

Newsletter

June 2014

Elisabeth Curtis Centre Riding for the Disabled

Charity No. 1137217; Company No. 7302917



Becky from the White Horse presenting £500 from Charles Wells' Eagle Aid to fundraising group members Jan, Jenny, Audrey and Ros at the Quiz Night on April 9th.



Editorial

Things have been fairly quiet at the Centre since our last Newsletter in February. Muscadeu has continued to mend and was gently brought back into work after Easter. He was a bit “on his toes” but did not misbehave. We are keeping him in the back field with Chunky for now as this is our flattest piece of pasture and Chunky is not given to charging about - a steadying influence on our little Camargue pony, we hope!

We continue to try to fill our two empty stables but this is not an easy task. We have come close a couple of times but the perfect pony seems to be eluding us. I have lost track of how many horses and ponies members of the Riding Committee have looked at, and I hate to think of how many miles they have clocked up. I would like to say a huge “Thank You” to all who have been involved in the pony hunting, and to Liz and Kirsty in particular. It is a time-consuming and often upsetting task. You meet lots of ruthless dealers and lots of individuals who are desperate to re-home a pony they probably shouldn't have bought in the first place.

On a happier note, we have continued to receive lots of wonderful donations. The Stancourt-Dicker Charitable Trust presented us with another cheque for £4,000 in March. We are planning to use this to re-fence the Circular Ride.

The fencing on the ditch side was put up some 30 years ago and is, unfortunately, mainly barbed wire. Over the years it has been weighed down by brambles and when the brambles died down last Winter we could see that in places the wire fence is actually on the ground - time to replace it! We are hoping to get this work done during the Summer holidays. An additional benefit of having the ride properly fenced, with post and rail fencing, is that we will be able to use it as grazing. This will involve less mowing and more eating, of which the grooms and ponies all heartily approve!

During the summer break we are also planning improvements to the surface of the indoor school. It should provide much easier walking for both ponies and volunteers. It is going to be a busy “holiday”!

We were also very happy to welcome Ann and Kevin Harradine to the Centre recently. They have been supporters for many years and it was a pleasure to show them around and to let them see how much our riders enjoy their sessions. They don't know about the National Curriculum or how much good the therapy is doing them, but it is obvious from their smiles that they think it's great fun! Ann and Kevin this time brought, rather than sent, a cheque for £500 which they had raised with the help of the members of their Masonic lodge in Luton, the St. Mary's Chapter. Many thanks to you all.

We were also very happy to show Liz Smith, from The Corsairs singing group, around the Centre. The Corsairs had raised £200 for us, but Liz has been a good friend in many ways. She first introduced us to The White Horse some years ago, which has resulted in considerable funding coming our way. So, thank you, Corsairs and thank you, Liz!

This leads me nicely on to the quiz we held at the White Horse, Newnham Avenue, in April. The quiz itself made £262, but on the same night we were also presented with £500 from Charles Wells as part of their Eagle Aid Awards. Many thanks to Sue and Nigel for nominating us for this award and to Becky and her wonderful team for running the quiz for us, despite the fact that Nigel was poorly and Sue was away.

We would also like to say “Thank You” to the Morris Minors Owners Club for their donation of £100 and to Pete Warren for nominating us. Pete was a Tuesday night volunteer for many years until health problems caused him stay at home. He still makes social calls occasionally and regularly donates the things he wins in raffles at car rallies!

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Editorial (contd.)

Finally, I am afraid we have a goodbye to say. Helen is the Monday morning instructor and also helps on Tuesday evening, where she has been a volunteer for many years. She is returning to her native Yorkshire in the middle of June. She will be greatly missed as an instructor and a friend. She has a wealth of experience with horses and limitless patience with riders and volunteers, which made her an ideal instructor. Thank you so much, Helen, for the time you have given us. You will be a tough act to follow!

Jan
Chairman/Editor



Long-time supporters of the Centre Ann & Kevin Harradine present their latest donation of £500 on behalf of the St. Mary's Chapter, Luton.



Liz Smith of The Corsairs singing group, presents a donation of £200 to Kirsty and Jan.

My Journey to the Elisabeth Curtis Centre
(Pauline Evans Wednesday pm & Saturday)

Although I did not know it, my journey to the Elisabeth Curtis Centre began when I was a teenager.

I have two older sisters. Jan, the one nearest to me in age, shared my teenage love of ponies. Despite repeated attempts, and promises to look after it, we were never able to persuade our parents to buy a pony for us to share. As teenagers we did not think deeply about the cost and practicality of things. I did, however, manage to get a bicycle, which allowed me to go for 'hacks', and gave me freedom to roam. Throughout our childhood and adolescence we had other pets, including a goat, cat, tortoise, budgie, hamster, guinea pig and rabbits. The ones that featured in this phase of our lives, and were also our favourites, were Jan's dog Pixie and Sophie my white rabbit. In the absence of the real thing we treated Pixie and Sophie as substitute ponies. We spent time grooming them, and trying to teach them to jump over the fences we made in our back garden. Neither was very keen or obedient, especially Sophie who was only interested in nibbling the grass and shaking off the daisy chain I often placed around her ears. I talked to Sophie as if she was a pony, but despite my persistent coaching, she would never neigh, whinny or whicker for me. Perhaps I should have had a parrot instead.

A family we were close friends with moved from urban Ashford, Kent to rural Sellindge, a few miles away, and closer to our home in Seabrook (near Hythe) on the Kent coast. Their new home, Briar Cottage, came with land.

Geraldine, the eldest of the three Piper girls, achieved a miraculous and marvellous thing. She did get a pony, a dappled grey called Scrumpy. We went to Briar Cottage whenever we could. Over several years I spent many happy and peaceful hours mucking out, grooming, cleaning tack, sweeping the yard, and generally doing 'horsey' activities there, as well as playing in the haystack, looking for eggs, and walking across the surrounding fields. As an adult I look back on that time as my halcyon days.

I had books about ponies, both factual and fiction, and read Horse & Hound magazine.

I loved the Thelwell books, the stories about small rotund ponies and riders. In those days I looked like a Thelwell rider. Those of you who know me might be surprised at that. We watched show jumping from Hickstead, and the Horse of the Year show on the television.

An ambition was achieved when one year I went with a group to the Royal Tournament. Observant readers may have noticed that I have yet to mention riding. This was an aspect of my pony life that I was least fond of. Just as many years later when learning to ski, I lacked confidence in my ability to stay on my feet or on the saddle. Therefore, in expecting to fall over or off, I invariably did.

Jan and I went to several riding stables, but one stood out. It is still remembered and talked about by us. It was the stables run by Penny Buck (another appositely named person) in Aldington, a village between Hythe and Ashford.

When Dad was unable to take and/or collect us we caught a bus, one that took the scenic route to Ashford. I rode Cindy and Jan rode Brandy. Of our time there, two occasions will never be forgotten. One was a day's excursion, or trek to a local gymkhana. We went alone, hacking on Cindy and Brandy there and back. This turned out to be an impetuous act on our part, and an almost irresponsible one on the part of Penny in letting us go unaccompanied. Nothing untoward happened to the four of us, but the gymkhana venue was much further away than we thought it was. More importantly, we did not really know where we were going.

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My Journey to the Elisabeth Curtis Centre (contd.)

However, get there we did, eventually. I excelled in none of the events in which I entered, but Jan and Brandy performed with bravura to win a coveted, home-made, green rosette by coming third in the apple bobbing event.

This success buoyed us up for our return ride to the stables, but deflation soon set in, and I recall being on the verge of teenage hysteria because I was exhausted, and it seemed like a never-ending journey.

Of course, it did end, and without ado, except to my backside and humour.

The other memorable event was a five day Stable & Pony Management Course during one Easter Holiday. Beforehand I was restless with excitement and anticipation: five consecutive days outdoors and at the stables. Oh joy. Oh rapture. Off we went on the first day wearing clean jodhpurs and polished boots and with our lunch and hats in our new two-toned duffel bags acquired by redeeming a few books of Greenshield stamps. The bus ride that morning seemed endless. Our bubble was soon to burst. In short, that week, at a cost to our parents for the course and bus fares, was not money well spent. The grand title of the course, on which we were the sole participants, was a misnomer. Most of the time we were nothing more than unpaid stable skivvies. The *piece de resistance* was when Penny and her boyfriend turned up with a huge second hand horse box that they had just bought. It came without occupants, but not what they had left behind. In fact, what every horse in transit had ever produced: it was feet deep in dung!

As part of our S&PMC we were asked to help muck this vehicle out. We spent much of the rest of the week doing so. As we heaved off one layer of dung after another, each one smellier than the one above it, several thoughts about time came to mind. I thought of an old house where wallpaper was applied over and over again without taking off its predecessor, of rings in trees, and of sediment and rock over the geological ages, but most of all I thought, "What the s*** am I doing here?"

Well, time passed as it does, life intervened, and I moved on and away. Something never left me though. It was the content and impact of those years: outdoor activity, Briar Cottage, Penny Buck's and ponies. I hoped that one future day an opportunity would arise that brought me back to being with and around ponies. Decades later I was reading one of the local papers, and noticed an article about the Elisabeth Curtis Centre, which I cut out and saved, saying to myself that when I was no longer dividing my time between Bedford and London I would apply to volunteer there.

The combination of physical activity, helping others, and horses appealed to me. Several years later when I was back living solely in Bedford I contacted the Centre, and on Wednesday 23 November 2011 I went there for the first time. As soon as I saw, heard and smelled the place I knew I was back amongst 'friends'. I had arrived.

What do I feel about helping at the ECC, and RDA in general? This line from *Middlemarch* by George Eliot quoted in *The Times* recently seems an appropriate answer: "*What do we live for, if not to make life less difficult for each other?*"

Pauline Evans May 2014

Fundraising

1st March 2014 ECC Quiz Raised £510.00. Many thanks to Ros for being Questionmaster, and Audrey & Jenny for catering.

Wed 9th April Quiz at The White Horse, Newnham Avenue, Made £262 profit. Also received £500 from Charles Wells' Eagle Aid.

Fri 3rd, Sat 4th & Sun 5th May Beer Festival at The White Horse, Newnham Avenue. Toy Shop made approx. £13.50 profit, Tombola made £166.80 profit. Notelets £7.50 profit and Jewellery £2.00 profit.



John erecting the new entrance arch into the Sensory Ride

Forthcoming Events

Sat 31st May Kempston Fire Station Open Day. Taking Toy Shop. (Car Boot stall fees to come to ECC)

Sun 8th June Open Farm Day at Manor Farm, Stagsden. Taking Toy Shop, holding a collection & Pony Rides.

Sat 14th June Flitwick Carnival 12.00 - 4.00 p.m. Taking Toy Shop

Sat 21st June **ECC Open Afternoon 2.00 - 4.00 p.m**

Sun 22nd June Parklands Residents Association Open Gardens. Includes ECC Sensory Ride.

Sat 28th June All Saints' Church Fete, Church End, Kempston Rural. Taking Toy Shop.

Sat 5th July Wootton Fun Day. taking Toy Shop.

Wed 16th July AGM at Bromham Village Hall (**N.B. Hall 2**) 7.30 for 8.00.

Sun 13th July Bromham Show. Taking Toy Shop.

Sun 10th August St John's Summer Fair at Moggerhanger. Taking Toy Shop.

Sun 7th September Biddenham Show. Taking Toy Shop & Jewellery Workshop.

Term Dates for Bedfordshire Schools

Wednesday 23rd July - Summer Term ends.

Monday 1st September- Autumn Term begins. (Mon & Tue (1st & 2nd Sept.) Bedfordshire Schools Training Day.

Monday 27th October - Friday 31st October: Half Term.

Friday 19th December - Autumn Term ends.

Monday 5th January 2015 - Spring Term begins. (Monday 5th January - Bedfordshire Schools Training Day)

Dates may vary according to session - please check with your Instructor.

Printed by:
CopyKatz Ltd.

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