

# VETERINARIAN'S CORNER

## A Tribute to Mentorship

by Heidi Talbott

**D**uring my summer job this year, I had a fellow classmate make an offhand comment that has since stuck with me. “People who don’t do things don’t do them for one of two reasons. Either they don’t want to or they don’t know how.” At the time I brushed the remark aside and even verbalized a skeptical “I don’t know.” The statement just seemed too definitive. As I thought about all the things I don’t do, or haven’t done, I wanted to make excuses for them. Yet, the words he said continued to roll around in my daily thoughts for awhile. The more I heard it, the more I started to believe it.

When I was asked to write this article, Dr. Fellers and Annette Parsons were hoping for me to write about my Ride & Tie experience, my training regimen and my goals within the sport. However, they both graciously left me a caveat... “or whatever else you’d like to write about.” As I have reflected on my most recent Ride & Tie experience and how it relates to my veterinary-student experiences, one theme has stood out. Both veterinary education (in school and in the field) and Ride & Tie participation require mentorship.

I could have not done the 2012 Ride and Tie Championship if it were not for the help of my mentor, Paul Johnson. I met Paul “PJ” around four years ago. I joke that he let me come over once to ride, after meeting me through a mutual acquaintance, and he hasn’t been able to get rid of me since. Paul has been one of the most gracious people I have ever met. He has taken the time, the energy and a good deal of patience and invested it in me. I have had several influential and excellent mentors in my life, and the theme has always been the same. Although I am able to provide little in return, my mentors have poured energy, information, and enthusiasm into what they are teaching me.

When leaving a job as a vet assistant prior to starting veterinary school, I asked the doctor I worked for if she had any advice for me. This was her response: “Find a good mentor right after graduation and stick with them for a few years. Even if you have to take a pay cut. It will pay off in the long run.” Wise words. Since then, I have always tried to be keen about finding individuals who were eager to share their expertise with me.

The field of veterinary medicine is a wonderful profession to work in, largely because of willing mentors. Fortunately for me, I am in an environment (school) rich with people who love what they do so much that they have chosen to share their knowledge with the eager minds of students. Mentorship is a common theme most anywhere you look in veterinary medicine. There is only so much information that can be learned from a book. The rest comes from real-life experience. Most often, this happens under the tutelage of another doctor who has ‘been at it awhile.’ They share recipes, techniques, enthusiasm, triumphs and failures, all with the intent of making you a better doctor.

My experience with Ride & Tie has been no different. I have enjoyed it so much because of the help I have had. Paul has yet to partner with me during a Ride & Tie (I think he’s waiting for me to get faster!), yet he’s been my partner all along. He’s gotten me to start running, he’s done the long rides with me on Sunday mornings to condition our horses and he’s provided the mental encouragement needed to train for a big event like the Championship race.



The author’s Ride & Tie mentor, Paul Johnson at the 2012 Ride & Tie Championship, with his granddaughter, Ella and thier pooch friends.

Photo: Jan Agur.

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**So maybe my classmate is right. I know that I was successful at the Ride & Tie Championship because I was aided by a caring person. Looking back, I had wanted to do this, but I did not know how. However, I am a fortunate person, blessed with a wonderful mentor in my life, who has pushed me to participate in things I didn't know existed (literally) and didn't think I was capable of. Who has been a mentor in your life? Who have you mentored?**

**This brings me to the essence of what Ride & Tie means to me. It represents determination in one's self. It represents great friendships. It represents love and care and understanding of one's horse. It provides an opportunity for giving and receiving. It represents a connection with nature. And I couldn't be more proud to be a part of it.**

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*Editor's Note: Heidi Talbott was the 2011 recipient of the Jim Steere Memorial Scholarship award, given annually by the Ride and Tie Association to a deserving veterinary student. The 2012 Championship Ride & Tie was Heidi's first Ride & Tie.*