



# Gary And Marlene Howard: For The Love Of The Game

by LARRY BORTSTEIN

If Fran Hays hadn't asked her business partner to date her daughter a quarter-century ago, there would be no Brendan, Britt or Tiffani Howard today.

There probably wouldn't have been a stakes-winning mare named Lil Sister Stich.

And there certainly wouldn't have been a world-record-setting three-year-old California-bred colt named Bob Black Jack.

A dark bay or brown son of Stormy Jack—Molly's Prospector, by Native Prospector, Bob Black Jack, bred by Gary and Marlene Howard in partnership with Bruce Dunmore, turned in the fastest six-furlong clocking in history on Jan. 26, when he blazed the distance in 1:06.53 on the Cushion Track at Santa Anita Park to win the \$250,000 Sunshine Millions Dash Stakes at Sunhine Millions VI.

The Howards are co-owners of Stormy Jack, an 11-year-old Bertrando stallion who won four stakes races and earned \$596,673. Stormy Jack stands for \$2,500 at Harris Farms in Coalinga, California. Bob Black Jack, whom they sold for \$4,500, is the first stakes winner for his sire, who is expected to be bred to 80 mares this year after covering only 27 in 2007.

Above all, the story of Gary and Marlene Howard of Hemet, California, is a love story.



Their deep and abiding love for each other, as well as for horses, has been the dominant force in the lives of these Utah natives. It has carried them through good times and hard times to a point of present contentment.

And Fran Hays started it all.

She and Gary Howard were partners in a company that had 17 trucks hauling heavy equipment around the country. Fran had a daughter, Marlene Averett, and like all mothers, was concerned about her child's future welfare.

"She asked me a few times to take her out," Gary recalled. "I wasn't sure it was a good idea, but finally I did. A few months later, we got married."

A mutual love of horses was one of the things that drew the couple close. He had grown up on a cattle ranch in Nephi, Utah, a town of 3,000, and she had come from Logan, Utah, about 50 miles away, where she rode as a girl.

"It's funny how we both started out in Utah, but we met in California," Marlene said. "When we went out to dinner that first time, he and I talked about the horses we owned."

In quick fashion, the marriage produced three children—sons Brendon, now 23, and Britt, 21, and a daughter, Tiffani, who is 20. Brendon is married and both Britt and Tiffani will be married later this year.



Marlene & Gary Howard

Lil Sister Stich—\$150,000 California Cup Distaff Handicap—November 2, 2002.

While raising their young family, the Howards developed Hideaway Farms in what was then a sleepy parcel of the San Jacinto-Hemet area east of Los Angeles.

"Before we settled here, we looked all over for property," Marlene recalled. "We went up to Santa Barbara and Solvang. But this place was already set up. We got to thinking this would be the right place to start a horse business."

With Gary training and Marlene handling the breeding end of the operation, they built Hideaway Farms into a success.

Along the way, they acquired a partner who has become one of the closest friends in their lives. He is Bruce Dunmore, an aerospace engineer from Albuquerque, New Mexico, who is the third owner of Stormy Jack and co-breeder of Bob Black Jack.

Dunmore met the Howards nearly 20 years ago when, after buying a horse at the CTS (California Thoroughbred Sales) Del Mar Yearling Sale, he asked for a recommendation on where to ship it.

"The man suggested Gary and Marlene's place," Dunmore said. "We've been together in the horse business ever since."

Dunmore marvels at Marlene Howard's eye for horses, a talent she acknowledges, but is at a loss to explain its origins.

"I start with the position that no horse has perfect conformation," she said. "A knee or an ankle might be a little off. You go from there. Bob Black Jack wasn't at the farm long enough for me to spot any weaknesses. But, for example, Lil Sister Stich was a little long in the pasterns."

Lil Sister Stich, a daughter of the Howards' stallion Seattle Bound, out of the Never Tabled mare Never Tarnished, was the most successful horse the couple raced. She won all three of her 6 1/2-furlong starts down Santa Anita's downhill turf course, including the grade III Monrovia Handicap in 2002, and also captured a pair of California Cup events—the Distaff Starter Handicap in 2001, and the Distaff Handicap the following year.

She was named for Marlene's mother, who had been a seamstress. "She was going to be named 'Lil Sister Stich' but the name came back wrong," Gary said. "It would have been bad luck to change it, so we left it alone."

Two autumns ago, Ben Warren asked the Howards about selling the property to him. Last summer the sale was finalized and Warren launched his own ambitious program.

"I want to breed and raise a Kentucky Derby winner out here," Warren said.

The Howards are still active training for Ben Warren at his facility. "People get the idea that we sold because we were having financial problems," Gary Howard said. "That's not true. We sold because Ben made us a great offer."

Dunmore is in remission from multiple myeloma, a cancer which left his bones soft and fragile and which was diagnosed two years ago. A former football player at Southern Methodist University in his native Dallas, he lost more than 60 pounds from his once-powerful frame.

"I don't travel much anymore," he said. "But if Bob Black Jack gets to the Kentucky Derby, I'll try to get there."

Though all three of the Howards' children helped at the farm when they were growing up, daughter Tiffani is the only one that has stayed close to horses.

"When she gets married on May 25, she'll ride out in a horse and buggy," Marlene Howard said. "She's the listed owner of a filly named Carousel Delight, who's by Din's Dancer and broke her maiden at Hollywood Park by more than eleven lengths."

Carousel Delight has a yearling colt by Madera Thoroughbreds' stallion Robannier and is expecting a 2008 foal by the Howards' Seattle Bound.

"After that, she'll go to Stormy Jack, of course," Howard said. 🐾



**Bob Black Jack—\$250,000 Sunshine Millions Dash Stakes—January 26, 2008**

©Maricle Heacox