the largest and most prolific breeder. Fifty some foals are expected this year. According to Mike Felty this



Riding with son Will Henry was one of Randy's greatest joys.

was something Tabor was extremely proud of. "He wanted to be the largest breeder. He didn't want to stay that way, but for a year or so, he wanted to be the biggest. That's something he was very proud of"

Tom Scott referred to Tabor as one of the luckiest son of a bucks he's ever known and he's right. He spent a lifetime doing what he loved. He found a true soul mate who friend after friend say is his mirror image. Paige Tabor made his life complete and together with their children formed an unbreakable family unit, giving others an example for which to follow.

With faith and lots of support, Paige has been rock solid through these dark days. She delivered his eulogy and has held together the family and staff at 3-T. Tabor's longtime right hand, Hillary Whittaker, has also been there for the farm and family. Whittaker, along with Bobby McGivor, Kay Murray, Beau Tabor, and Adam Tattersall are holding down the fort while Tabor's death sinks in. Currently there are three stallions (Worthy Prodigy, American Legend, and More Traditional) standing to the numerous farm owned mares and lots of colts to bring start..

"We'll continue to do what we do," said Whittaker. "For right now we just have to act like Randy is on one of those long golf trips.

"Besides all of the Saddlebred babies he was very excited about the Dutch harness horse crosses. He went to Holland and imported some mares and a young stallion. Randy was really getting into these crosses."

The future of 3-T farm is something that will have to be figured out. Tabor was very proud of the fact he was a third generation horseman. He also shared with many friends that he would be delighted if his son Will Henry was a fourth.

"I told Will Henry that it's unfair he had to lose his daddy and that is a hurt that will be with him for a long time," said Todd Miles whose son Tyler is best friends with Will Henry Tabor. I also told him he just gained a stepfather and brother and that we will always be here for him. If this is something he wants to do we will help him and I'd be honored to teach him. No matter what he wants to do, we'll be there for him."

It's friendship and support like this that will help Paige, Elliott, Will Henry, Glyndle, and Nadine Tabor pull through. That friendship

is widespread because that's the same friendship Tabor gave to person after person. It didn't matter if they were a childhood buddy, a local amateur/owner/trainer, or a potential big time customer Randy Tabor made them feel at ease, feel like he cared about their life, their families.

"I just showed Linkin Park last night [at Oklahoma Centennial] and I've never been as nervous in my life," said Todd Miles referring to the horse Tabor had bred and started. "I've never wanted to win a class so badly. Randy was with me because this was the best this colt has ever been for me. I dedicated that ride and the rest of this year to Randy."

Other friends are still dealing with the loss and trying to step up and be strong, knowing that's what he would have done for them.

"I was driving down to the funeral and I'm thinking about what I'm going to say to Glyndle and Nadine," explained John Conatser. "I'm thinking, 'What can I possibly say that could give them any comfort?'"

"I didn't have a clue what I was going to do, but when I got there I told them that in our society today we like to say that all men are created equal. However, not every man is created special. Randy Tabor was created special."

Rainbow, rest in peace with your Maker and know that you left this world a much better place for us all. God didn't intend for your light to flicker. It will burn brightly with us forever.....