

Yankee Ingenuity



By Sue M. Brander

Ethel Gardner was born in Princeton, New Jersey, in 1917. Her father, a Princeton graduate, accepted a position managing a ranch near Colorado Springs, Colorado, where she spent most of her childhood. She grew up around horses on the ranch and photos show her jumping horses as a young woman. The family later moved to Lake Placid, New York, and finally, to Lake Placid, Florida. The family had inherited a small fortune from nineteenth century railroad interests and Ethel was properly educated. Although Ethel's most intense educational years arrived at about the same time as The Great Depression, her parents were able to educate her. She graduated from St. Margaret's School in Waterbury, Connecticut, then went on to schools in Stuttgart, Germany, and later Grenoble, France. She attended The American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York City and Washington. She concluded her education at The School for Secretaries in New York City. As a young woman, she obviously had a flair for creative arts and

this talent would express itself in an amazing way as she grew older.

During the war years, Ethel worked at the Naval Shipyards in Philadelphia. As a young woman, she worked in mechanical and management jobs, ending her corporate career at the Elco Corporation in Philadelphia. In the decade from 1946 to 1956, she won numerous awards which give an insight into the workings of her mind. The Naval Air Materials Center Award was for developing a method for cataloguing and identifying instruments. In 1953, the Research Institute of America gave her an award for her method of record keeping on absenteeism. And in 1956, the Institute gave her an award for Raising the Potential of Unskilled Workers. She also designed an automatic grain feeder for horses that would dole out 100 pounds of feed in predetermined quantities, two or three times a day, at designated hours. Her last position with Elco was Industrial Relations Director. So here was a young woman with a creative mechanical ability as well as an

extraordinary intellect for designing record-keeping systems. These accomplishments speak to that rare blend of creativity and analytical abilities we sometimes call "Yankee Ingenuity." In her own words, she "retired" in 1957, at the age of 40. And then Ethel Gardner started the real work of her life.

Ethel decided to start building a small herd of Morgan horses. She purchased land, built her own house, and started a stable near Philadelphia. She boarded a few horses at first and her strategy was to acquire one broodmare a year.

Near the end of the 1940s, while Ethel Gardner was winning awards for her achievements in corporate life, Mabel Owen and Mary Jean McCulloch went to the same auction and bid on the same mare. Mary Jean won the bid that day, but Mabel made it her business to speak with the woman who got the mare she admired. The two became friends, and in 1950 and 1951, Mabel leased her stallion, Squire Burger (Juzan x Nella), to the young woman who was just starting her Morgan breeding program. Squire Burger stood at McCulloch Farm for two seasons and in 1951 Mary Jean bred Diana-Mansfield to Squire Burger. The following spring, she foaled Whippoorwill Duke, who became the herd sire at McCulloch Farm for the next quarter century. Mary Jean McCulloch married Alex Vasiloff in 1953 and sold most of her broodmares, but kept Duke. The couple began their family and their Morgan breeding program was on hold for a few years. Mary Jean later bought more mares to breed to Duke and rekindled the Whippoorwill dream at McCulloch Farm.

In 1958 and 1959, Mary Jean leased Whippoorwill Duke to Helen Greenwalt in Illinois. Mrs. Greenwalt had good reason to want Duke, because his grandsire was her own Jubilee King. Mrs. Greenwalt bred Duke to Jenney Lake (Senator Graham x Monty by Flyhawk) and in 1960 she foaled a colt. Mrs. Greenwalt wanted to sell the colt to Ethel Gardner, but Ethel already had ordered her one broodmare for the year and declined. After the third try, Mrs. Greenwalt finally gave up and sold her nice colt but learned they planned to geld him. Mrs. Greenwalt thought this colt was much too nice to be gelded, so she backed out of the sale and again offered Ethel the opportunity to buy the colt. She sweetened the deal with a price Ethel could not refuse. Ethel bought the colt, now named The Yankee, and brought him home to her farm in Pennsylvania.

She chose the prefix "Cascade" for her farm and



(Opposite) *The Yankee with Ethel Gardner, whip.* (Above) *The Yankee grandson, Dusky Duke (by Yankee's Anhingo) at the 2002 Spring Fling Show.* (Photo Sunflower Photography)

she started the Cascade College of Horsemanship, which offered certificates in many categories. Eventually she expanded her boarding and training facility to include a 34-horse barn, an arena, and half-interest in a 75-acre farm where she pastured horses, and of course, a mortgage.

The young colt had the kind and affectionate disposition that made his sire famous. Whippoorwill Duke sired a generation of horses that made the Whippoorwill prefix famous for kind dispositions and versatile individuals. The Yankee was his father's son.

Ethel believed that Morgans should do everything and made no excuses for the stallion mindset. The Yankee would be a versatile Morgan. She trained him to harness, but she had long since given up riding, due to an earlier accident in which she was badly injured. Judith Palmer Harik did his saddle training once a week and a young girl who had never ridden before kept him exercised under saddle in between his more formal lessons. In his career The Yankee would perform in Park Saddle, Western Pleasure, Roadster, Jumping, English Pleasure, Trail, Dressage, harness racing, flat racing, walking races, and pulling a stone boat.

Even before The Yankee arrived at Cascade Morgans, Ethel conceived of a horse show that would showcase the versatility of the individual. She was on her way to The Pennsylvania National Morgan Show in 1959 one evening when she had the idea for a versatility show. It was an outrageous idea. Ethel wrote the rules herself and certainly knew how to be precise in writing. First, every entry had to compete in multiple divisions. The rules were specific. There was some flexibility about which race to run, but every horse had to run a race either under saddle or in harness. There were walking races, flat races, and harness races. Ethel's concept for The Versatility Show was

enormously labor intensive for its time, because it required judges with expertise in a vast array of areas and each of the disciplines had to be staffed. If it was taxing for the people, it was even more so for the horses, who competed in multiple and physically demanding classes in a single day. Pulling a stone boat, jumping a course, and showing in English Pleasure is a lot to do in one day.

Ethel wasted no time implementing her idea. The first versatility show took place in 1960 at the grounds of the Huntingdon Valley Riders and Drivers Association in Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. Fourteen horses competed. Ethel was undaunted by the small attendance. The next year the show was held in Jarrettown, Pennsylvania. Each year the little show grew and eventually outgrew its venue. In 1963, it moved to The Liberty Bell Race Track and later at Pennypack Park, both in Philadelphia. In 1967 The Versatility Show moved to Northampton, Massachusetts, and then on to the Sawmill River Farm in Leverett, Massachusetts, where it remained until 1971.

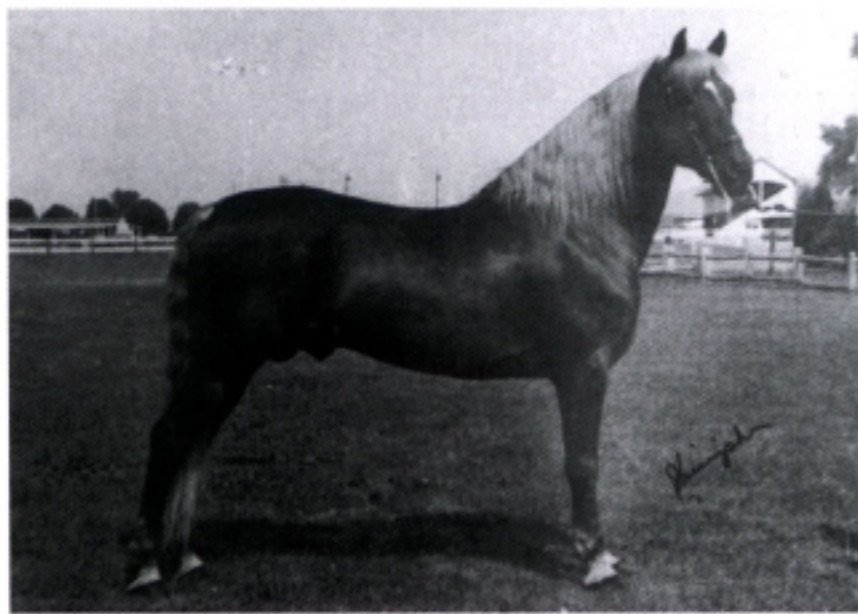
Although The Versatility Show never attracted the huge number of horses of the more familiar Morgan shows, it played a very important role in cementing relationships among Morgan owners and breeders. It was just amazing who showed up at The Versatility Show. In 1969, Mike Goebig rode Tas Tee Indian Summer to win The Grand Championship. In 1964, Richard Pickett had the Grand Champion, Bar-T Superman. A sampling from the 1969 show program includes Morgan Manor Mandrin, Sam Moro Ashbrook, Applevale Kinsman, Kennebec Corez and Kennebec Brownie, The Yankee, Cool Ridge Lee Darling, Townshend Vigildana, Frosty Beau, and Townshend Vigildon. Thirty-five horses competed that year.

Grace Yaglou remembered the 1969 Versatility Show warmly. "That's where I

first met Margaret Gardiner," she said. "It was cold. Very cold. It was a great show. I had a lot of fun. You had to go in four divisions, Pleasure, Driving, Racing, and one other. Sam [Sam Moro Ash] was a kid's horse. He was by Oscar. He was pretty good at the trot. I went in the Walking Race. We probably came in last, but I had a good time." The Versatility Show was the first event that brought these two Morgan breeders, who had been around Morgans in New England for decades, together.

Margaret Gardiner also remembered The Versatility Show. "I thought they were wonderful," she said enthusiastically. "I think we got sevenths and eighths a lot of the time. I do remember Kennebec Brownie won the racing twice. He was out of Helen May by Kennebec Ethan, so he was a half brother to Kennebec Count. Bill Poulin, an uncle of Larry Poulin, rode him. I rode Kennebec Corez, who was by U S Paner out of Kennebec Cory, who was a half brother to Kennebec Russel. We had a lot of fun. Horses I remember are Johnny Appleseed, shown by Louise Henry; and Portledge Steven, a most excellent stallion by Bay State Ideal out of Portledge Mercy. Portledge Steven was the one we battled with for the Racing division. We won it twice and he won it twice. I have a lovely great granddaughter by him now. Ethel was a wonderful person and the Versatility Show was a wonderful thing and a great showcase for the Morgan."

Mary Jean Vasiloff recalled the outfit Margaret Gardiner wore at one of The Versatility Shows. "Margaret was wearing a babushka, a floor length fur coat, and Army boots!" she laughed. Then she remembered Ethel Gardner's signature horse, The Yankee. "He was a very straight moving horse, very cadenced, which is why he remained sound for all his life. He had a tireless movement, no wasted energy, very correct. He had a lot of muscle for his size. He also had a very good brain and



(Left to right) Yankee's Danielle (*The Yankee x Anna-Marie Mar-Lo*) was twice voted Mid-Atlantic Horse of the Year. (Photo © Torrance); *The Yankee*, pictured here in 1964.

a flexible mind. A change of tack and he would switch his style and do a different job. He knew how to go by the tack he was wearing. He had a nice kind eye."

Ethel passionately believed in the Morgan and did not do things by halves. When she decided to jump in, she was totally committed. Ethel bankrolled the first Versatility Show. She wanted to award prize money and that was not customary at Morgan shows. In 1971, she wrote a short paper about the development of this show.

"In early years I had an uphill fight because no one had heard of paying money in breed classes, work harness classes, races [Morgan people that is]. I used to be much condemned for the scoring of all entries and spoofed because I sent out score results after the show. Then we came to be known for our hospitality [hot and complete breakfast for exhibitors, for instance] fun and good sportsmanship during the show.... The show was aimed at the general public as good, all-day family entertainment. The show catered to the exhibitors in the belief that it was a tough show and an awful lot of work and expense had preceded their presence there."

Bankrolling The Versatility Show represented a considerable sacrifice. But the exhibitors so appreciated the show that they helped out. "At the first show," she wrote, "exhibitors turned around and gave me either half or all of their prize money to help pay for the show. I suspect that Marilyn Childs put them up to it, knowing I had no financial feet to stand on. Anyway, I was overwhelmed."

The Yankee also became a regular competitor at

Mid-A, Gold Cup, and the Eastern National in Northampton, Massachusetts. Ethel expected to win ribbons and if she didn't, she was not reticent about taking it up with the judge. She wrote of a time at Northampton when Dr. C.D. Parks was judging, and *The Yankee* was not winning. Ethel recorded the moment as follows. (Editor's Note: Ethel wrote this in the third person.)

"Another time, at the National Morgan Horse Show, with Dr. Parks judging, after several classes Ethel approached the judge. 'The Yankee is used to getting ribbons. What is his problem today?' As they were talking, Yankee was awarded two blues for two separate levels of Dressage. One evening after a huge pleasure driving class and before the winners were announced, Dr. Parks approached Ethel while she and Yankee were still in the lineup.

"He said, 'I've been watching your horse very carefully. His manners are perfect, his performance is perfect. I just don't like him.' Ethel thought, 'Who cares if you like him? After putting him down for ten years, you've finally had to admit to me that his manners are perfect and his performance is perfect.' In spite of his sixth-place ribbon, *The Yankee* was Reserve Pleasure Champion in that show with 700 Morgans competing...."

Ethel had acquired a couple of mares for her small breeding program. By far, her favorite mare, and Yankee's favorite too, was Anna-Marie Mar-Lo (Mickey Finn x Ruthven's Barbara Ann). She bought Lippitt Dulcie (Lippitt Sam x Lippitt Dusky Kate) as an older mare, and she owned Flyette (Flyhawk x Juliette). She bred Flyette to Ulendon to get Cascade's

Udonnaflly, whom she retained in her breeding program. The Yankee sired 30 registered Morgan foals and got his share of non-Morgan mares, too. His first foals were born in 1964 and his last in 1989. Eleven of his foals were out of Anna-Marie Mar-Lo and three out of Lippitt Dulcie.

In 1966, some competition arrived at Cascade Morgans. Ethel acquired a stallion named Dennis K (Flyhawk x Kathleen C). She found him in New Jersey, doing work as a cart horse. He was basically a rescue horse and needed extensive rehabilitation and recovered nicely in Ethel's hands. He sired three foals out of Anna-Marie Mar-Lo, three from Lippitt Dulcie, and two from Flyette. Ethel had a very disciplined small breeding program. Ethel bred about three mares a year, and if she was lucky, she got three foals. Some years, there were only two foals. She kept a few of the progeny for her future breeding program, but she sold most of the foals. She never got carried away with breeding more than she could sell or more than she could support. At the peak of her program she had, perhaps, 15 horses, including the handful of broodmares, the two stallions, and current year's foals.

In 1974, Ethel decided to move to Florida. Her niece, Niven Owings, had the family farm, Spring Lake Farm, in Lake Wales, Florida, and that was a perfect staging area for the move. Ethel acquired some family land right next door to Niven, and with classic Ethel resourcefulness, she found the perfect house for her new farm. It was an old railroad station. All she had to do was move it ten miles. She built the farm around the railroad station and carried on with breeding Morgans.

The move did not happen overnight, though. Ethel planned it and phased it throughout three years and finally got there in 1977. Niven found a young woman who lived near the Florida farm to help Ethel with the move. Nora Saxon was

19 years old when she met Ethel and all her experience had been with Quarter Horses. Nora drove up to Pennsylvania to bring a load of equipment to the new farm. While in Pennsylvania, she had an opportunity to ride Anna Marie Mar-Lo and it was quite an experience for the Quarter Horse kid. "She was a roadster," Nora recalled. "I had ridden a horse that trotted pretty fast, but never like that. I wasn't aware of the Morgan's trotting ability. I was riding her bareback and she was big as a house in foal. Ethel and I were in a field, side by side, and I was amazed that this mare could trot so fast. Ethel told me to just let the reins out and cluck. She took off like a rocket ship. The acceleration was positively exhilarating. I had tears in my eyes, it was such a thrill. I fell in love and I never forgot that ride. She passed that on to her babies, too. She had a daughter named Duenda who had that same roadster trot." The Florida teenager who rode Quarter Horses had a new vision of the horse and is still breeding Morgans, more than a quarter century later.

"I had the experience of going out in a wooden wheeled cart with a brake," Nora recalled. "Ethel was a fearless driver. She hitched Yankee's Strutter. He was a gorgeous big chestnut, big boned, out of Anna-Marie Mar-Lo. She took me in Pennypack Park and she was going 90 miles an hour through these ravines and hills. What a thrill! I was from Florida and I had never experienced the kind of terrain they have in Pennsylvania. She was going faster than I had ever trotted behind a horse. I fell in love with driving and I still drive to this day."

Ethel was beginning to look to the future of her breeding program and Niven became the heir apparent. She inspired both Niven, and her daughter, Kristal Homoki, with a love for The Yankee and all that he produced. Ethel never married and had no children of her own. In her

niece and grandniece, she found two soul-mates who shared in the spirit of her beloved horses. However, in the 1970s, Niven had a day job, so Nora Saxon Dickey became the farm manager. "I broke Yankee's Pleasure," Nora recalled. "She's still alive."

Niven kept a Yankee son, Yankee's Anhingo (x Lippitt Dulcie). "Someone told Ethel that is a Native American word for 'waving grasses,'" Niven said. "And that is exactly how he moves, like waving grass. You could set a tea cup on his rump and it would stay there."

"That horse should have died when he was three years old," Nora recalled. "I had him at school with me, when I was in college. Niven sent him with me for training. He got some kind of strange illness and spiked a fever of 107 degrees. I kept a hose on him for two days. He was down for six weeks and had complete liver failure. Somehow, he recovered. I took him home to Spring Lake Farm again. He was lame for a couple of years and then that went away, too. I actually showed him again. Niven uses him for breeding and he's still settling mares at 29 years old."

"I had a Yankee's Anhingo son named Gandolf," Nora continued. "You could put his picture next to his great grandsire, Squire Burger, and it looked like the same horse. He had that same chestnut color with the flaxen mane and tail, white face, and two white socks behind. He had a big neck, a big eye, and a very chiseled head. He also had that classic Squire Burger disposition. I showed him at The Dixie Cup in English Maiden Pleasure in 1982 or so. We did a lot of driving at the Florida State Fair and won our share. He was always in the ribbons. I foxhunted with him, too. Ethel did a Versatility Show after she came to Florida and I drove him there. We had a good turnout, 20 or 30 horses. He was never sick a day until he died at the age of 24. I just lost him last year."

Nora recalled training Niven's young stock. "These horses were like nothing to break. I'd just get on and ride off. It was never a problem. It was that way with every one of them. That solid temperament just passed on to all the Yankee foals. You could do anything with them."

The Yankee died in 1989 at the age of 29. He outlived his beloved Anna-Marie Mar-Lo by a few years and they were buried side by side on the farm. Ethel later moved to North Carolina, where she lived with a friend until her death in the summer of 2002. Family and friends gathered at the farm in February to celebrate her life. Per her request, they scattered some of her ashes over the graves of her two greatest horses. Then they walked the short distance to the family cemetery on the farm and placed the remaining ashes in the family vault.

Ethel's little railroad station house was sold and Niven Owings got a call from the new owners a few months ago. They had been cleaning out under the house and found many boxes. Niven drove to the station house to have a look. The boxes contained all the records and breeding notes and show programs Ethel had amassed throughout the 40 years she bred Morgans. Niven was astonished at the level of detail Ethel preserved in these boxes, right down to envelopes and scraps of paper with small notes jotted on them.

"I'm the third generation on this farm," Niven said. "Ethel's father, who was my grandfather, bought this property in 1933 and started to do sustainable farming." Later, Niven's father took over the farm. "When my husband retired from the military, my father became incapacitated," Niven explained. "Nobody else wanted it and I was interested." She now raises The Yankee's descendants on that farm.

"Ethel believed the Morgan had so much more to offer than just to go around a ring," Niven recalled. "She started The



*Yankee's Anhingo
(The Yankee x Lippitt Dulcie).*

Versatility Show as a combination of everything the Morgan is capable of doing. The idea was to have one horse and develop it as far as you can. The Yankee was her first love and she did everything else to support him."

Niven's daughter, Kristal Homoki, is now living in Pennsylvania. Now, she too has time to raise a few of The Yankee's descendants. Kristal has two mares and a gelding by

Yankee's Anhingo. Kristal remembered her aunt's farm. "In 1975, I got my first pony," she said. "Ethel still had The Yankee, Anna-Marie Mar-Lo, and Udonnafly. She taught me everything I know about horses. She insisted it was not good enough to be just a rider. You had to be a skilled rider. It wasn't just a matter of sitting there looking pretty with your heels down."

Last year, Kristal took three horses to The Spring Fling in New Jersey. "My gelding, Dusky Duke, was second in-hand, and my mare, Spring Lake Katefly, was high-point Morgan," she said proudly. "Duke looks exactly like his grandsire, The Yankee. I saw these three ladies sitting on the back of a truck, and one of them said to me, 'I really like your horse. He looks a lot like my horse, Yankee's Excaliber. But you wouldn't know him because he was by The Yankee.'"

Kristal shot right back, "Of course I know The Yankee!" Apparently, Kristal has moved into "Yankee" Country. She plans to breed her Yankee mares, Dulcie Lenda and Spring Lake Katefly.

Others also found their way to The Yankee stock. Jerry Olson bought Spring Lakes Peter D and showed him in Combined Driving. In 1991 he won the Double Jeopardy Championship at the Morgan Grand National, and was reserve in Dressage Driving. "I got him from Niven as a foal," Jerry said. "I had a Quarter Horse and a friend of mine was into Morgans and he got me to buy Peter D. I started with him in-hand, then did pleasure driving and riding. Then we went to Classic Pleasure and he did really well at that. He'd do five or six events at one show. He's a versatile horse. You could crank him up and you could bring him right

back down. He has 20 foals, some Morabs. I have one of his foals left, Sports Authority. I showed him one year and he won first and seconds everywhere we went. The Yankee put out a lot of great horses here in Florida. Peter D is 19 years old now and I still have him on the farm."

Jeannine Dyer got Anna-Marie Mar-Lo's last colt by The Yankee. The mare was 24 when she foaled Yankee's Amity. "She had a filly the next year," Jeannine Dyer recalled. "Peggy Pettinger said Anna-Marie Mar-Lo was the fastest trotting Morgan of modern times. I was interested in getting an Anna-Marie Mar-Lo foal and Ethel had a deal she called Breeder's Gamble. For \$25 you could reserve her foal. The contract said the foal had to live three days. There was an agreed price for a stud colt and a higher price for a filly. She was in foal to The Yankee. She foaled a colt."

Jeannine also took a Breeder's Gamble on Anna-Marie Mar-Lo's next foal by The Yankee. "That one was a filly," Jeannine said. "The filly was named Yankee's Carillon, after a bell tower near Ethel's farm in Lake Wales, Florida. She foundered when we brought her to Illinois, so she never had any foals. She lived to be about 14 years old."

"Amity is about 14.2 with a flaxen mane and tail," Jeannine continued. "I showed him in carriage driving in Florida and he did well. He was in the top ten of the AMHA Open Competition most of the time. At the Florida State Fair one year, he won the all-breed open. He was seven when we moved to Illinois and there was no carriage driving here, so we switched to pleasure driving. He was third in the country in pleasure driving the last year we showed him. We had showed so much carriage driving in Florida, nobody could compete with him. He won everything in pleasure driving in Illinois."

"Amity has six daughters and one colt," Jeannine said. "We have a two-year-old colt out of one of his daughters. We're planning to breed him this year. Ethel always kept a mare in the pasture with The Yankee and she always had a mare in the stall next to him. I turned Amity out with the mares and he loved it."

In the four decades she owned Morgans, Ethel Gardner inspired not only her own family, but others, as well, to take stock in The Yankee. The Yankee was her vision of "The Horse," and she certainly knew that vision was alive and well in 1989 when she laid her

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Ethel Gardner's ad for The Yankee from the Versatility Show program.

greatest horse to rest beside his greatest mare. She watched generations of his progeny grow up in hands she had personally selected. Kristal sent Ethel pictures of The Yankee's descendants at The Spring Fling Show, shortly before Ethel died. She was elated to see another generation competing with The Yankee's bloodlines. Niven said, "My goal at Spring Lake Farm is to continue with the bloodlines that Ethel started and to produce the horses with the intelligence and personality she valued and prepare them to go out into the world."

Although The Versatility Show never attracted the huge numbers of the traditional Morgan horse show, it provided a competitive venue for those who believed passionately in the versatility of the individual Morgan. Most of the peo-

ple who competed at those shows continued to own and breed Morgans for decades to come. Although The Versatility Show ran its course as an event after about a dozen seasons, it provided an important bridge to the future. It provided a place for them to come together, to realize they were not alone, and to support one another. Many of these people went out and did spectacular things with and for their Morgans. If you go down the list of competitors at any of Ethel Gardner's Versatility Shows, you will find names that are still famous in the Morgan breed and beyond—40 years later. It was as though she dropped a pebble in the pond of ideas and the ripples that went out from that pebble have never ceased. ■