

A Tribute To

by DEBRA GINSBURG



Dorothy Kisela & Nancy F. Wood



The Del Mar Sale most likely would not be experiencing its current run of success if it weren't for this Bakersfield accountant who bred the sale toppers of the 1999 and 2000 sales. Their prices were the highest for a pair of Del Mar yearlings since the early 1990s and the overall sale figures soared accordingly.

Dorothy and her daughter Donna became Thoroughbred owners for the first time in 1985 when they bought an interest in some yearlings owned by Ed Nahem. One of these was a Kennedy Road gelding named Black Jack Road who catapulted this mother-daughter accounting team into the Thoroughbred breeding business.

"My mom was the kind of person who jumped into everything with both feet," said Donna Kisela. "She read everything she could about the horse business and was thoroughly active."

Black Jack Road had to overcome a fractured shin before he made his first start—as a 4-year-old—on July 17, 1988. After the Kiselas bought out Nahem, Black Jack Road captured 10 stakes—including the El Conejo and Los Angeles Handicaps—for earnings of \$525,537.

Dorothy and Donna then joined forces with Eddie Gregson, Black Jack Road's trainer in Southern California, and bred a filly in 1998 by Nahem's Eclipse champion Bertrando. She was consigned to the 1999 Del Mar Yearling Sale by Debbie Sands and brought \$200,000, the highest price paid for a Del Mar yearling since Never Round topped the 1990 sale at \$250,000. They returned in 2000 with the filly's full brother, who surpassed her sale price by \$40,000, and will have another sibling in this year's auction.

"Dorothy was a client here for about three years and a very astute horsewoman," said River Edge Farm manager Russell Drake. "She raised some really nice horses."

Leannessa, the 1999 sale topper, broke her maiden last December and is now a multiple allowance winner. Dorothy, however, died from cancer in early February, but the good news is that Donna will carry on the business.

"She was a very fine lady," said Sands. "She did a lot to help the California breeding program."

"My mom was greatly loved by her friends because she would bend over backwards to help them," Donna said. "She was a great businesswoman and as honest as the days are long."

When this prominent California breeder passed away at her Napa Valley home last September, it closed an exciting chapter in the history of the Thoroughbred in the West. Her success was clearly tied in with the early years of the Del Mar Yearling Sale. With her longtime partner Dr. Del Weaver, Wood bred dozens of stakes-winning young Thoroughbreds that brought top dollar at auction.

One of these was an attractive roan filly from the first crop of Lou Rowan's 1965 Del Mar Futurity winner Coursing. She was such an appealing individual that she brought \$40,000 as the top-selling filly at the 1968 Del Mar Sale. Under the name Amber Light, she captured the San Juan Bautista Stakes for earnings of \$50,695.

"Nancy was a classy lady all the way," said Ridgeley Farm's Pat Thompson. "If you didn't like the horses in her consignment, she wouldn't hesitate to point you to a horse in another consignment that might suit you better. Nancy was as honest as could be. Her word was her bond."

As president of the Northern California Thoroughbred Association, Wood was the driving force behind the creation of a yearling sale in the Northern part of the state so local breeders could sell horses in their own backyard.

Teaming up with auctioneer Tom Caldwell, the NCTA conducted its first yearling sale in the parking lot at Golden Gate Fields in the early 1970s. The Northern California Yearling Sale subsequently found a home in San Francisco's Cow Palace and grew so remarkably in the decade since that a mixed sale was added in 1981. The sale toppers often came from Wood and Weaver's consignments.

"Thanks to Nancy and Del, the Northern sale gave us an avenue to sell horses that were a notch below Del Mar quality," said Northern California breeder Nancy Probert. "Many of us are small breeders who often can't afford to ship horses to sales in Southern California. It can be a costly proposition."

Nancy and Dick Probert are among many local breeders that Wood took under her wing and guided toward commercial success. Shirley McQueeney was another.

"She was a true horsewoman in the days when California breeding was not as prominent as it is today," McQueeney said. "She helped me overcome some of the common pitfalls that overwhelm people just getting started in the horse business. She was very gracious and we became good friends."