

## **Results of the USPC Hildegard Neill Ritchie Writing Contest**

The annual Hildegard Neill Ritchie Writing Contest on the subject of Foxhunting is open to all D- or C-rated Pony Club members. The first place winner receives a \$200 check, the second place winner receives a \$100 check, and the third place winner receives a \$50 check.

The contest award is from a memorial fund established by friends of Mrs. Ritchie, who was a long-time Pony Club supporter and volunteer. She founded the Colorado Springs Pony Club in 1958 and was its District Commissioner for 30 years. She was Regional Supervisor of the Colorado (now Rocky Mountain) region for 12 years and hosted regional Pony Club camps on her ranch for 20 plus years. She served several terms as a USPC Governor and received the USPC Founders Award in 1989.

Many thanks to the judges for the contest this year: Norman Fine, Cindy Piper, and Rita Mae Brown.

# The First Fox Hunt

by Jessie Longe

Throwing on breeches, ratcatcher and socks,  
A brush and a hairnet to tie up my locks  
I head out to see the early sunrise,  
Sleepiness gone from my excited eyes  
My pony's awake and ready to go,  
To await the call of a 'Tallyho'  
Quickly, pack the trailer and hit the road,  
I soon will meet friends as we all unload  
In no time my pony and I are all set,  
We'll gallop along; all fears I'll forget  
The Master in his pink coat blows his horn,  
Traveling on horseback through fields of corn  
Then o'er a coop, across the vast land,  
Multi-colored leaves paint a pallet so grand  
The deep forest glistens with morning dew,  
To the top of the hill for a majestic view  
Autumn breeze blows, I feel my horse prance,  
Toward the last jump, we swiftly advance  
Her excitement builds for the final chase,  
Clearing rocks and ruts with amazing grace  
Slowing down, I give a pat to my horse,  
And relish the moment on such a fine course  
I think she'd agree, our foxhunt was thrilling,  
Nowadays they don't send out foxes for killing  
Hounds trot away in their triumphant pack,  
And I can assure you, next time I'll be back!

*Jessie Longe is a 15-year-old D-3 member of Lead Hound Pony Club, Northern Lakes Region. She rides a fantastic pony named Phoebe, a POA mare that Jessie has been leasing for almost a year now. Last fall, she was invited to join the Long Lake Hounds on a Jr. Fox Hunt day. Her poem is a reflection of the amazing experience she had on her first hunt. According to Jessie, the scenery was magical and everyone she talked to was so kind and helpful. Phoebe and Jessie enjoyed the ride so much that neither of them wanted it to end! A few weeks later, they jumped at the chance of competing in the Long Lake Hound's Hunters Pace, and even won a second place ribbon! Jessiee looks forward to the next fox hunting opportunity, and she says,*

*I guarantee you I'll be there!*

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# Once Upon a Foxhunt

by Jacinta Roberts

One cold afternoon, an old fox sat in a warm den with her grand-cubs. "It is a shame that foxhunting is not as popular as it used to be," said Grandma Fox, "It is a good sport, but even if foxhunting is ended entirely, we will still have the memories."

"Ooh, grandma, tell us about your first foxhunt; we like that story" said the cubs.

"Very well," said the old fox, "but you must promise not to interrupt." And so the fox began:

One damp morning when I woke up thinking it was an ordinary day, I was surprised to see people riding through the woods with hounds. "I will have to look into that later," I thought, "At the moment I must comb my brush." Although I was an adventurous young fox, I would not let anything keep me from being neat and tidy. After I had inspected my shiny, red coat for dirt, I looked in a clean puddle to make sure I had no specks in my teeth. I looked around for the riders I had seen earlier. I found them soon enough and debated whether I should walk up to them and ask who they were, or if I should wait until one of them galloped away from the crowd. It turned out I did not have time to do either; I suddenly became aware of a pack of hounds running in my direction. I was confused about why they were running after me. I dashed into a covert. Only one of the hounds could get through and I knew this was my only chance to find out what was going on. When I asked him why so many people were chasing me, he seemed surprised.

"Why, we're foxhunting of course," he said. "If I were you, I would try to run away so that the hounds do not catch you."

"Would you try to catch me?" I said.

"Of course not, you are my friend; I will make sure you don't ever get caught while I am foxhunting."

My new hound-friend told me that I could still have good time hunting even though I was the fox. When I asked him how, he said not to be so friendly. "Not all hounds will act like me," he said, "I have to go now before the huntsmen come looking for me. Have fun."

A few minutes after my friend left, I saw the other hounds coming toward me. They were terrifying; but I hardly noticed them, for I was focusing on the horses that were following the hounds—dapple grays, chestnuts, bays and blacks. My favorite was in the front; it was black with a star in the middle of its forehead. All the horses hooves were caked in mud, my pads and my toes were the only part dirty on my feet. The riders looked strange to me; some were wearing dark green coats, others had

gray, but the strangest coats, I thought, were red (Pinque). I was also surprised to see so many things attached to the saddles—coiled whips and interesting little cases. When I wandered after the riders, I found a case that had fallen off of a saddle. I pried it open and found a little sandwich and a bottle with some bad smelling liquid. I suppose these riders were probably farther away from their homes than I had ever been from mine.

I jumped out of the covert and ran as fast as I could. I did not think about where I was going and soon found myself in front of a lake; the hounds surrounded me and the only escape was the icy, cold water. Although I hated to do it, I jumped in. It took my breath away, but I tried to see the bright side of it, thinking that my brush did need to be washed.

I reached the other side of the lake, cold but unhurt. After shaking myself off, I knew exactly what I was going to do. "I am going to go and find a nice, warm covert and take a long nap," I said. While I was looking for a covert I found the case that had fallen of one of the saddles. I pried it open and found the little sandwich. Since I had not eaten that morning I gobbled it down at once. There was also bottle in the case, but I did not touch it, for it smelled terrible. When I got to a covert I thought about the events of the day. I was glad that I had been hunted and that I had met the hound; I could hardly wait for next year so I could see him again.

*Jacinta Roberts, age 11, is a member of Peace Point Pony Club, in the Tri-state region. This is her second year in Pony Club. She is a D-2 and rides a 13-year-old black-bay morgan-quarter horse cross named Heidi. Jacinta is currently practicing for Quiz, which takes place on March 28<sup>th</sup> for the Tri-state region. Jacinta won a second place at last fall's horse show at Peace Point, jumping 18 inch rails. She hopes some day to take Heidi foxhunting.*

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# Foxhunting, For Me

by Maggie Lloyd

Foxhunting, for me, was never a conscious choice. My father's family was born into the tradition, and my mother's family started foxhunting out of love of the sport. For me, fox hunting is not only about the joy of the sport and a love of horses, but also about a strong community and a love of nature. Many of my best friends fox hunt with me, and our territory is comprised of overwhelmingly beautiful woods and pastures freckled with sheep, cows, and countless horses. I have been exploring these relationships and this nature since the age of five, when I began foxhunting.

Foxhunting has brought me together with my community. I love waking up early to ride alongside of my mother, father, two brothers, sister, grandmother, great aunts, cousins, and many family friends. I cannot imagine a hunt without the chatter with my teenage friends, visits with members of our community who no longer ride but still come to the meets on foot, and the ever present Snickers bars that my favorite whipper-in sticks into my pocket as he rides past.

Recently, my cousin and I left the comfort of the Genesee Valley to be guests of the Palm Beach Hounds in Florida. We were visiting my grandparents during their vacation in Florida at the time, and they drove my cousin, Brenna, and me two hours to stay with friends who are joint members of Genesee Valley and the Palm Beach Hounds. We spent the two hour car ride from Coco Beach to Palm Beach playing games, listening to music, goofing around, snacking on Almond Joys, and talking about our nervous feelings of hunting somewhere completely different. When we got to our destination, we went to dinner, lay out our hunt clothes, and got a briefing from Katie, our family friend, about the game we could be hunting tomorrow. This included fox, alligators, and, to our shock, wild pigs! The next morning we jumped out of bed early and ate muffins in the car. We pulled up to the meet feeling nervous as the sun was rising over a park filled with palm trees and white sand. I was shocked to look around me, because I felt like I could very well be hunting on a different continent. Brenna and I found our ponies and mounted up, and then, after a warm welcome, began our hunt. As the huntsman blew his horn, Brenna and I glanced at each other. This was starting to feel familiar. We were wide-eyed as we galloped along the sand, ducked under tree leaves, and jumped over fallen palm trees.

I could talk about my experience with the Palm Beach hounds endlessly, because that day, I experienced about three hours of cultural shock. The differences that I experienced were numerous, but the basic sport was the same. At one moment, Katie pointed to a hound and told me that it was Angus, a hound from Genesee Valley. I looked at her, surprised, and then told her that Angus had been walked at our farm only a few years earlier. I went to Palm Beach and hunted with a hound that I considered mine! After the hunt, Brenna and I were included in a lovely breakfast, where, although we were the youngest by at least 30 years, we were welcomed genuinely and enjoyed a great time with people who share our love of the sport. It was truly amazing for me to see the way that the territory of this sport varies by location and yet the community and the qualities intrinsic to the sport stay consistent.

I am lucky to come from a community anchored on such a wonderful sport. The connections I have with members of my hunt are extraordinary. Although our field is large, I could name every smiling face. For me, foxhunting has been an opportunity to form adult relationships, to test my courage, to explore the amazing nature that I live in, and to engage in a thrilling chase. All of these are reasons to love the sport, but outshining them all are the amazing connections and friendships I have formed within my family and my community.

*Maggie Lloyd is a 16-year-old H-B member of Genesee Valley Pony Club, Western New York Region. Maggie is the great-granddaughter of William P. Wadsworth, author of "Riding to Hounds in America."*

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