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Gretchen and Roy Jackson

BY KATHRYN LEVY FELDMAN

It has been said that you can tell a lot about people by the way they treat their animals. While Gretchen and Roy Jackson's unwavering commitment to do whatever it took to save the life of their Kentucky Derby Champion, Barbaro, was certainly the most public demonstration of the extraordinary stewardship the Chester County couple displays toward animals in their care, it was by no means the only time they have exhibited such behavior. "We were going to try everything we could to get that horse back to living a decent life," Gretchen told *Ladies Home Journal*. "That's really the only way when you love animals."

Certainly Gretchen's love of animals has been well documented: from her childhood predilection for saving mice from hungry cats to caring for the six retired racehorses, (one of whom never made it to the track) that live on the couple's Lael Farm in bucolic bliss with assorted riding horses, ponies, donkeys, cows, sheep, dogs and cats. Roy is no less devoted to all members of their menagerie as he so eloquently told the *New York Times*, "We have an obligation. We are their keepers."

Case in point is the retired Champion Show Conformation and Working Hunter, J. K. Tindle, whom Gretchen and her daughter Lucy Zungailia, bought more than two decades ago from the November Weanling Sale at Keeneland. "They went down there to buy a horse with essentially no pedigree to train as a hunter," Roy recounted. "We broke Tindle on our farm."

Tindle, in fact, became a Champion Hunter in a long and distinguished career that spanned three owners. The Jacksons sold the horse to the Firestones, who in turn sold the horse to the Haas Family. When Tindle retired from the show circuit in a ceremony at Madison Square Garden in 1996, he had won nearly every championship up and down the East Coast. In 2004, when they were selling their farm, a member of the Haas family called Gretchen with an update on Tindle. "They were going to send Tindle to a retirement facility, but instead he came back to us to live out his life," Roy said. By all accounts, Tindle, now age 25 and blind in one eye, is content doing just that.

Then there is the saga of Wanting My Way, a filly who, about twenty-five years ago, went through the floor of a horse van with one of her hind legs. "She didn't break any bones but she peeled the skin off her leg above her hock just like a banana," Gretchen recalled. One of the horse's kidneys shut down from stress. "We did our own dialysis, 24 hours a day for six weeks," Gretchen recalled. "Everyone, including Roy, Lucy and me, took a shift, sleeping on the floor and rigging up bottles." In the end, Wanting My Way foundered, and, as Gretchen recalled, "we lost her."



HALLANDALE BEACH, FL - APRIL 1: (L-R) Michael Matz, trainer of Barbaro, jockey Edgar Prado and owners Gretchen and Roy Jackson pose in the winner's circle after winning the Florida Derby April 1, 2006 at Gulfstream Park in Hallandale Beach, Florida.

No strangers to the disease that ultimately claimed the life of Barbaro, the Jacksons hope that increased public awareness of the condition will lead to increased funding for research efforts. Despite ongoing research over the last 30 years, scientists still do not have complete knowledge of this prevalent disease, especially when it comes to devising effective preventative and therapeutic management strategies. In fact, during the eight months that Barbaro spent in the ICU of the Widener Hospital, the Jacksons saw at least four other horses succumb to complications from laminitis.

Certainly Gretchen and Roy Jackson are leading the effort with their recent \$3 million gift to endow a chair in the name of Dean W. Richardson, the cornerstone of a new major Penn Vet effort to fight laminitis. "This endowed chair is a strong recognition of the power of translating fundamental scientific advances into new real-world treatments," said Dean Joan Hendricks. "With a new faculty position dedicated to the study of equine disease, we will be better positioned to fight deadly conditions like laminitis."

It is also an acknowledgment of the gratitude the Jacksons feel not only toward Dean Richardson but to everyone at New Bolton who was involved in Barbaro's care. "Our close relationship with Dr. Richardson over the last eight months persuaded us to name the chair in his honor," Gretchen commented. "We are indeed grateful to him and we look forward to a future without laminitis." "We have no second thoughts looking back or anything," Roy told the *Thoroughbred Times*. "We just tried to enjoy all the racing as best we could and just did the best we could for him afterward. . . ."