

The *Spirit* of a *Survivor*

BettyAnn and Brandi
Photo by Andrew Ryback Photography



By Dani Moritz

The word “incredible” is hardly sufficient to describe 64-year-old BettyAnn Kolba’s story. In fact, I honestly cannot fathom a word to describe her undying devotion to horses, her spirit, her strength and her determination.

BettyAnn is one of those rare people who can go through hell without blinking, who has unwavering faith and who epitomizes kindness.

When I began chatting with BettyAnn, our conversations were simple. She had been selected as Sidelines’ January mascot – so we exchanged some basic information and I asked her some questions. When I realized she lives close to my family home near Chicago, we decided we would meet in person at Jaynesway Farms in Bartlett, Illinois, where she keeps her beautiful mare and fellow Sidelines mascot, Brandi. She even offered the opportunity to ride Brandi and who could turn down such an offer?

Upon meeting BettyAnn, I quickly realized she is so much more than a successful adult amateur who happened to win our contest with her adorable photo of Brandi showcasing the mare’s “cover girl smile.”

This is the story of a woman I am honored to have had the opportunity to meet. Although I may have only met her a few months ago, I consider her a friend, a mentor and a role model – and I know many of you will also after reading her story.

The Very Beginning

As a four-year-old little girl, BettyAnn became obsessed with drawing the same picture. Every day through college she would pick up her drawing materials and bring to life the same chestnut horse with a big white blaze and four white legs. Little did she know that one day her dreams would become reality and she would be face-to-face with the horse she had illustrated for all those years. But that fateful meeting would not be for years to come, for this is the beginning of her story.

BettyAnn was not born into the horse world. Like many other first generation horsemen and women, BettyAnn’s passion for horses was, to put it kindly, peculiar to her normal parents who didn’t understand the drive to trade relaxing weekends for early mornings and manure-filled wheel barrows.

During a Sunday country drive with her dad, BettyAnn (then five-years-old) spotted a horse show from the car. As she hung tightly to her window, she watched in awe as a beautiful bay

Continued on page 130



*BettyAnn and Brandi showing off their jumping style.
Photo by Connie OC Photos.*

horse jumped a hedge. Right then and there, she was hooked. She demanded her parents stop the car and begged for a riding lesson.

Reluctantly, her parents obliged. "They thought riding would be smelly, I would step in poo and won't want to do it," BettyAnn explained. "So the next Saturday he [my dad] took me there and got a lesson for me. After the lesson, I hung onto the horse's leg and said, 'I don't want to go home. I am going to live at the barn.'"

It didn't take long for her parents to realize just how serious she was. BettyAnn laughs that she was so determined that most Saturdays, if mom had better things to do, she would run away from home and head to the Hinsdale barn, a 10-mile walk and 20 minute car ride.

Eventually, her parents gave in. BettyAnn was working for her \$2.50 weekly lesson (she had two paper routes, cut grass and walked dogs) and she had proved that nothing was going to keep her away from horses.

A Passion for Learning

BettyAnn went on to spend her entire life devoting herself to improving as a rider and horsewoman, learning from as many expert horsemen as possible.

In high school, she continued her lessons and rode other people's horses as she improved. She spent summers riding in Michigan with Max and Nancy Bonham, then met Alyce Hinkle, who had trained with the British three-day team.

With Alyce's help, BettyAnn took her riding to the next level and attended her first Washington International Horse Show as a spectator (which then turned into a life-long obsession to ride there). She also learned the ropes of training and reselling horses, which funded her college education at the University of Tampa.

"I would get horses off the track, train them, sell them, pay my tuition, have a little extra and buy another horse. That's how I started working with racing Thoroughbreds. I find it funny that people are just now rediscovering the ability of Thoroughbreds to show."

While in college, she met trainer Frank Conway who was working at Two Rivers Hunt Club. Frank would introduce her to one of her greatest influences and mentors – the one and only George Morris.

Recollecting on her first clinic with George, a grin snuck across BettyAnn's face. "I just fell in love with the man. I was just like, 'He's so brutal. I love it.'"

BettyAnn was just that kind of rider. She wanted to be the



*BettyAnn with George Morris during his November clinic at Telluride Farm in Hampshire, Illinois.
Photo by Melissa Lorusso*

best, so she gave it her all - 100 percent of the time.

A Miraculous Recovery

When BettyAnn returned to Illinois after school, she began riding with Wally Holly, then with Dick Cheska. At the time, she owned two horses – one an OTTB preliminary eventer and the other a youngster named No Secrets with a bad abscess who ended up being a remarkable success.

After eight months, No Secrets, aka Ottis, abscess finally burst and healed, and he was ready to start hacking, but fate had other plans for BettyAnn.

When it seemed everything was falling into place, the world came crashing down on her. A drunk driver broadsided her – it didn't look like she would make it.

When an emergency crew arrived at the scene, they couldn't even find her. They thought she had been ejected from the car, but her body had actually been shoved through the dashboard and she was inside the engine. At the hospital, she was given last rites; she was clinically dead.

"I could hear what people were saying," she said. "I understood what they were saying. I just couldn't wake up. Finally, when I did wake up, they told my parents, 'she'll be blind and crippled and a vegetable.'"

That prognosis wasn't going to work for BettyAnn. She knew she had more to accomplish – she knew it wasn't over. "There's something that tells you when you're OK and when you're not and I knew I was OK."

Despite her body literally being crushed, within two months she was back at the barn. Dick's boys, Richard and Donald, had been bringing her young horse along. Because giving up wasn't (and isn't) in her vocabulary, she found herself back in the saddle within a week.

Continued on page 132

"I couldn't even close my hands around the reins because my broken hands had been in splints. Well, when my gloves got wet and they dried, they got stiff and shriveled up so I would pull the gloves on and force my hands to curl. Every time I would pull them on, the gloves would curl my hands more until I could close them."

After only two months of riding, she took the young horse to a show, broke his green, became the Amateur Owner champion and qualified for a horse show at Madison Square Garden by the end of the year. She then rode with Alex Jayne when the Cheskas moved to Wisconsin.

Tragedy Strikes Again ... And Again

Unfortunately, BettyAnn worked for an airline and was transferred to Puerto Rico so she wasn't able to take No Secrets to Indoors. "Work took over and I ended up out of horses for about 20 years," she explained.

She returned to riding in 2003 when she got a call from a friend saying they needed to put a Thoroughbred down because they had lost the farm and nobody else could handle him. BettyAnn couldn't let that happen so she took in the Thoroughbred, named Rusty, who she ended up trading for an OTTB from the feed lot who became This Bud's For Me, or Buddy. The old, toothless man is still with her today, happily stalled next to Princess Brandi and always eager for some TLC.

Around the same time, BettyAnn also purchased her friend's Quarter Horse/Warmblood. "He was a roping horse who looked like a fat, shaggy, short legged Corgi, but I loved him at first sight. I took a lot of grief about him because everyone thought he was so 'ordinary.' I told them they would eat their words. After patiently retraining him, I was able to put six different riders on him to show. My plain little cow horse was Illinois Hunter Jumper Association (IHJA) End of the Year Champion in numerous divisions for three years. 'My Teddy Bear' and I watched a lot of people eat word sandwiches!"

Once again, it appeared that everything was coming together. But a year later, BettyAnn found herself in the hospital once again – this time with a life threatening illness. A failed surgery and two years of being in and out of the hospital later, BettyAnn left the hospital with a poor prognosis. She didn't expect to live, but this wouldn't be the first time she cheated death.

A Redheaded Mare

Determined to find her way back to the Washington International Horse Show, BettyAnn went straight to the barn the very day she was released from the hospital. When she walked into the indoor, she froze in her tracks.

There she was – that chestnut mare with the four white legs and a blaze that she had spent her life drawing pictures of since she was four-years-old. Somehow, somehow she had found the horse she dreamt about her whole life.

"I hobbled over to the teen [who owned Brandi] and said, 'Hi. I'm Betty and I am going to buy your horse.' She said, 'OK sure...' and we both laughed," BettyAnn recollected.

That mare was N'Style, aka Brandi, and she would become BettyAnn's physical and mental therapy – and, most importantly, her best friend. Melissa Lorusso, the teen who owned Brandi, kindly allowed BettyAnn to ride and show Brandi.

The week she met Brandi, BettyAnn decided she was going to go to Equifest for her first show, which drew nearly 1,000 horses. She hadn't been riding because she was so sick, but she decided to try anyway, with the help of her longtime Jaynesway instructor Loreal Fricano Urso. On the Tuesday before the show, she trotted Brandi. On Wednesday, she cantered and took a few cross rails and on Thursday they arrived at the show grounds – having never ridden a course together. On Friday, BettyAnn



BettyAnn with her "date" Nacho during Doug Boyd's open house in Mettawa, Illinois.

Photo courtesy of BettyAnn Kolba

and Brandi eagerly headed for the show ring.

"We were walking out of the schooling ring and going up the hill. Something clicked right there. She won every class and champed in our first show. You could tell Brandi was just happy and nobody was more shocked than me. I felt that if I died tomorrow, my dreams had come true. We did one or two shows that season and ended up in the ribbons at the end of the year."

Completely in love with the redheaded mare, BettyAnn officially purchased Brandi on New Year's Day in 2009. Together, they have racked up dozens of wins in Medals and Adult Amateur 51+ classes. They even realized BettyAnn's dream of heading back to the Washington International Horse Show. She took her savings and a group of dear friends (including Alyce, the trainer who took her to her first WIHS) and enjoyed the thrill of a lifetime, ending up in 15th place.

"Brandi has won six IHJA Medal Finals, ranked third in USEF HOTY Awards, is a Derby winner, WIHS, M&S, and NAL winner, but mostly she's my little redheaded mare that I adore with all my heart," BettyAnn said.

About the writer: Dani Moritz is a graduate of William Woods University with majors in Equine General Studies and Communications and is currently pursuing a Masters In Strategic Leadership at Stephens College. She is the assistant editor for Sidelines Magazine and the proud owner of a beautiful Paint/Arabian mare named September. She is also the 2012 American Horse Publications Student Award winner.

Pretty in Pink & Grand Prix Barbie

BettyAnn Kolba is absolutely well known for one thing in particular - her love of pink. A quick peek at Princess Brandi's stall and you'll notice pink brushes, pink blankets, pink buckets – pink, pink, pink! BettyAnn even owns her signature pink margarita maker that she brings to shows. "If it's made in pink, I have it," she said.

And if not's made in pink, she'll make it. She has designed custom lavish saddle pads, "diamond" polos, fly bonnets, trunk covers, you name it, she does it. Before long, all the barn kids at Jaynesway Farm (where she boards Brandi and Bud) wanted their own custom BettyAnn-made products, so Divine Equine Designs was born. Before she knew it, she was working full-time filling orders. You can check out her website at divineequinedesigns.com.

But horses aren't the only ones who benefit from BettyAnn's creative pursuits. Twice a year Jaynesway has a schooling show. They have many kids who only get to show at these events. She outfits these riders in what she calls Grand Prix Barbie Dress Up. "I have been very blessed that a lot of people helped me along the way and I got to show all across the country. We've only got twice a year to get these kids into it. I have acquired clothing in every size and I get the kids properly dressed for their big show," she explained.

BettyAnn collects everything from boots to hunt coats, shirts,

breeches, new helmets and gloves when they are on sale so she can lend them to riders for the schooling shows. She stores all the clothes and items in her "Tack Shack," a converted hot dog shop on the barn's property. Riders (young and old) borrow clothes or purchase them and, when they have outgrown them, exchange them for new ones.



While she certainly doesn't make any money doing this, BettyAnn doesn't mind. "If it gives them the bug, if it gives them that thrill or that show ring experience once or twice a year, it's worth it. If they decide it's more than a passing fancy and this is really what they want to do, then I can help them move up. You pay it forward. People always helped me with my horse dreams. I don't have kids, so I take these kids and I dress them up and hope they also find that thrill."

GGT™
GERMAN GEO TEXTILE
FOOTING

GGT Footing™ is proud to sponsor the newly installed GGT Footing™ arena at the New Bridge Polo and Country Club in Aiken, SC. A special Thank You to Joe Watkins of Longwood Arena for his construction of the arena and footing installation!

LONGWOOD ARENAS

Accept no imitations! Get the real GGT- Footing™ textiles! No fillers and the perfect footing results.

Contact **Cynthia Brewster-Keating**
National Account Manager
864.804.0011
ggt@polysols.com
www.ggt-footing.com