

## FOR THE LOVE OF THE BREED

### A Tale of a Fifty Year Breeder

Tom Hennigh reached an important milestone this year. For fifty *accumulative* years, he has been raising American Quarter Horses. It wasn't just any Quarter Horse that caught his eye, but the Skipper W Quarter Horses. This one amazing bloodline stole his heart many years ago, and has stayed with him until this day.

In 1956 Tom, a United States Air Force Veteran, returned home from the Korean War to his little home town of Windsor, Illinois. While he was gone a neighbor down the road, Glenn Ferrell, had acquired some horses. The neighbor's young son Arlie rode by one day on the most beautiful buckskin mare Tom had ever seen. She turned out to be a Skipper W mare named Nicka Maria by Nick W. The Ferrells had also purchased a stallion named Skipper Jr., one of the first sons of Skipper W. (See them in *The Hank Wiescamp Story* by Frank Holmes, page 122) These two superior horses inspired Tom to follow his heart and begin his fifty year journey as Hennigh Quarter Horses.

While giving plenty of credit to Hank Wiescamp for this remarkable breed, Tom always likes to acknowledge the work and dedication of Warren Shoemaker whose horses were the beginning of this extraordinary line, and "went on to make the Skipper W's famous". Tom says, "Warren Shoemaker was a person I considered a friend. To me he was a cattleman, horseman, and a true westerner. I thought of him as a real life John Wayne because that was the way he lived." A cherished gift given to Tom from Warren still hangs on his wall, a large collage of Warren and his many horses.

Over the years Tom has raised too many horses to name. A few of the more well known stallions include: *Spot Cash (son of Skipper W)*, *Skips Assist (AQHA superior halter and ROM in pleasure)*, *Skips Retreat (son of Skipper King)*, *Skip Topkick (his own amazing trick horse)*, and *BH Skips Assist (one of the few black Skipper W stallions; see a picture of St Three Bar, his grandsire, in "The Hank Wiescamp Story" page 157*. He's also owned branded mares, and mares by stallions such as: Skipper King, Skips Assault, Skips Retreat, Skip Sting (by Skippers Lad), Spot Cash, Skipper Jr. and Skippers Lad.

Through the years Tom has not only worked with his own horses, but has worked to promote the entire Quarter Horse Industry. He was Public Relations Director for the Solid Gold, and the International Livestock Show in Springfield, Illinois. He was a fundraiser for the Little Britches Rodeo and Benefit for Needy Children in Colorado Springs, Colorado. More recently he was an Investigator for the Bureau of County Fairs and Horse Racing in the state of Illinois, where he inspected over 900 head of horses at various farms, and did drug testing at state run races and authenticated winners.

Tom held his own Skipper W Select Sale in Shelbyville, Illinois; put on bull buck outs, Professional Rodeos, and High School Rodeos. He's worked with such men as Ben Johnson, whom he thought was a truly down to earth and personable man who never held himself above anyone; Doug McClure, a very nice man; Buck Taylor, a talented artist whose autographed painting hangs in Tom's living room; and James Drury, who rode Topkick "the trick horse" once.

Two of Tom's loves were team penning and entertaining children all over the U.S. with Topkick, a gorgeous palomino stallion who performed 25 tricks (*now deceased*). Doing benefits for needy and handicapped children was at the top of their list. The smiles and enjoyment on the faces of the children were unforgettable. Tom went to the World Show with a team penning mare named 'Lady Skip Seeker' who is still on the farm today. At the World Show he enjoyed visiting with Orren Mixer on more than one occasion, and on Christmas Eve in 2000 was totally surprised when a delivery man came to the door with a package containing two paintings autographed by Orren bearing personal greetings of Merry Christmas and Best Wishes.

The AQHA not only verified that Tom made the Fifty Year Breeder Award program this year; they also told him something else. He is the first in the State of Illinois to do so. That was something that he hadn't even considered, but was very proud to hear. He has one more goal that he would like to add to that list. Before he retires he would like to also reach the Legacy Award, the award for 50 *consecutive* years of raising American Quarter Horses. He plans to reach that goal in 2012. He doesn't plan to quit any time soon, but his thoughts so far, "***It's been a great run***".

*By: B.K. Hennigh*